PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 363

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2000–01

COMPRISING PERIOD
12 February—1 March 2001

£70

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12 February 2001

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FOURTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 7 MAY 1997]

FIFTIETH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 363**

FIFTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2000–01

House of Commons

Monday 12 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEFENCE

The Secretary of State was asked—

European Defence

1. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): When he plans to meet the US Defence Secretary to discuss European security and defence policy. [148218]

2. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): If he will make a statement on European defence co-operation. [148219]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I met the United States Defence Secretary on 3 February at the annual security conference, in Munich. European security and defence was one of several issues that we discussed. On 14-15 December 2000, the North Atlantic Council welcomed the conclusions on European defence of the European Council, at Nice. The Council re-affirmed its determination to reinforce NATO's European pillar and stated that it shared the goal endorsed by European Union member states at Nice of a genuine strategic partnership in crisis management between NATO and the EU.

Sir Sydney Chapman: In view of the Secretary of State's very last comment and the fact that the Prime Minister said last week that it would be his policy to strengthen defence inside NATO, can the Secretary of State explain how those comments square with the St. Malo Anglo-French agreement, which asserted:

"The European Union must have the capacity for autonomous action, backed by credible military forces",

and

"recourse to sustainable military means . . . outside the NATO framework"?

Is not that yet another example of prime ministerial double-speak, and will it not be Government double-speak?

Mr. Hoon: It has always been quite clear that any significant operation involving the European Union would look, first of all, to NATO for its operational planning and, indeed, for NATO assets. Equally, however, it has always been recognised, as is the case today of course, that individual member states might join other EU member states for small operations distant from NATO—for example, ones involving humanitarian relief, which is central to the Petersberg tasks. In those circumstances, the St. Malo agreement is wholly consistent with the current position. Indeed, it is wholly consistent with the position that the hon. Gentleman undoubtedly supported when the previous Government were in office.

Mr. Waterson: When the Foreign Secretary said last week that the European defence force would remain "securely anchored" in NATO, how did that sit with the documents signed at Nice, which said that

"the entire chain of command must remain under the political control and strategic direction of the EU",

and that NATO will only be "informed of the developments"? Are not the Government, as always, saying different things to different audiences?

Mr. Hoon: No, they are not. It is clear that decisions taken by the European Union can be taken only by European Union member states. In a sense, therefore, the hon. Gentleman is stating the obvious. As I said to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), there will be circumstances in which—for small, humanitarian-type operations, consistent with the Petersberg tasks—the European Union may well choose to act alone, as member states could do now.

Ms Rachel Squire (Dunfermline, West): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are committed to a strong future for NATO, the United Kingdom Government must use their key position in Europe and their special relationship with the United States to prevent and deal with misunderstandings and to help to deliver a stronger European Union defence capability? Does he also agree that the two things that threaten NATO's future most are, first, European nations not delivering greater operational effectiveness for NATO; and, secondly, the anti-European rantings and scaremongering of Conservative Members?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is important that we maintain a strong defence within NATO, and that we strengthen NATO's European pillar. That argument was first advanced by President Kennedy on behalf of the United States, and successive United States Administrations, including the new one, have made it quite clear that it is vital that the Europeans are more capable of being responsible for their own defence. Sadly, Conservative Members want to be completely isolated, not only in the European Union, but in the wider European area. Of the 25 states gathered together in the aftermath of the Brussels capability conference, not one did not want to participate in improving European defence; in the unlikely event of Conservative Members ever again taking power in the United Kingdom, this country would be the only one in the whole of Europe.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, on Friday, President Chirac said that development of European security and defence

"se fait et ne peut que se faire en complète harmonie avec l'OTAN."

In English, that means that European security and defence can be carried out only in complete agreement with NATO. Is it not a disgrace that, this week, the shadow Defence Secretary, the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), will travel to Washington to tell lies about European defence—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I do not think that the Minister needs to answer that question.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Does the Secretary of State agree that the relationship between the United Kingdom and the United States on defence and security issues goes beyond NATO, is deeper than that between any other two NATO partners, and that development of a common European security policy should in no way necessarily break that special relationship? Is it not also true that the best way of ensuring the survival of the Atlantic alliance is for the United Kingdom to be the lead nation in developing the European defence and security policy? Will he pursue that matter?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with the hon. Gentleman in that series of comments. It is vital that we maintain our excellent relationship with the United States and, indeed, with the new United States Administration. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was in the United States in the past week. In the course of a number of conversations with various members of the new Administration, positive support was given to the efforts that European nations are making to improve their contribution to NATO. Specifically, Secretary of State Powell said:

"I can tell you that within the Bush Administration the President and I and Secretary Rumsfeld and Dr Rice and others think we have a very good understanding of what the European Security and Defence Initiative is all about: an effort on the part of our European friends to increase their capability for rapid reaction in Europe and wherever the need might arise. And we support that goal."

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Secretary of State now wants to claim anyone who has ever spoken vaguely about anything in the past. He is claiming President Kennedy; soon, no doubt, it will be Napoleon and Alexander the Great. Is not the reality that, at that very meeting, the US Defence Secretary raised serious concerns? Are not my hon. Friends right when they talk about the Government leading the process from start to finish, hand in hand with the French and the Germans? Will he comment on the fact that, today, Mr. Scharping has said:

"As the European Union develops its security and defence policy and becomes an independent actor, we must determine our security policy with Russia, our biggest neighbour"?

Is not the reality that the Foreign Secretary has gone to Washington, spinning the Americans a load of nonsense about what the Government signed, but that he cannot admit that the safeguards that he guarantees to Washington are simply not there?

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman looks carefully at the words he has just used, he will see that they amount to everyone else in history, and currently, being wrong apart from the present Conservative party. If the Conservatives thought more carefully about how isolated they are on matters European, it might give them some credibility when addressing the issues. Frankly, the hon. Gentleman talks about isolation when he cannot find a single country anywhere in the European continent that supports his position on European defence. That is pretty desperate.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Secretary of State never bothers with the facts. At Nice, the Government signed some undertakings: first, that EU forces would be both autonomous and independent of NATO; secondly, that the planning of operations would take place outside of NATO; thirdly, that the EU will make the first decision on what it will do and then may consult NATO; and, finally, that political and strategic control of the forces will stay with the EU, not within NATO. Is not the reality that the Government are, as ever, saying one thing and doing

another? In Washington, they are saying, "Trust us, we will stop this happening", while back in Europe, they are saying, "Don't worry boys, we love everything about it"?

Mr. Hoon: If the hon. Gentleman wants to deal in the facts, he had better get them right. It has been made clear that operational planning will be a matter for NATO and there will be agreement between the EU and NATO to ensure that we do not develop duplicate facilities. Operational planning will be the firm responsibility of NATO. That has been agreed between NATO and the EU and is part of the underpinning that we have negotiated to ensure that there is no inconsistency between European defence in the EU and European defence as part of NATO.

KFOR

3. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): If he will make a statement on the involvement of KFOR as a consequence of Albanian insurgency into Macedonia and southern Serbia. [148220]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): We can be justly proud of the contribution British forces make to the multinational effort to bring peace and stability to Kosovo.

Our forces continue to play a pivotal role in the NATO-led multinational force in creating a stable environment in which the UN mission can carry out its vital work in developing civil society and local administration.

KFOR troops continue to monitor closely ethnic Albanian extremism in southern Serbia, and its operations to interdict men and material crossing the administrative boundary have been stepped up. In recent weeks, British forces have made a significant contribution to preventing ethnic violence and lawlessness, both in the region bordering the Presevo valley in Serbia, and in Mitrovica, where extremists persist in their attempts to block progress towards a peaceful multi-ethnic society.

In the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, policing and internal security remains a matter for the FYROM authorities. However, there has been dialogue between KFOR and FYROM on border security issues, and NATO has offered advice.

Mr. Dalyell: Why is it that marauding Albanians, rightly apprehended by British members of KFOR, are dispatched to the Americans at camp Bondsteel?

Mr. Spellar: Forces operating in Multinational Brigade (East) are reinforcing the United States efforts but are, of course, under the control of MNB(E). Camp Bondsteel is the main centre for that. We do not have sufficient facilities available there to detain those numbers of people.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Have the new United States Administration given any indication about whether they intend to withdraw their forces from Kosovo? If they have, or they do so in the near future, are European forces capable of filling the gap?

Mr. Spellar: The United States Administration have clearly indicated that they are evaluating their worldwide commitments. They have also indicated that they will not be taking any precipitous action, particularly in the Balkans, and that they will have discussions with allies on any changes that they might propose, following the evaluation that any new Administration would quite naturally make.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): My hon. Friend may be aware that the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs was in Yugoslavia last week. We heard some very positive proposals by the Yugoslav Government to try to defuse the problems in the Presevo valley and to allow co-operation between the Yugoslav army and KFOR to deal with extremists while bringing moderate Albanians in Presevo more fully into public life in Yugoslavia. How are we responding to those proposals and making sure that KFOR responds positively as well?

Mr. Spellar: I understand that the Foreign Affairs Committee was impressed with the work being undertaken in Kosovo. We certainly welcome Belgrade's willingness to address these issues constructively and have noted Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Covic's proposals. NATO has taken these concerns seriously. We are also considering further measures and the NATO Secretary-General has had an exchange of letters with President Kostunica.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): Clearly, there are no quick fixes in the Balkans but there may be slow fixes. Will the Minister assure the House that the professionalism and dedication of British troops on the ground will be matched by the determination and support of the Government for as long as it takes?

Mr. Spellar: Yes.

Strategic Defence Review

4. **Mr. Tony Colman** (Putney): If he will make a statement on progress in the implementation of the strategic defence review. [148221]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The Ministry of Defence is continuing to make excellent progress in implementing the long-term programme set out in the strategic defence review. More than half of the key measures have already been completed. The large majority of the remainder are on track and we remain committed to ensuring that the strategic defence review is implemented in full.

Mr. Colman: Does my right hon. Friend agree that in implementing the SDR, the Government have had to take account of failings in defence equipment brought into service under the previous Government? Is he aware that since the review, and as a result of the significant new investment that this Government have made, those failings are either being repaired or have been repaired, and that the Chief of the Defence Staff himself, Sir Charles Guthrie, has confirmed that British forces are well equipped?

Mr. Hoon: May I take this opportunity of publicly congratulating the Chief of the Defence Staff, Sir Charles Guthrie, on his impending retirement? I thank him on

behalf of the four Secretaries of State for Defence whom he has served under two Governments. Most importantly, however, I thank him on behalf of the British people and Her Majesty's armed forces for a career of distinguished and unfailing service.

Sir Charles Guthrie has said that British forces are now better equipped that any time in his long and distinguished career. Indeed, his successor, Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, has indicated that the Royal Navy currently has the best forward programme of warship building than at any stage in his naval career.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Secretary of State confirm that, instead of expanding the regular Army by 3,000, as planned in the strategic defence review, the numbers have dropped slightly, and that the proportion of soldiers who are unfit for combat service has increased? Will he also confirm that we have a shortfall of one sixth—17 per cent.—in RAF fast-jet pilots, an even larger proportionate shortfall in Royal Navy fast-jet pilots and that the serviceability across all our major classes of aeroplanes has declined since the SDR was published?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman gives an accurate account of the problems that we inherited. We have sought to resolve several issues, not least improving retention. Recruitment remains buoyant for the Army, and we are on track to deliver the manning required by the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force under the strategic defence review.

There is a short-term problem with fast-jet pilots. We have sought to address that through the recent armed forces' pay review body, and have accepted its recommendations in their entirety, specifically the recommendation on extra payments for fast-jet pilots. We shall address the longer-term problems by seeking to train more pilots to fill the many aircraft that we look forward to procuring for the RAF and Royal Navy.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): One of the aims of the strategic defence review was improvement of performance in the public service. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will be aware that the work force at Clyde submarine base, in my constituency, have shown commitment and loyalty over the years. Given the latest exercise in saving on expenditure, can my right hon. Friend assure me that he will take seriously the combined trade union response on the future of the work force? Can he assure me that he will not hand the work force lock, stock and barrel to Babcock Rosyth Defence Ltd. or the private sector, but have a public-private partnership to improve the stability and efficiency of the base now and in the future?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He and I have held a meeting to discuss proposals to make our systems of warship maintenance and support still more efficient. I have received various suggestions from him and from the trade unions. We are also working closely with the employers to ensure that whatever support we give to the Royal Navy will be the best value for the taxpayer.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): May I associate Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition with the Secretary of State's thanks to the Chief of the Defence Staff? I congratulate General Sir Charles Guthrie on his retirement and his distinguished career. I am sorry that he is retiring, as he told us this weekend that the European Union rapid reaction force would not have a fighting role during his lifetime and that the military should not be undermined by barmy ideas. Why is the Secretary of State determined to ignore his chief military adviser and press ahead with deeply unpopular plans to peg military pay to politically correct targets rather than military effectiveness?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks about General Sir Charles Guthrie, but he should put Sir Charles's comments in the correct context. The Chief of the Defence Staff was, as the hon. Gentleman well knows, referring to war-fighting capability, and the Government agree with what he said. War-fighting is the kind of activity that we expect NATO to carry out as a result of our collective defence obligations. General Sir Charles Guthrie was quite right to refer to the fact that it is unlikely that the EU will have a war-fighting role. European defence is about crisis management and the Petersberg tasks, not war-fighting.

Defence Budget

5. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold): What the level of underspending in the defence budget is. [148222]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The latest forecasts are for expenditure to match the total to be sought in the spring supplementary estimates.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Given that the Government have cut £5 billion from the defence budget since 1997, will the Secretary of State guarantee that none of the underspend—amounting to several hundred million pounds—on last year's budget will be returned to the Treasury?

Mr. Hoon: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, because I suspect that he was put up to ask that question by his Front-Bench colleagues, who appear not to understand the way in which departmental budgets work in government. In particular, they do not appear to understand that Departments are responsible to Parliament for their spending. If they understood that, the shadow Defence Secretary might not have told the *News of the World* that the underspend represented some sort of cut, as the hon. Gentleman's question suggests.

I suggest that the hon. Gentleman or his Front-Bench colleagues take a little tutorial from the Library on how departmental underspends are dealt with year on year, particularly for defence. Underspends are carried into the next financial year and are spent on defence. If the hon. Gentleman is worried about underspending, I recommend that he ask the House of Commons Library what the underspend was for 1994-95 and 1995-96. He will find that the underspends then were entirely comparable to the amount that he is concerned about today. I should be interested to know whether he asked any questions about that at the time.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): My goodness, the Secretary of State goes on for an awfully long time to say absolutely nothing; he will

not answer the question. Let us take him back to the accounts. As he knows, he wrote to me on 6 February about the *News of the World* article, and claimed:

"There is no question that the total £241 million underspend on the Defence Programme is somehow going to be taken away by the Treasury."

The Secretary of State does not even read his accounts; the figure is about £317 million. The accounts state:

"Actual surplus to be surrendered."

So, according to the accounts, that money will be surrendered to the Treasury. The Treasury will decide whether it goes back to the right hon. Gentleman. The Minister for the Armed Forces—sitting next to the right hon. Gentleman on the Treasury Bench—does not even know anyway, but that is to be expected. In the article, the Minister insisted that

"unused money would not be given back to the Treasury."

We have got used to the Government being unable to tell us the truth about European defence, but for them to be unable even to tell us the truth about the accounts shows a level of incompetence that is breathtaking.

Mr. Hoon: What is breathtaking about the hon. Gentleman is the level of his ignorance of the way in which government works. If he understood anything about that—after he was elected to the House of Commons, he supported the then Conservative Government for five years—he would know full well that the underspend is available to the Department to carry over into the next year. He would also know—*[Interruption.]* This should be a matter of concern for Members of the House of Commons. The hon. Gentleman should know that the reason why there is so much anxiety to ensure that Departments stay within departmental totals is that those totals are approved by Parliament. That is why, year on year—*[Interruption.]*—and, specifically under the previous Conservative Government, there was a series of underspends to ensure that the MOD stayed within the total granted by Parliament. The matter is not simply that the hon. Gentleman fails to understand how government works—I might expect that, because he is unlikely ever to be in government; he does not understand how the House of Commons works either. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. When Members on the Opposition Front Bench ask a question, I expect them to allow an answer to be made.

Missile Defence Systems

7. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What assessment he has made of the desirability of anti-missile defence. [148224]

10. **Mr. Jeremy Corbyn** (Islington, North): What expenditure has been incurred at Fylingdales in preparation for national missile defence. [148227]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): We continue to assess the potential role of ballistic missile defence systems in countering missile attacks. We have not received a request from the United States to site elements of national missile defence in the United Kingdom; nor have we incurred expenditure on any works at RAF Fylingdales in preparation for any such request.

Dr. Cable: Why does the Minister think that a proposal originally designed to deter attack from small rogue states is seen as such a major threat to nuclear powers such as Russia and China? If those countries retaliate, as they say they will, by expanding their nuclear capability or nuclear defence—triggering effects in countries such as India—what estimate has he made of how that escalation will affect our own security?

Mr. Hoon: A number of considerations arise in relation to the hon. Gentleman's question. They have been addressed by the US and by this country, in considering the implications of missile defence systems. Clearly, before the US takes a specific decision, it is important that it should consult allies and, indeed, Russia. The new US Administration have made it clear that they would do so—thereby dealing with the type of strategic implications indicated by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Corbyn: Does the Secretary of State accept that NMD is an extremely dangerous adventure, incredibly expensive for both the United States and any other country that participates in it, and completely at variance with the views of the world court on the legality of nuclear weapons and with the stated aim of the Government that we were in favour of a non-nuclear world in the future? Furthermore, is he aware of the cost of NMD? One 20-missile battery would be 150 per cent. of the cost of the existing British Trident submarine fleet. Does he not think that that is a scandalous waste of money and that we should show more concern for a non-nuclear world than creating the nuclearisation of space and all the dangers that go with it?

Mr. Hoon: No, I do not.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the Secretary of State give me a straight answer to a simple question? Given the Nice treaty and the references, which I have seen in the control-and-command system that is being set up, to a nuclear capacity in relation to the use of nuclear weaponry, does he have more confidence in our reliance on the French or on the Americans?

Mr. Hoon: We work closely with our French allies and our United States allies inside NATO. Indeed, as recently as last Friday at the Anglo-French summit, we discussed a range of matters on which we intend to pursue closer co-operation with our French allies—for example, closer co-operation between our two navies, questions of logistics and the ways in which amphibious forces can be organised. We recognise that it is important to establish close co-operation not only with France and the United States, but with the range of allies with whom we have worked closely for a long time.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Did the Secretary of State acquaint himself with the views of Admiral Eugene Carroll—a retired American naval admiral, with a very fine record of service over the years—who made it clear at various meetings in the House of Commons that this was not a nuclear missile defence scheme, but a process

under which the United States would aim to dominate the space of the world and be able to destroy any land installation by laser beams; that, inevitably, it is bound to lead to a response by Russia and China; and that it is not at all welcome in Europe, no doubt for that reason? Will he make it clear that to leave the decision until after the election, on the ground that no proposal has yet been made, would not be a very wise decision to take?

Mr. Hoon: I am aware of a number of different opinions in the United States. There is a range of views, both in support of and critical of proposals for missile defence systems. As I have said, there is a range of different proposals. Some of them—perhaps, for the moment, those at the fantastic end of the spectrum—appear to involve proposals with lasers. However, a range of issues is being considered by the present Administration. The only thing that I should emphasise to my right hon. Friend is, of course, that the new United States President was elected specifically on a promise to the American people to go ahead with systems of missile defence and, in those circumstances, my right hon. Friend should not be surprised when, in due course, the United States makes such a proposal.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Instead of subjecting us to a diet of waffle, prevarication and stonewalling on this crucial issue of public policy, why does not the right hon. Gentleman simply own up to the fact that the reason why he will not state whether in principle he is in favour of national missile defence as a protection for this country against the antics of rogue states is that the Government are deeply split on the matter? Whereas he and his hon. Friends can see the credible advantages of such a system, his right hon. Friend, the former CND fanatic—the Foreign Secretary, no less—is profoundly against it because he has always been and remains a one-sided nuclear and other disarmer?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman should know, of course, that the Government are always of one mind on any given issue. However, let me make it clear to him that the United States has taken no decision on specific missile defence systems and, therefore, there has been no specific request to the United Kingdom regarding the use of any facility here. We share the United States's concerns about missile proliferation; we have worked with the United States for many years on ways to improve defensive systems. As its closest ally, we would, of course, want to respond helpfully should a request be made by the United States. That point has been made in our early discussions with the new US Administration.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Can the Secretary of State assure the House that Government policy has not changed since their response to a Select Committee on Foreign Affairs report in which they state that the Government

"values the stability which the ABM Treaty provides, and wishes to see it preserved. At no point has the Government given the US Administration reason to assume unqualified UK cooperation with NMD deployment . . . the Government is strongly in favour of deeper, carefully considered international dialogue on this complex and difficult issue."?

Mr. Hoon: May I make it clear to my hon. Friend that the ABM treaty was concluded between the United States and Russia? The treaty has been amended in the past and is therefore capable of further amendment should the parties—the United States and Russia—choose to make further amendments. We certainly value a degree of strategic control should that be appropriate, and as part of the consultation process that the United States has suggested we will urge that the United States and Russia look to a degree of strategic control for the future. However, as I said in relation to the previous question, in our earlier discussions with the United States Administration we said that, as the United States is our closest ally, we would want to be helpful should it make a specific request on this matter.

Army (New Equipment)

8. **Mr. Barry Jones** (Alyn and Deeside): What plans he has to introduce new equipment for the Army. [148225]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): We are investing in a number of new systems that will ensure that the Army's capability is maintained at the highest level. The Apache helicopter entered service last month, and plans for future equipment include new armoured engineering vehicles and, in the longer term, improvements to the range and accuracy of our artillery weapons, a fully integrated fighting system for the infantry and a new range of armoured fighting vehicles. We have also taken decisive action to rectify two long-standing equipment problems by commencing a modification programme for the SA80 rifle and by launching a new competition for the Bowman radio requirement.

Mr. Jones: Is the Ministry still committed to purchasing the new heavy lift aircraft, the A400M? I urge him to ensure that he purchases not 25 but 45 of that aircraft, and makes sure that the wings are made in my constituency, where 4,800 skilled workers stand ready to be of service to him. May I further tell him that, in the Airbus consortium, our German colleagues are lobbying like mad to get the contract to make the wings? As we have had steel redundancies in Wales, including at Shotton in my constituency, manufacturing would receive a big boost if he would say that 45 aircraft will be purchased and that the wings will be made in my constituency.

Dr. Moonie: I assure my right hon. Friend that we are absolutely committed to the purchase of the A400M. Plans for its development are progressing well. I am confident that the wings will be built in his constituency and will preserve the jobs that will be underpinned as a consequence.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the Minister accept that until we have robot wars, we need human beings to operate the equipment? Is not the British Army 8,000 men short? What would the Minister say to the Staffordshire Regiment, whose representatives said at a meeting in the House of Commons only a week and a half ago that, for the first time since the second world war, it is undermanned by more than 250?

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of the deficiencies in numbers that we inherited from the previous

Government—deficiencies that, like them, we have done our best to remedy. The hon. Gentleman must recognise, however, that demographic changes in this country make it increasingly difficult to recruit into the armed forces. We are taking effective action to improve recruitment and retention through the package of support that we are giving to families, and through the improvements that we are making to accommodation. The picture in the next few years will be very much better than over the past few years.

Future Offshore Vehicles

9. **Mr. Mike Hancock** (Portsmouth, South): When his Department will complete its evaluation of the tenders for the future offshore vehicles contract; and if he will make a statement. [148226]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Invitations to tender for the future offshore patrol vessel contract were issued on 12 December 2000. The closing date for submitting bids was 8 February 2001. If industry's responses confirm improved value for money over the current service, the intention is to be able to place a contract in April 2001.

Mr. Hancock: Is the Minister aware of the importance of the contract to the employees of Vosper Thornycroft in the south of Hampshire, who currently face redundancy because of a shortage of work? In view of the important industrial implications, will he give a commitment to the House that the Defence Procurement Agency will complete its evaluation of the bids as quickly as is practicable, and will countenance no further delay? Will he also assure the House that the agency will be vigilant about the predatory bids for the contract that might be on the horizon, and rule them out of order? That will safeguard the position in which we have more than one shipbuilder building warships for the British Government.

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of the importance that shipbuilders in the hon. Gentleman's area attach to the contract. I assure him that there will be no delays in reaching a conclusion on the bids that we have received. We are also well aware of the importance of competition.

Mr. Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): I declare an interest as a member of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union, which has a presence in the industry. Given the size of future shipbuilding operations in this country and the extra capacity that is required, does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to maintain the two asset bases, one on the Clyde and one on the south coast, because having two United Kingdom companies that are efficient in that sector increases our chances of building and exporting warships?

Dr. Moonie: As I have said, we recognise the importance of diversity of location and ownership in shipbuilding for our armed forces. That includes the north-east and the north-west, as well as the south coast and the Clyde. We will do everything we can to ensure that we get best value for money and continue to support British industry.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): What confidence can there be that the Ministry of Defence will handle the competition fairly? The strategic defence review identified two LSLs as a requirement, but it was decided that four were needed instead, two of which were given, without competition, to the Yarrow yard. That has probably enabled Yarrow, which is owned by BAE Systems Marine Ltd., to launch a predatory bid for those craft. Is it not time the Ministry returned to the use of competition as the guiding principle, and stopped handing out contracts to giants such as BAE Systems, in the interests of industrial rather than defence policy?

Dr. Moonie: I must point out that the original requirement was for six of those ships, not four. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Dr. Moonie: When we are placing a large procurement order, such as the one mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, there is clearly a trade-off between where to place the shipbuilding orders and the time within which we want to bring the ships into service. Our armed forces are absolutely delighted with the speed with which we managed to place the orders.

Royal Navy (Pay and Conditions)

11. **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): What steps he is taking to improve pay and conditions of Royal Navy personnel. [148228]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): The terms and conditions of naval service personnel are subjected to regular review to ensure their currency and fairness. The rates of pay and associated allowances of naval service personnel are reviewed annually by the independent Armed Forces Pay Review Body, which bases its recommendations on broad comparability with similarly weighted civilian jobs. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced on Friday, the review body's recommendations for the 2001 pay award have been accepted in full by the Government and will be implemented from 1 April. The settlement is good for all the armed forces and is fully deserved, given the excellent job that they do.

Mr. McWalter: Does my hon. Friend agree that many people in the armed forces welcome the improvements that he describes? However, vessels such as HMS Ocean were not so much lean-manned ships as scandalously undermanned, as part of the previous Government's arrangements? Will he ensure that staffing levels on such ships are high enough to keep them clean, so that they can be a source of pride to the Royal Navy?

Mr. Spellar: I assure my hon. Friend that the Navy's leadership is ensuring that our ships are properly and adequately manned. It is also undertaking effective recruiting, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, and the Royal Air Force and the Navy are moving towards achieving the required staffing balance.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does the Minister agree that the most unfair aspect of pay and pensions is the so-called pensions trough, whereby some people who retired at a time of pay restraint are £1,000 or more a year

worse off than people who may have retired only a few days later? Does he also agree that if those pensions were part of a private scheme, the trustees would have tried to address the problem? Will he face up to the representations made to him by the Officers Pensions Society and others to deal with that injustice?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman knows full well that the issue is difficult and has been faced by Governments of both parties for many years. It affects not only the armed forces pension scheme, but a considerable number of public sector schemes as well. It is a little disingenuous of the hon. Gentleman to imply that there may be a separation between the armed forces scheme and the schemes for the rest of the public sector. As I said, all Governments have faced that difficulty, and in 18 years, the previous Government did nothing about it.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): Is my hon. Friend aware that armed forces personnel serving abroad receive less pay than they do when they are based in barracks here? Will he give a commitment to consider that issue?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend is probably referring to overseas allowances for personnel in Germany and the Balkans. That is a difficult matter, which raises taxation issues. The previous Administration also faced those problems—but I am not trying to place the responsibility on them. Individuals who serve in Germany and the Balkans may not be better off in their overall service, because they will be affected by a different tax regime. However, we recognise the problems caused by separation; that is why we introduced enhanced separation allowances.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Does the Minister realise that the shortfall of naval pilots in joint force Harrier is not just a question of money? Does he understand that although RAF Cottesmore is an agreeable location—it is a former bomber base in good hunting country—it is not exactly the same as a naval air station where there is salt in the air, and the traditions, atmosphere and ethos encourage Fleet Air Arm pilots, like other naval personnel, to stay and to feel at home?

Mr. Spellar: I have been to Yeovilton and I did not notice too much salt flying across from the waves on the beach. Like many other countries, we face considerable pressures in recruiting naval air personnel and RAF pilots, because of the expansion of the civil airline industry. I wish only that the industry paid for all its own training, instead of constantly poaching personnel from the air force. We are looking to improve and increase output from the training system, but that will take time. That is why we have, as the hon. Gentleman will know, introduced measures to encourage retention, so as to sustain our operational effectiveness. The Navy and the RAF are hopeful and optimistic that those will have a significant positive effect.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): My hon. Friend will be aware that for some years I have been campaigning to have removed the arcane old-fashioned regulations that affect the pay of Navy, Army and RAF personnel. Those regulations prevent the operation of deduction of earnings orders that the Child Support Agency has imposed on some personnel, and so help them to avoid their responsibilities. When will the Minister do something about that? The new CSA arrangements will do nothing to deal with the backlog of cases affected by those regulations, and that is a crying shame.

Mr. Spellar: I know that my hon. Friend has met the Under-Secretary of State to discuss the matter. My recollection from my days as Under-Secretary is that the percentage that can be deducted from service pay is greater than the CSA levels that are to be introduced. I admit that problems arise because of arrears, which are often due to CSA bureaucracy. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is considering the matter.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): I wonder whether the Government have any conception of the consternation and chaos produced throughout the armed forces by their ill-conceived and mishandled pay proposals for 2000. What possible sense or justice is there in paying a cook more than a bomb disposal expert with the same rank and seniority? I spent Thursday with an all-party group on one of the Royal Navy's largest ships. The whole complement was in a state of cold fury about the proposals. Is it surprising that with such a ham-fisted Government, morale and retention in all the services are collapsing—contrary to the complacent impression given by Ministers earlier in response to my hon. Friends the Members for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) and for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant)?

Mr. Spellar: Everyone recognises that changed pay systems always create some difficulties, especially in their early stages. Policies are designed to be more flexible so that they can be adapted to changing circumstances. Everyone will have the opportunity to increase his earnings within his rank, in recognition of experience and qualifications. The second major change is a more targeted approach, which will allow us to address accurately particular areas of need. Allowances will be focused more efficiently on recruitment and retention. It is a strategy for retaining the best alongside the strategy for change. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies) indicates some dissent. That is slightly surprising, as that was said at the introduction of the policy in February 1997, in the foreword signed by the then Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo).

Royal Navy (Front-line Equipment)

13. **Mrs. Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What progress he has made with enhancing front-line equipment for the Royal Navy. [148230]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): We have under way the largest warship programme for many years. This includes the type 45 destroyer equipped with the principal anti-air missile system; new aircraft carriers with new carrier-borne aircraft and airborne early-warning aircraft; Astute class submarines; new amphibious support ships; and multi-role survey vessels. The Royal Navy will also be

supported with new roll on/roll off vessels and new auxiliary oilers. This is just part of a huge programme of modernisation that, I am happy to say, is progressing well.

Mrs. Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Will he confirm that the Government's plans to procure two new larger aircraft carriers for the Royal Navy will not be affected by the outcome of the general election?

Dr. Moonie: Given the performance of the Opposition, I do not think that that will be a problem.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): Does the Minister recall saying a few moments ago that the Government believed in competition within the warship-building industry? Does he not realise that when the Secretary of State announced fair and equal shares in the type 45 programme last year, that in itself persuaded Vosper Thornycroft to share its commercial and engineering techniques with the big players? As a result, it is subject to predatory pricing and is likely to be driven out of the marketplace, which would be a loss to warship building and to the country's economy? What does the Minister have to say about honouring the pledges made in the House to protect smaller players from predatory pricing?

Dr. Moonie: There has been no change to date in our policy, which is to conduct a procurement exercise involving both yards, under the direction of the prime contractor. That remains the policy.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Will my hon. Friend ensure that future large aircraft carriers will be capable of operating Eurofighter, as that will ensure that we have a seaworthy—or rather, sea-going—version of Eurofighter, which will benefit jobs in the north-west?

Dr. Moonie: The decision on the further development of Eurofighter has not yet been taken. I am sure that my hon. Friend is well aware that we are committed to supporting the early stages of development of the joint strike fighter, which promises to be a most exciting and effective aircraft.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will any royal naval fleet submarines be decommissioned earlier than planned?

Dr. Moonie: No.

Defence Expenditure

14. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): How much total expenditure on defence was as a percentage of gross domestic product in the last financial year. [148231]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): Over the last year defence spending has represented 2.4 per cent. of gross domestic product.

Mr. Williams: Will my hon. Friend confirm that defence expenditure, though rising as a percentage of gross domestic product, is much lower than it was in the mid 1980s, thanks to the peace dividend? Will he also confirm that a higher proportion of that spending is now spent on peacekeeping than on offensive capability?

Mr. Spellar: These issues are not so easily divisible. The ability to undertake high-intensity war fighting also produces the forces that have been able to react rapidly throughout the world, very professionally, to bring peace and stability to many areas—to Kosovo, to Sierra Leone and elsewhere. That is all part of the overall capability of our armed forces.

NATO (European Security)

15. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): When he last met the NATO Secretary General to discuss European security. [148232]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I last discussed European security with Lord Robertson at the North Atlantic Council Defence Ministers meeting on 5 and 6 December 2000.

Mr. Loughton: Does the Secretary of State agree with the head of the European Union's new military staff that, in time, EU rapid reaction forces will compete with NATO?

Mr. Hoon: No, I do not. Indeed, as we have negotiated the way forward between the EU and NATO, it has been clear Government policy that there should no duplication whatever of complementary abilities. We want to make sure that the remaining details that still have to be negotiated are right, and we fully agree with the United States that it is important that there should be no duplication of the various available facilities.

Service Personnel

16. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): If he will make a statement on the change in the total number of service personnel since 1979. [148233]

The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mr. John Spellar): On 1 April 1979, the trained strength of the armed forces was 284,200. On 1 December 2000, the trained strength of the armed forces was 189,318. The reduction in the size of the armed forces over the last 20 years reflects changes in the requirements of the international situation and defence policy. The roles of the armed forces have changed from those envisaged in the cold war to those defined in the strategic defence review. Our aim is to achieve a balance of resources between platforms, weapons and people, to generate and maintain modern, joint battle-winning forces.

Mr. Brown: Will my hon. Friend confirm that the bulk of the cuts in the number of service personnel occurred under the previous Administration? How many foreign policy-led strategic reviews of defence policy, as opposed to reviews led by the need for Tory cuts, have been carried out since 1979?

Mr. Spellar: I assure my hon. Friend that, as he rightly says, the strategic defence review was led by policy imperatives, followed by resource requirements. He is

right to identify the fact that under the previous Administration, any such reviews were Treasury led and cuts oriented. Not only were there cuts in the numbers in the armed forces, but targets were overshot. We inherited that situation. It was undesirable because of the extra pressure on our forces, and because it gave a clear impression to people outside that the forces were no longer recruiting. I pay tribute to the recruitment organisations of the three services, which have made a considerable effort to get across the message that we are in the business of recruitment, and are still hiring considerable numbers of high-quality young people.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Does the Minister accept that, as the Adjutant-General said, at the present inflow rate of personnel to the Army, it will take 31 years to achieve the Government's targets? There is therefore no room for complacency. Does he also accept that putting women in the front line in the Army is not likely to enhance morale in the armed services? Furthermore, will he comment on the activities of two Army women who have invited contempt for the Army? Will he do something about that, so that such people do not treat the Army as a game? It is a fully professional service, and women should not treat it in that way.

Mr. Spellar: I think that the hon. Gentleman has been reading the wrong newspapers. I am pleased to hear that he is contradicting his own leader on the issue of women in the front line.

Rather than leap in to this subject, Ministers are awaiting the professional and thorough study undertaken by the Army, which will report later this year. We will evaluate that and report to the House. We are certainly not complacent about recruitment numbers. As I just said, we inherited a serious situation: not only were numbers down, but the impression had been given that we were no longer recruiting. *[Interruption.]* Contrary to the impression given by the bawling of the hon. Member for Grantham and Stamford (Mr. Davies), numbers in the Army are going up. That is a tremendous tribute to the training machine that gets recruits through to the Army, and the efforts of our recruiters, especially as employment levels have risen by 1 million, thanks to the excellent economic policies of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Traditionally, people believe that recruitment suffers when employment rises—but now the attraction of our armed forces ensures that recruitment, too is rising. That is good for the forces, and a good sign for our economy.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Should it not be entirely for women in the armed forces to decide whether they are capable and fit to do the job in the front line? If they are, they should be able to do it, and there should be no discrimination against them. Should that not be the Government's policy?

Mr. Spellar: Our policy is to await the outcome of the review being conducted by the Army, which will be conducted in depth, and extremely professional. We would, of course, be interested to know what the joined-up policy of the Opposition is.

Point of Order

3.30 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it not against the Standing Orders and procedures of the House that on a day allocated for Opposition time, the Government should make a non-essential statement, particularly when the contents of that statement have been trailed all weekend in the media?

Mr. Speaker: I understand the hon. Lady's concern, but the statement is not against the procedures of the House. The Minister is entitled to make a statement before the House.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It must be a point of order relating to the statement; otherwise I will take it after the statement.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Further to the original point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you advise the House whether you have any discretion as to whether to allow a statement to be made? The Minister should ask your permission to make a statement, and the request should be judged not least by whether the statement is genuinely urgent, particularly on a day that is supposed to be allocated to the Opposition as a Supply day. Do you accept that in order to protect the House, there must be an element of discretion? We cannot be ruled and dictated to by Ministers.

Mr. Speaker: I have stated that the Minister is entitled to come before the House and make a statement.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. As both Speaker and Deputy Speaker, do you recollect that almost every week since 1997, the Tory Opposition have demanded a statement from the Government on this, that and the other? I have never heard so much hypocrisy in my life.

Schools Green Paper

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment (Mr. David Blunkett): Well, Mr. Speaker, you cannot win.

With permission, I shall make a statement. I begin by thanking all those who assisted in drawing up the proposals, including my ministerial team. I put on record my appreciation of teachers and non-teaching staff across the country for the work that they are doing, day in, day out, to turn policy proposals into reality in the classroom and beyond.

Four years ago, we promised that we would improve school standards. Last week, the chief inspector of schools confirmed improvements in literacy and numeracy, which have transformed primary schools. Standards are rising fastest in schools where under-achievement was most pronounced, in education action zones and through the excellence in cities programmes. We have seen more than 650 schools successfully removed from special measures. We will deliver our class size pledge ahead of schedule.

We are laying the early foundations, with 120,000 more young children in free nursery places than four years ago. We are committed to universal free nursery education for all three and four-year-olds, and to providing child care places benefiting 1 million children by 2004. We have expanded the sure start programme, and I am pleased to announce that the number of early years excellence centres will be increased to 100.

Our task now is to build on those foundations, to sustain change in primary schools and to transform secondary education. We have made a good start, particularly through excellence in cities, the considerable expansion of specialist schools and our investment in buildings and repair. In partnership with teachers and parents, we need to move further and faster.

Today's Green Paper, "Schools: Building on Success", sets out three key challenges for the future. First, we need to improve standards still further. For primary schools, we are consulting on a new target for achievement at age 11 so that 85 per cent. will gain level 4 in English and maths by 2004 and 35 per cent. will reach level 5. We aim to achieve a step change in performance in early secondary years. We shall set demanding targets for achievement at age 14, building on success in primary schools. Attainment at that age is a key determinant of GCSE performance, and 93 per cent. of those who reach level 6 gain five or more good GCSE grades. That is why we are already taking action.

We have introduced new programmes of teaching with more challenging targets in 200 schools, as well as catch-up provision and tests for 12-year-olds who have fallen behind. From September, we shall extend that programme to all English secondary schools, backed by £82 million of investment in this year alone. We are concentrating renewed attention on secondary schools with low levels of success and, through new pupil learning credits, helping those schools that face the largest economic and social disadvantage.

The second challenge is a new focus on diversity and choice to ensure that the individual talent of pupils is fostered and that their weaknesses are addressed. Through a more diverse curriculum and improved support, we can

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transform their life chances. The national curriculum remains a basic entitlement, but, in addition, we shall ensure that all children have access to sport and the arts and to teaching on citizenship and democracy. I can announce today our intention that, over time, every primary school child will have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and to experience one of a range of sports. However, we need to do much more to offer real choice.

We shall accelerate pupil achievement with experimental programmes for youngsters, who will take tests at 13 rather than 14, and ensure that there is more early entry for GCSE. I can announce today the establishment of a new centre, which will spread best practice in addressing the needs of gifted and talented pupils. We shall offer a new vocational route, providing choices in work-based as well as full-time practical GCSEs that will lead to apprenticeships for those who would benefit.

The third task is to extend diversity among schools so that every secondary school develops a particular ethos and plays to its strengths and also contributes to the community and the wider education system. We shall double the current number of specialist schools with a new target date of 2003 for the first 1,000, leading to 1,500 schools within five years. Consistency is important. Therefore, I can announce today the creation of advanced specialist schools, which will extend their role to assisting in teacher training and school leadership.

We have already announced the first city academies in inner-city areas. Today, we are proposing new forms of partnership with the voluntary and private sectors to support schools. Beacon schools enable the best of our schools to share best practice with others. I can therefore tell the House that, as well as making 1,000 offers of beacon status by the autumn, we shall also expand the programme to some schools that show excellence in working with their communities.

The Government have been the first to support new voluntary-aided schools for different faiths. We believe that it is important that, where there is parental demand, we support such schools. We recognise that the cost to Church and other faith schools of funding 15 per cent. of capital investment has been considerable, especially with the improved funding from Government. I can today announce that, following discussions with Churches and other faith groups, we intend to reduce that contribution to 10 per cent.

To succeed in reforming standards in schools, we need to recruit and retain good teachers. There are 2,250 more people training to be teachers today than a year ago. That is a direct result of the action we took last year. This year's pay settlement is also an important step, and helps new recruits and experienced teachers in particular. There has been a 12 per cent. increase in applications for teacher training, and more than a twofold increase in inquiries. We need to consider further how we can persuade good graduates to consider teaching, and how we can help them to stay in the profession.

The Green Paper proposes that we consult universities about developing teacher modules in a wide range of undergraduate courses, so that young people get a taste and experience of what teaching has to offer, and some are able to complete the in-school, graduate teaching programme on a fast track. Furthermore, in shortage subjects—maths, English, languages, science and technology—we will assist new teachers by paying off their student loans at one tenth of their debt in each year they remain in teaching in the state sector. During that period, they will not have to repay those loans. That is a substantial new incentive to graduates to come into and to stay in teaching.

The programme that I have announced sets a clear direction for schools over the next five years. It builds on the policies that work. It offers consistency and continuity with modernisation. Teachers will be supported by improved training, and by policies aimed at cutting bureaucracy and addressing teacher work load. That will be backed by increased autonomy for head teachers of successful schools, building on changes in inspection and funding and on the curriculum, and improved pay and conditions for staff. The programme will be underpinned by the substantial increase in investment that we have provided in the day-to-day running of our schools and in the fabric of the buildings.

Our policies are designed to develop the potential of and offer equality to every child, whatever his background and whichever school he attends. We have today moved beyond the old arguments to create a schools system appropriate to the 21st century. I commend the Green Paper to the House.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me prior sight of this statement, and prior knowledge of the content of the Green Paper from *The Sunday Times*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, the *Sunday People*, *The Independent on Sunday*, the *Daily Mail*, various other newspapers, the BBC, ITN, Sky, Radio 4, and other broadcast media.

There can be no doubt about what has brought the right hon. Gentleman to the House to make this announcement—panic. The Government have failed to deliver on education, and the Secretary of State knows it. After four years, the Labour Government's education policy is failing, and has been put on special measures.

The Secretary of State knows that, under the Government, class sizes in secondary schools have risen, their targets on exclusions have undermined discipline in classrooms, as confirmed by Ofsted, and they have stifled the energy and enthusiasm of our teachers by burdening them with red tape and paperwork—a directive a day since the beginning of last year.

The Government have presided over a crisis in teacher recruitment and retention that has left schools up and down the country without sufficient staff, and has done serious harm to the education of tens of thousands of children. What is the Government's answer to those problems? This morning the Prime Minister pledged to increase the share of national income spent on education in the next Parliament—exactly the same pledge that he gave before the last Parliament, and the same pledge on which he has failed to deliver in this Parliament.

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, over the current Parliament, the Government will have spent an average of 4.6 per cent. of gross domestic product a year on education, compared to the average of 5 per cent. spent by the previous Conservative Government? Will he confirm that this Government have thus failed to deliver their 1997 manifesto commitment to spend a greater proportion of national income on education than did the

last Conservative Government? The right hon. Gentleman has not delivered on that pledge; why should we believe him this time?

Now there are more pledges in the Green Paper published today. There is to be diversity in secondary education, businesses are to take over failing schools, head teachers are to be given greater management freedom from local education authorities. Obviously, we welcome the language and rhetoric of many of the proposals in the Green Paper—at least, those that have been cut and pasted from the Conservative party website—but why should we believe the Secretary of State's pledge on diversity, when he abolished grant-maintained schools? Why should we believe his pledge to bring in businesses to run schools, when the Government have failed to provide that in education action zones? Why should we believe his pledge on freedom for head teachers, when he continues to let local education authorities top-slice money from our schools?

We particularly welcome the right hon. Gentleman's acceptance of a principle we have long advocated: that the private sector should be allowed to take over management of some schools. Will he confirm that he has abandoned his previous dogmatic stance, and that private-sector companies will now be able to make a profit running state schools?

Teachers are bogged down by bureaucracy under this Government. Given his words this afternoon, will the Secretary of State apologise to the teaching profession for the lack of trust that he has shown it over the last four years, for the increased work load he has imposed on it, and for the way in which he has driven tens of thousands of teachers out of the profession?

What is new in the Government's package today? It must be the decision this morning that they suddenly favour selection. All those people—some of whom may well be sitting on the Labour Benches now—who watched the Secretary of State's lips at the 1995 Labour party conference, when he said "No selection by examination or interview", will have been startled by today's announcement. On this issue, the Government are guilty of confusion and cowardice.

Specialist schools are able to select 10 per cent. of their pupils; but the Secretary of State tells Radio 4 that they are not selective. And what of the new national academies for gifted and talented children? Will the Secretary of State tell us how pupils will be selected to attend the national academies, if not by examination or interview or on the basis of aptitude?

Does the Secretary of State agree with the Prime Minister's office, which says that our comprehensive schools today are bog standard? Labour's confusion over selection is obvious. They attack grammar schools, but have brought in selection in the inner cities for the brightest pupils, and will now bring in selection for those who wish to take vocational GCSEs. When will the Government stop their vendetta against grammar schools, and scrap the grammar school ballots?

The Secretary of State has talked today of diversity and choice. Instead, he offers bureaucracy and confusion. What is clear from the details of the statement is that the Government will still be imposing their will on schools. As with the Thunderbirds puppets, the central manipulator will still be obvious.

Will the Secretary of State now accept that the only way in which to provide for the freedoms of which he and the Prime Minister speak is to free our schools from the shackles of local education authorities, provide the whole of the funding for each school directly to the school on the basis of a national formula, and set schools free to decide what is right for their pupils, untrammelled by bureaucratic and politically correct interference from central or local government?

Our schools need to draw out and to develop the talents and abilities of every child and to enable each child to develop his full potential. Our aim is to provide the education that is right for every child, but, for that, we need an education system whose hallmarks are excellence, diversity and choice—a system where schools are free to set their own ethos, to maintain it through their admissions policy and to set and to exert discipline; where they receive the whole of their budget direct and are free to spend it in the interests of their pupils; and where teachers are trusted and free to get on with the job of teaching children and raising standards.

The Green Paper does nothing to provide the freedom that our teachers and schools are crying out for. This is not just a bog standard, but a failing Government: they are failing schools, children, teachers and parents. In the interests of our children's future, they should be removed from office as soon as possible.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to the Lady Penelope of the Opposition for the warm welcome that she has given to the raising of standards and to the concentration on pupil improvement. I am also grateful for her many suggestions for improving standards in the most deprived parts of the country—I am terribly sorry that I appeared to miss all that last bit of her speech. Instead, we got a diatribe of dogma about taking money away from special needs, from school transport and from school improvement and simply distributing it through the standard spending assessment process. Let me answer one or two of the things that the hon. Lady did ask me.

We are interested in investing in improvement, not in profit. It was sad that the hon. Lady made no additional suggestions about teacher recruitment, which I have requested from her twice in the House in the past month. She made no suggestions for improving the schools that were left to flounder under the previous Government; nor did she welcome the measures that we are introducing via pupil learning credits. Through that process we will ensure that there is greater freedom for those schools that wish to exercise it, rather than imposing it on them. By that means we can also invest in raising the chances of every child, gifted, talented, or with special needs. Instead of commenting on those proposals, we heard a diatribe about structure, questions about profit and abuse of the work that has been going on to raise standards throughout the country.

The hon. Lady compares the position during the depths of the recession in the early 1990s with that of today. Let us compare what we inherited with the position today. Expenditure on education has increased from 4.7 per cent. of national income to 4.96 per cent. We have every intention of ensuring that that expenditure graph rises, as the Prime Minister spelt out this morning, so that, year on year on year, there will be increased funding for schools, which we have not seen for generations, and which will enable teachers to do their job properly.

[Mr. Blunkett]

Let me take on the central issue raised by the hon. Lady. The present Government have managed to turn around 650 schools that were on special measures and restore them to sound health. That achievement has been far more effective than anything achieved before. The good teaching, good schooling and better results achieved in those schools have been recognised by the past three reports of successive chief inspectors. That is the measure by which we determine our success. The measures that we use are not the criticisms raised by the hon. Lady, but whether the life chances of children are being improved by our policies.

I challenge the hon. Lady and her colleagues to say whether they would spend the extra £82 million this year, whether they would spend the increased amount on performance-related promotion and whether they would continue the standards fund investment, which is directly aiding those schools, through the excellence in cities programmes. That money does not, however, go directly to the schools and is therefore not covered by the so-called pledge—one of the many pledges that last about three weeks—that Conservative Members have made on school spending, not on education spending. If they will not say that they would spend that money on raising standards in our schools, the Opposition—we shall be meeting them at the general election—will be a bunch of hypocrites, preaching one thing while intending to practise another.

As for the hon. Lady's gibe at the start of her oration, I can say only that I am very pleased to be able to combine accountability to the public, whom we serve, with accountability to the House—so that everyone knows what we are proposing and is aware of what the Opposition are not proposing.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): I warmly congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement and the fact that there is a future for education across the country. He is aware that, in mining areas, because of the previous Tory Government's pit closures, we are short of skills and skills training. How will the programme that he has announced today help us to meet the new economy's skills needs, particularly in mining areas?

Mr. Blunkett: The diversity that we are seeking at secondary level will not only build on the heritage and commitment to skills in those areas on which the United Kingdom relied economically and for jobs for 150 years, but redesign and regain the commitment to apprenticeship and vocational skills that has been lost in so many areas. Our combination of diversity, academic education and offering youngsters the ability to choose and choose again, so that they can develop themselves through lifelong learning—it is not a matter of "one chance and you're out"—will give children from the age of 14 the opportunity to sample different life opportunities; the ability to decide at that stage which route they wish to take; and the opportunity to be encouraged and enabled in new modern apprenticeships. That will make it possible for them to gain the types of skills on which their fathers and grandfathers relied.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): The Liberal Democrats sincerely welcome the fact that the Government are putting education at the heart of the next general election. We are also pleased that the Green Paper contains some interesting proposals. We welcome the teaching of sport and music in primary schools, and we certainly welcome more money for extra-curricular activities. We also welcome a review of the 14 to 16-years curriculum, although I ask the Secretary of State to extend that to the 14 to 19-years curriculum. Such a review is urgently needed.

Many of the Government's proposals, however, are muddled, ill thought out and lack reality. Margaret Thatcher was the Secretary of State who introduced the most comprehensive schools in Britain. The current Secretary of State will be remembered as the one who engineered and sounded the death knell of comprehensive education and the introduction of selection. If specialist schools are good enough for four out of 10 schools, why are they not good enough for all of them? Why is the Government's vision so narrow that six out of 10 schools have to comprise a second tier of schools in our system? If specialist schools have to select 10 per cent. of their pupils by aptitude or ability, why have 93 per cent. of existing specialist schools rejected that path? Why does the Secretary of State think that such selection will improve standards? I think that the whole House would like to hear that answer.

We welcome the Secretary of State's admission that there is a crisis not only in teacher recruitment but in teacher retention. However, the type of thinking that holds that money should be provided only for "shortage subjects", without even defining a shortage subject, is very muddled. Religious education is a national curriculum subject, but, in the past 15 years, the full quota of RE teachers—unlike the quota of biology teachers—has never been recruited. However, the debts of students who become biology teachers will be paid, whereas those of students who become RE teachers will not be paid. We therefore need to know how "shortage subject" will be defined and how the Secretary of State will apply the definition in giving those grants.

How will the Secretary of State tell teachers in a staff room—some of whom have had their debts paid off and others not—that we now have an equitable and fair teaching profession? Will he consider the Liberal Democrat proposal of a 100 per cent. training salary for teachers, so that everyone is treated fairly and is guaranteed a job for the first year?

Mr. Blunkett: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the welcome at the beginning of his remarks. I agree that the 14 to 19 age range is important, which is why the beginnings of programmes in the secondary school, pre-16 period will be carried forward post-16. That makes a lot of sense and we are working with further education colleges and others to achieve it.

The hon. Gentleman chides me about comprehensive education. It is important to spell out the fact that under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 specialist schools can choose, by aptitude, up to 10 per cent. of their pupils. Actually, the Act rules out any further selection by examination for all schools that do not already have it. The adjudicator has been taking appeals from parents in relation to those schools that did have partial selection. It is important that, in their coverage, the media understand what the law says and what is happening in schools.

Comprehensive schools, to me, are all-ability but not all the same. They are able to provide for the individual needs of pupils. That was the aspiration of Anthony

Crosland, and I pay tribute to Susan Crosland, who confirmed that on "The World at One" on Radio 4 today. She welcomed our proposals, which she said were in line with her husband's original intentions in putting forward a system that had diversity, that played to the strengths of pupils and the schools and that did not allow for simple sameness.

I spelled out the specialisms where there are the greatest shortages at the moment. They are the ones, plus English, that have already had the golden hellos. The hon. Gentleman asked what people in a staff room will think when they find that some teachers in shortage subjects have had a golden hello for taking up teaching. I will tell him: they will think what a relief it is that they now have teachers to fill vacancies, lift the work load, teach the children and pick up the specialisms that were in short supply. That is why we are doing it.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I welcome the sensible and non-dogmatic approach to delegating more autonomy to schools. In that respect, will my right hon. Friend say what steps are being taken to reduce the administrative and form-filling burden on teachers, started by the Conservative party?

Mr. Blunkett: Apart from completely revising the standards fund formula in terms of its allocation and monitoring, we have reduced the paperwork and administration by two thirds in secondary schools, and by 40 per cent. in primary schools last term. The latter figure was a result of our sending the schools a grammar guide, and I just wish that Opposition parties would follow through their logic. If we are to improve standards and teach phonics, spelling and decent grammar, we must do something about it besides eulogising. We are also putting in place a major reduction in data collection. We will reduce the amount that is asked of schools by other authorities, such as education authorities, Ofsted and the like. We will make sure that the monitoring panel that we have established in the Department does its job of telling us what is and what is not acceptable in schools.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): If the majority of secondary schools specialise and a minority do not, will it not be time for the Secretary of State to give up the pretence that he is running a comprehensive system? Could he say whether pupils in the remaining non-specialist schools are still entitled to opportunity for all?

Mr. Blunkett: We have specialist schools and beacon schools, which, incidentally, also have resources to use in spreading best practice. The new community beacons that I announced today will be a part of that.

We have schools where there are variations and which develop, because of the expertise of particular teachers, an ability to deliver to special needs pupils. Teachers with a particular talent offer after-school and lunchtime programmes in languages such as Greek, and spread those programmes between schools.

A comprehensive system, in my book, does not have some good schools in some leafy suburbs and second-rate schools in other areas served by those who have always had the lousiest deal. It has decent schools for every child, so that those living in the leafy suburbs might, just for once, want to send their children across cities, across boroughs and out of the immediate neighbourhood into schools that have improved so dramatically and have specialisms so attractive that no parent in their right mind would want to eschew them.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): I warmly welcome the extra boost announced today for teacher recruitment and retention. However, will my right hon. Friend say a little more about how he intends to help students already on BEd courses who, as he will be aware, feel that they have missed out on the very generous help being given for postgraduate one-year courses and who are looking for a bit of help from this?

Mr. Blunkett: If my hon. Friend looks at paragraph 12 of chapter 5, he will see listed a range of ways in which we might be able to help BEd and BA students who are taking undergraduate courses in education. The options on which I want to consult involve being able to pay students in their fourth year of a four-year course, reaching a point when they might be able to take up the induction year and therefore gain qualified teacher status. We are also looking at students taking up the equivalent of the graduate teacher programme in the fourth year, or taking sufficient modules during the four-year course to have reached the point in the fourth year at which they can take up QT status automatically—apologies to the Gallery, if anyone is still listening, for the jargon.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): They have all gone.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not surprised, considering the questions that we have heard from Conservative Members.

We shall combine the above measures with encouraging undergraduates on other courses to sample and enjoy teaching, including taking up paid work as teaching assistants, should the semester and the school term coincide sufficiently well.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Will the Secretary of State realise that much of what he has been doing recently has done nothing for the specialisation of schools in the countryside? I have a letter signed by the right hon. Gentleman, dated just over two weeks ago, in which he praises the additional £52 million for the SAS—*[Interruption]*—I mean the SSA for the counties. Devon, which is one of the largest counties in the country, gets less than £100,000 out of that £52 million, with £150,000 going to the whole of the west country. The right hon. Gentleman talks about the extra money for the neighbourhood renewal fund being brilliant for Devon. Plymouth—a Labour area—gets £1 million, but there is nothing for Devon and the countryside. This is the Labour party looking after its own, not the countryside.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not know about the SAS, but I know a bit about the SSA. We all agree that it needed revising a long time ago and we will do something about it.

I do not want to be ungenerous to the right hon. Gentleman, but in fact Plymouth is not under Labour control, regrettably. We lost it at the last local elections. *[Interruption.]* I heard the right hon. Gentleman say Plymouth; I am terribly sorry if I misheard him. [HON. MEMBERS: "He did say Plymouth."]

[Mr. Blunkett]

Let me put the record straight. This was additional money, on top of the revenue support grant, the standards fund, the building programmes that have been allocated and the nursery education provision for that county and others. The money was provided from Department for Education and Employment resources that we identified, based on the distribution and top-slicing of adult education money and the ability of authorities to reach and deliver their standards agenda.

I am terribly sorry that I could not do more than I did a fortnight ago, but I will continue to do my best to ensure that the schools in the right hon. Gentleman's constituency receive the special grant that they never had when his party were in office.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): May I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement for its response to the fact that vocational and technical education has been downgraded for too long? As a result, engineering careers, for example, have been difficult to promote positively to young people. Can my right hon. Friend confirm that vocational GCSEs and work-related learning opportunities will become a central part of the education system? Along with closer links between schools and industry, that will ensure that places such as Lincoln receive the bright and talented people whom we need to work in engineering.

Mr. Blunkett: I certainly can. That is why the specialist school programme is being expanded to science, engineering and business and enterprise. I pay tribute to the contribution that business and commerce have made both in kind and in support for and direct links with schools. It was disgraceful that the shadow Secretary of State was so disparaging about the efforts made. What a funny twist that was, and what a changed world we live in. I assure my hon. Friend that the work will continue and that the 14-plus programme, helped by the change in the law that we brought about in 1998, will facilitate it.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): Most of the Secretary of State's statement applies, of course, to England alone, but one area—the relief of repayment of student loans for teachers—has considerable scope for cross-border confusion. Will the right hon. Gentleman clarify the position of those in teacher training colleges in Wales who then teach in England, and of those from teacher training colleges in England who go to teach in Wales? Has some understanding been reached with the Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in Cardiff, Jane Davidson; and can the Secretary of State clarify the situation?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I am happy to do so. The cost will be met from central funds, not by the Welsh Assembly, and that will facilitate decision making for the young people to whom the right hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State recognise that many parents in inner urban areas are strongly committed to the principle of universal comprehensive education? Many inner London boroughs have a serious problem because the remaining grammar schools and selective schools in outer London diminish the number of able children who go to inner city schools. Will my right hon. Friend renew his commitment to comprehensive education? Instead of promoting the idea of 10 per cent. selectivity in specialist schools, will he reduce selectivity so that we end up with the universal comprehensive system that would be the best possible support for inner city schools?

Mr. Blunkett: I thought that I had already done that. The introduction to the Green Paper calls for

"embracing without reservation the principles of inclusion and equality of opportunity on which comprehensives were founded".

I repeat that this afternoon. We have every intention of ensuring that where parents want change, they can use the adjudicator system to trigger it. In the case of selective schools using the old 11-plus, parents will have the opportunity to do that too. The main task that I set myself four years ago was to transform the schools, in which too many children found themselves, that were called comprehensive, but were comprehensive in name only.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): In reflecting on his four years, the Secretary of State will have noted the answer given to the House a few weeks ago by the Minister for School Standards on allocations to local authorities. Can he tell us why Sheffield and Derby receive £2,500 for a primary pupil, but the county of Derbyshire receives only £2,300? Do the allocations have anything to do with who the Cabinet Ministers are?

Mr. Blunkett: If that did have anything to do with Cabinet Ministers, it would relate to the previous Government's Cabinet, not the present Government's. The system used for distribution of revenue support grant is the system that we inherited. We have done our best to ensure, through the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, that the system is put right. Direct funding to schools, the standards fund, the new funds for nursery provision and the funds allocated for building programmes make matters not worse, but better. Had we put those resources directly into the SSAs, Derbyshire's relative position would have been a great deal worse.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): What assessment has been made of the excellence in cities project and of its effect on increasing standards? Will he confirm that the education SSA system will be reviewed and changed next year?

Mr. Blunkett: On my hon. Friend's second question, which picks up on the one put by the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), our Green Paper was issued last year and we have been holding consultations on it. By the summer, we shall be making decisions on a revised system of SSA distribution.

There has been a dramatic improvement in schools in excellence in cities areas; the youth cohort study showed improvements of 10 per cent. for youngsters from black and Asian households and of 7 per cent. for those from white, working-class households, as compared with the rest of the country.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to expand Church

schools. Bishop Ramsey Church of England school in my constituency is excellent. Does the right hon. Gentleman realise that, in outer London, which he classifies as the leafy suburbs, there are considerable problems in the exercise of the real choice to which he pays lip service and makes obeisance? Will he do something to make certain that parents in my constituency really have the chance to get their child into the school of their choice? The fact is that not only the Church schools, but the foundation schools, are so good that local children are being flooded out by an inflow from across the borough boundaries.

Mr. Blunkett: I inherited a difficult problem: the inability of parents to get a place for their children at the schools closest to where they live. Sometimes that was because of selection; sometimes it was because of inherited admissions decisions. That is why we introduced a revised code, and set up independent tribunals so that parents could appeal to an external arbiter. That is why we expanded schools—especially in the infant and primary range—to ensure that more parents obtained their choice. Improving the quality of education is the only answer, if we are not to squeeze out those who do not know the ropes, who do not have a loud enough voice or who have not been able to use the admissions system to get their children into the school of their choice.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for his proposed expansion of specialist schools, in whose number I hope that the Blackpool Collegiate high school—currently preparing a bid for sports college status—may be included. What resources does my right hon. Friend think he may be able to allocate to non-specialist secondary schools, so that subjects such as history, geography and citizenship, all of which need promotion, receive the right resources, so as to enable the expression of diversity of choice across the whole sector?

Mr. Blunkett: That will be done by ensuring that, first, should the Collegiate school obtain sports status, it can share it with neighbouring schools, to increase the excellence of the athletes and gymnasts of Blackpool who will welcome us to a triumphant party conference in a couple of years. Secondly, the programmes that we have set in train—the excellence clusters that are reaching out to other parts of the country—will ensure that the resources for learning support units, for mentors and for the programme for gifted and talented children will be extended in the way that I want. I hope that whoever is in my job in a few years will have been able to ensure that those measures and that investment—over and above the amount that schools would have received and thus vulnerable to the election of a Tory Government—have been put in place.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I would be among the first to welcome the greater diversity offered by specialist schools—I welcome the increase in their number—but the reality is that, increasingly, parents can send their children only to the local school. Their offspring may be budding sports stars, but they might be stuck in an area where the specialist school is one for languages—excellent though that may be. Are we not introducing a postcode lottery for education?

Mr. Blunkett: No, we clearly are not, but I understand that the Liberal Democrats are committed to reversing the Greenwich judgment.

Mr. Willis: Hear, hear.

Mr. Blunkett: The Liberal Democrat spokesman agrees in his usual cheerful way. However, if the Greenwich judgment were overturned, people would be confined within their postcode areas and they would not have the choice to move across the boundaries.

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): Given that comprehensive schools have played a major part in raising standards of pupil achievement in the past 30 years, and although I recognise that we can do even better, may I urge my right hon. Friend to give particular encouragement to comprehensive schools serving the most deprived inner city communities to seek specialist status where they wish to do so?

Mr. Blunkett: The answer is an unequivocal yes. Under the excellence in cities initiative, we have deliberately supported and worked with schools to do that. My intention has always been that city academies and specialist schools should be targeted and resources provided precisely to lift the standing, the status and the achievement of the schools that need that particular boost; they can then share it with their communities.

Mr. Fabricant: I welcome those statements, which come straight from Conservative party policy—even though they were delayed because of the dreadful activities of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) on Thursday—but what can the Secretary of State do to make people in Staffordshire believe that anything he says now is not a promise today and no jam at all tomorrow? A promise was made in 1997 that the Government would spend more money per capita as a proportion of GDP on education—they have not. They made promises in 1997 to raise the SSA in Staffordshire within a year of forming a Labour Government; we still languish second from bottom.

Mr. Blunkett: There has been a £300 increase in per pupil funding—£700 by the end of the spending review period—and the commitment to increase the amount spent on Staffordshire's schools has been met, ensuring that the buildings are repaired, that technology is installed and that teachers are better paid.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): The Secretary of State has referred to comprehensive schools that, in practice, are not comprehensive. I wonder what the statement offers to areas such as mine, where we have so-called comprehensive schools and an 11-plus exam? We have four grammar schools and five secondary schools. How will the Green Paper provide extra opportunities and diversity in places that still retain selection?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, in the Green Paper is a proposal, which I want to exemplify in the weeks ahead, to provide substantial additional resources for schools in such circumstances that are prepared to co-operate in sharing staff and facilities and in facilitating the integration of their pupils. In that way we can encourage the schools that have a traditional selection process at 11 to give all children the life chance that they are denied if they are excluded from excellence by an examination at one point in their lives.

Points of Order

4.23 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order, of which I gave you notice this morning, concerns the removal from the Order Paper of Question 10, which I tabled and which was already printed in the Order Book, to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for answer on Tuesday 27 February 2001. You will be familiar with the letter written to me on 7 February from the Deputy Principal Clerk at the Table Office. I make it clear that in no way do I criticise the Clerks, who are doing their job, and in normal circumstances, there would be no whisper of an objection from me for ruling out a question that involved sub judice matters.

The letter from the Deputy Principal Clerk reads:

"You have an oral Question in the Order Book for answer on Tuesday 27 February asking the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his oral answer of 31 January, on Lockerbie, if he will take steps to establish the existence of criminal evidence relating to persons other than Mr. Al-Megrahi.

You may already know that Mr. Al-Megrahi has lodged a Notice of Appeal and that accordingly the *sub judice* rule applies once more to the matters in the case. The Speaker has therefore directed that your oral question be removed from the Order Book.

The rule also, of course, applies to your Westminster Hall debate on Tuesday 13 February on relations between the UK and Libya. References in debate to the matters awaiting adjudication in the case would be sub judice. Although the bare facts that the trial court at Zeist has reached a conclusion and that an appeal has been lodged may be acknowledged, any further comment about the trial or appeal or matters likely to be raised in the appeal would be out of order."

The problem is that there is nothing ordinary about the Lockerbie case. In particular, the Foreign Secretary, the American Secretary of State and a host of others have made statements calling for Libya to face up to its alleged responsibilities without waiting for the appeal procedure and, indeed in some cases, after the appeal has been lodged. Acres of newspaper comment appeared, both before and after the decision to appeal was announced. Is not what is sauce for the Foreign's Secretary's goose sauce for a Back Bencher's gander? More pertinently, should the House of Commons—and the House of Commons alone—be restrained from asking questions in good time?

The issue is not simply one of the rights of an individual defendant but whether, on the back of a trial verdict that is vehemently disputed by many of those who know most about the detail, this country should join in what could all too easily become military action in north Africa. The idea that the House of Commons should be prevented by rules—which are perfectly sensible in the overwhelming number of court cases in our domestic courts—from discussing grave international matters, where events could all too easily take over before the appeal procedure can be completed, is a matter, I submit, for your reflection, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order.

As notice of appeal has been lodged by Mr. Al-Megrahi, the case is now sub judice. Under our rules the question to which the hon. Gentleman refers has properly been removed the Order Paper. However, he also has an Adjournment debate tomorrow in Westminster Hall. In that debate, Members will be able to discuss the wider issues of the United Kingdom's and the United States' relations with Libya arising from the Lockerbie case to which the hon. Gentleman has also referred.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In answer to my supplementary question in Defence questions, it became clear that the Under-Secretary of State for Defence did not understand the difference between a landing ship logistic and a roll-on/roll-off ferry. I attempted to correct him from a sedentary position, but you, Mr. Speaker, quite properly rebuked me. If the Minister's answer has misdirected himself and the House, is there anything else besides the Order Paper that I can use to get him back to the House to correct the record?

Mr. Speaker: There is one thing for sure: the hon. Gentleman cannot rerun Question Time.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware from reports at the weekend that Sir Richard Branson's People's Lottery is seeking compensation of £8 million from the National Lottery Commission. Any compensation would come from the funds that are much needed by organisations throughout the country, and many people have expressed their alarm at that. Have you, Mr. Speaker, received any communication from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport about a statement on this issue?

Mr. Speaker: I have received no such communication.

Opposition Day

[5TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Prison Conditions

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

4.29 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I beg to move,

That this House notes with concern the comments of the Director General of the Prison Service, in which he criticised intolerable conditions and referred to a number of prisons as 'hell holes', and the Reports of the Chief Inspector of Prisons which described appalling conditions at certain prisons; and calls on the Government to take urgent action to improve conditions in Her Majesty's Prisons, in order to enable them better to fulfil their role of protecting the public.

I rather regret that the Government's gross discourtesy in having a statement on an Opposition day has meant that we have much less time for debate than this very important subject requires. When it happened on my previous Opposition day, I accepted it because it was a genuine emergency and the Government thought it necessary to make a statement on the steel industry. However, there was nothing remotely urgent about today's statement.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): The Conservatives used to do that.

Miss Widdecombe: Unless there was a sensitive time factor, we were careful not to have Government statements on Opposition days.

Let me start by quoting the Prime Minister when he was shadow Home Secretary. He told the Labour party conference that it was the Government's responsibility

"to confront the disgrace of a prison system in Britain that is inhumane, old fashioned and ineffective.

He went on to say that we should drastically reform the system

"as a service that is publicly accountable, not as the new Tory plaything of privatisation for those out to make a profit."

That was his understanding of the priorities of the Government and the Prison Service in 1992.

In 1997, the Home Secretary made a point of saying at the beginning of his term of office that he would take personal responsibility for the Prison Service and did not intend to shelter behind civil servants. He will remember that I welcomed that as a step forward and looked forward to seeing how he would discharge that responsibility. Today, I shall examine the Home Secretary's stewardship of the Prison Service.

I shall quote some shocking words:

"I am not prepared to continue to apologise for failing prison after failing prison.

I have had enough of trying to explain the very immorality of our treatment of some prisoners and the degradation of some establishments."

Those words were uttered by the Director General of the Prison Service and are an indictment of the Government's record on the prison system.

I shall not pretend that prisons have always been exemplary under Conservative Governments and always despicable under Labour Governments. Until the publication of the Woolf report, Her Majesty's prisons were pretty bad, no matter which party was in power. That fact was acknowledged by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he established the Prison Service agency. From then on, we made steady and, at times, startling progress, but since 1997 the Government have not had that commitment and, consequently, the Prison Service has either stalled or—worse—fallen back, with bad results for prisoners and public. Let me make it clear at the outset that I do not criticise the many dedicated men and women who work for the Prison Service; I criticise the Government.

Prisons protect the public in two ways: by keeping the prisoner out of circulation for the duration of his sentence and by making it less likely that he will reoffend when he leaves. The huge progress of an 80 per cent. reduction in escapes in our final years in government has been maintained, but the progress on the second front of providing purposeful activity has not.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Although I shall not be voting for the motion, I believe that the subject should be debated. Indeed, the Select Committee on Home Affairs is meeting at 5 o'clock. Does the right hon. Lady accept that, irrespective of which party is in office, the situation will become extremely difficult if more and more people continue to go to prison who are not an immediate danger to the community? Instead of increasing the number of people in prison, is there not a case for considering the alternatives? There is, however, no doubt that some people must serve prison sentences.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that point. I know that he takes a genuine and close interest in these matters. There is no inherent tension in having increasing numbers of people going to prison and also making the regimes decent and constructive. Rather than simply making that assertion, I can illustrate it with the fact that our best progress in making conditions more decent and increasing purposeful activity by hundreds of thousands of hours was achieved against a background of a 25 per cent. rise in the prison population in just a few years.

I do not believe that the courts send people to prison willy-nilly. Prison is nearly always a last resort when other options have failed, unless the first offence is horrendously serious. If the courts believe that people need to be in prison, it is the Government's duty to provide the necessary places in decent, constructive circumstances.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Does the right hon. Lady think that there are significant numbers of people who should be in prison but are not? Does she have any estimate of that figure? Does she believe that there are significant numbers of people in prison who should not be, and what is her estimate of that number? What does she think is the right policy for the next five years, whether or not she is in government during that time?

Miss Widdecombe: I think that there are people who should be in prison who currently are not. I refer to those

[Miss Widdecombe]

on the Home Secretary's home detention curfew scheme, who should complete what used to be a normal part of their prison sentence. We have proposed "three strikes and you're out" for people who deal soft drugs to children. They should be in prison. We have proposed tougher penalties for those who commit sexual offences against children. They, too, should be in prison.

As for those people who are in prison but should not be, the only significant number is those who have severe mental problems. In my time as prisons Minister, I was concerned that people who should be treated by the NHS are instead left in a prison system that cannot cope with them. We might tackle that problem a bit better—although we would probably not solve it completely—if the NHS was responsible for delivering prison health rather than there being a completely separate service, which means that there is not a seamless continuum.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to play a numbers game, and I cannot do so. I have never subscribed to the view that there is an ideal prison population—a number above which we should not go. I can only repeat that where the courts decide that prison is appropriate, it is the Government's duty to supply the places, even if that means building more prisons.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Lady was prisons Minister for several years. She referred to people with mental illness who are in prison. Did she set up a study to evaluate the number involved, and does she recall what that number was?

Miss Widdecombe: I was given a series of numbers by the prison health service, which varied from those who should not be in prison at all to those who would be helped if they received adequate health services while in prison. I shall not indulge in faulty recollection; Ministers have recently got into trouble because of faulty recollection. We conducted studies on those numbers. The hon. Gentleman might remember that we introduced a hybrid order, which enabled judges to determine that there should be a mixed penalty to be served partly in prison and partly in hospital. Before the hon. Gentleman asks me whether I made any assessment of the success of that, the answer is no because there was not time to do so before there was a regrettable change of Government.

I was saying that in the years following the Woolf report, prisons were made decent but austere. For example, the practice of prisoners sharing three to a cell designed for two was ended in 1994. Slopping out was ended in 1995. It is now back in three prisons. Assaults on prisoners and staff fell. The percentage of prisoners sharing two to a cell for one dropped, and prisoners engaged in hundreds of hours more of purposeful activity. They spent more time out of cells, were subject to random drugs tests, undertook national vocational qualifications and were given a new and effective system of incentives and privileges.

Four years into the Government's term of office, report after report has condemned the conditions in our prisons. However, the Government have failed to give the service any priority, even to the extent of the Minister with responsibility for prisons being unable to give me basic information about performance against standard indicators in the House.

The Director General of the Prison Service's comments in his speech last week exposes the Government's attitude to our prison system. He stated:

> "Year after year, governor after governor, inspection after inspection, prisons like these have been exposed. Year after year the exposure has led to a flurry of hand wringing, sometimes a change of governor, a dash of capital investment, but no real or sustained improvement."

In June, the chief inspector of prisons apparently found conditions in Brixton prison to be worse than when he made his previous report in 1996. He found conditions to be

"totally unacceptable in any jail."

He found that there were no workshops and no educational facilities worthy of the name. Who has presided over the system for four of the five years that have elapsed since 1996? The answer is the Home Secretary.

At Birmingham prison, it has been reported that half of all education classes are unfilled. The chief inspector apparently found that conditions were significantly worse than those set out in previous critical reports in 1995 and 1998. That is an indictment of the malaise that has developed in the prison system under the Government. They could blame the Conservative Government for 1995, but not for 1998, and certainly not for 2001.

How can we expect our prisons to fulfil their role of protecting the public and allowing criminals to make a new start in life if inmates are left to rot in idleness in such conditions? The chief inspector further stated that Brixton prison is not failing but is being failed. It is being failed, and failed by the Government. As the Lord Chief Justice, Lord Woolf, pointed out in his Prison Reform Trust lecture last month, in the past financial year the Prison Service's key performance indicators were met in less than half of all cases. That is hardly an impressive record. The Conservative Government's track record was that the agency consistently met either all or nearly all of its indicators.

In his latest annual report, the chief inspector of prisons commented that 1998-99 was a very bad year for the Prison Service, marked by extreme examples of unacceptable practice in prisons. Let us consider the facts. Under the Government, the number of assaults on prisoners has increased from 2,747 in the Conservative Government's last year to 3,456 in the year 1999–2000. The number of assaults on staff also increased by 471. Before the excuse is made that there are more prisoners, it is a percentage increase of 4.8 per cent. in the Conservative Government's final year to 5.3 per cent. in respect of prisoners; there is a smaller increase in respect of staff.

One of the saddest indicators of the failing prison system—of bullying, hopelessness and depression—is the number of suicides. In the last year, the number was 91, compared with 70 in 1997. Under this Government, the period of time that prisoners spend out of their cells on weekdays fell from an average of 11 hours in 1997 to just over 10 now. The number of hours that prisoners spend in purposeful activity fell to 22.8 hours; under the previous Government, it had increased to more than 26 hours. As the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) admitted last week, the hours of purposeful activity are now back to

those of 1992—before we began to implement the Woolf report—which means that all the progress of our last five years has been vitiated.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I visited Usk prison in my constituency only three weeks ago. May I assure the right hon. Lady that the description that she has just given is unlike the experience in that prison, where the amount of purposeful activity—NVQs, sex offender treatment programmes, training and education—has increased markedly in the past few years?

Miss Widdecombe: The picture that I am painting is not, as the hon. Gentleman said, my picture: it is being painted by the Home Secretary's own report and statistics. If they are wrong, Ministers are misleading the House. I do not think that that is likely; the report and statistics are right, and the hon. Gentleman must accept that. If purposeful activity takes up an average of 22.8 hours, it stands to reason that in some prisons—perhaps including Usk—it will take up more time, but in others it will take up less.

We must also consider the fact that that indicator includes all the open prisons, where a full day's work is normal for all prisoners. In many prisons, therefore, there are only a few hours of purposeful activity a week. I am happy to accept that the hon. Gentleman was impressed by what he saw when he visited his own prison. I could name other prisons, and I shall, where I have been impressed by what I have seen. I am afraid, however, that there are many more—regrettably, most prisons—which do not reach those standards.

How can prisons be expected to reform criminals if time is squandered in idleness, which amounts to thousands of lost opportunities to do something to make our prisoners useful members of our society? The Government claim that they have exceeded their target for the number of prisoners sharing a cell designed for one. Their target was 18 per cent., but the number sharing a cell is 17.2 per cent. However, that is a percentage increase on the 15.5 per cent. that we left in 1996–97. There could not be a clearer demonstration of sliding back into bad ways. The figures for the last financial year show that the situation was even worse than the year before. If targets are lowered, and if Ministers who inherited a 15.5 per cent. rate of two prisoners sharing a cell for one set a target of 18 per cent., inevitably standards will slip, which has happened in this and other measurements of our prisons performance.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): I am interested in the right hon. Lady's speech so far. Will she say what she would do about all those things and give a straight answer to a simple question? Will she commit to match, at the very least, the Government's spending plans for prisons?

Miss Widdecombe: Oh dear; I have a feeling that a Tory gain is in the offing. Our proposals on policy have already been made clear, and I shall make them clear again a little later—*[Interruption.]* When I do so, I shall address the issue of spending. If the hon. Gentleman contains himself, he will hear what I have to say. The Home Secretary cannot plead pressure of numbers, for we reduced the percentage of two prisoners sharing a cell for one during a time of record rises in the prison population.

In his highly condemnatory report on Feltham young offenders institution, the chief inspector reported that Feltham was without clear strategic direction and that conditions were unacceptable, yet two years later the Government have done nothing to solve the crisis. In August 2000, the assistant governor at Feltham resigned, claiming that the prison still operated in "Dickensian conditions".

In his report into conditions at Portland young offenders institution, the chief inspector stated:

"If an organisation such as the prison service does not have a proactive line management structure that is required to monitor and correct the quality of the treatment and conditions of prisoners, it will fail in its duty toward both prisoners and the public."

Has the Home Secretary done anything about that?

Surely it is conditions at young offender institutions that should worry us the most. It is essential that young offenders, above all, should be able to use their period of incarceration to rebuild their lives as useful members of the community, but instead there is an increasing culture of violence, which is leading to our young offender institutions becoming human dustbins, which young people leave dehumanised and sucked into a culture of ever more violence. The number of violent offences per 100 in those institutions has increased from 78 in 1997 to 90 in the last full financial year.

This Government are without a strategy for prisons; they are a Government who have allowed drift, decline and stagnation to infect the culture of our prison system. Not that there has been any shortage of ideology. In 1996, the Secretary of State said:

"I regard privatisation of the prison service as morally repugnant."

What is morally repugnant is the appalling situation that the Government have allowed to develop in so many of our prisons. It was our vision that led to significant improvements, which have now been lost by the Government.

Of course, not all reports have been bad. The chief inspector's report on Blantyre House concluded by praising the consistent, innovative and courageous approach of the governor and staff. So what happens? Blantyre House is raided provocatively and excessively, the governor is removed, and Ministers defend their actions.

The inspection of the private prison, Blakenhurst, concluded:

"The regime offered was good with excellent vocational training facilities, good work and education opportunities."

The inspection report into Buckley concluded:

"From this inspection we were able to say that Buckley Hall is a thoroughly good prison."

The report continued:

"The atmosphere was relaxed, yet controlled and relationships between staff and prisoners varied from good to excellent."

That is in contrast to the "hell holes" of many of our urban prisons described by the director general. What happens? Blakenhurst and Buckley Hall are renationalised—given back to the public sector, which cannot even run its own prisons properly, under an uncaring Government. Of course, the public sector pays no penalty if it fails. There is no built-in financial incentive to succeed.

I would be the last to lay all the failings of any prison directly at the feet of a Home Secretary, but too many of the problems in our prison system have been created by the Government. The lack of a strategic vision is failing

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both prisoners and the public. The Home Secretary attacked privatisation as immoral—not just bad or misguided, but immoral—yet he is now offering it as a solution to the immoral conditions at Brixton. At the same time that privatisation is seen as the answer to the problems at Brixton, Blakenhurst and Buckley Hall are being brought back into the public sector.

One wonders whether the right hon. Gentleman has done yet another U-turn. Having been converted in a matter of weeks from a moral repulsion at the mere thought of private prisons to supporting them and providing more of them, he is once again—and in the teeth of all the evidence of the reports submitted to him—going back to the old Labour view that anything private is bad and anything public is good. Alternatively, has he done some deal with the Prison Officers Association, to which he promised before the last election that he would abandon privatisation?

It is precisely this confusion—abandon privatisation there, implement it here—and lack of direction at the heart of our prison system that has led to decline and stagnation under this Government. What our Prison Service needs is a sense of direction. It needs a Government who have a vision for it and its future and who are prepared to tackle the disgraceful conditions in which so many prisoners spend their sentences.

Last year, the number of hours that prisoners spent in workshops declined, which is another way of saying that the number of hours that they spent in idleness increased. We need a prison system that works not only by protecting the public by taking criminals off our streets, but by allowing those who have been caught up in criminality the opportunity to rejoin society as useful citizens—yet the Home Secretary is squandering the opportunity to create a prison system that will work on both those counts.

Our proposals for self-financing prison workshops would create an opportunity for the Prison Service to start to take significant steps towards becoming a service that truly fulfils the three tasks of protecting the public, punishing criminals and providing a chance for those who have committed crime to build a new life on release.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Making sacks.

Miss Widdecombe: The last thing that I want is for prisoners to do what they do at the moment: churn out more than 2 million pairs of socks every year—not for some sensible purpose such as sale to Marks and Spencer, but for consumption by a prison population who have never exceeded 64,000. So whether it is sacks or socks, I am not interested in purposeless activity. *[Interruption.]* If I may continue, the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) may hear the answer to his question.

We will work towards a full working day in all prisons. The work that prisoners would undertake, if it came from real employers who really wanted it to be done, would allow a wage, rather than pocket money, to be paid to prisoners. Deductions could be made to cover savings, so that the prisoner could not be left with the plea that he had a choice between criminality and the dole; reparations to victims, so that he would understand that there are consequences to actions; the upkeep of his own family, which falls almost entirely on the taxpayer; and, indeed, his own upkeep, so that he would learn the habits not only of regular and demanding work, but of an orderly and responsible distribution of the proceeds of work.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw) *rose—*

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall give way first to the Home Secretary.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady and I am following her remarks with some care. She said that such industries would be self-financing and would cover all prisoners, who number about 64,000 at any one time. Will she publish the calculations that lay behind that conclusion so as better to inform the debate and say what kind of product would be manufactured?

Miss Widdecombe: Product does not always have to be manufactured. If the Home Secretary has taken any interest at all in the work that already goes on in our prisons, he will be aware that a wide range of products such as printing—in suitable prisons, of course—and other services are supplied. If he considers the example of Blakenhurst, he will acknowledge that a lot of contracted work is taken in, which does not compete with local labour. Indeed, it forms the basis of much of the praise that has been lavished on that institution.

It is not as though I have to say to the Home Secretary, "This cannot be done." Other countries have prison workshops that undertake real work that produces real wages, so if he is seriously saying that that ideal cannot be realised, I do not agree. I am well aware that such issues often get distorted, so I remind him of what I said by quoting back my own words: we will work towards a full working day in all prisons. I did not say that, in the first five minutes of taking over his job, which I am greatly looking forward to doing, I would produce 64,000 places for work. However, I could work towards achieving that, which is what I shall do.

Mr. Straw: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: Once more.

Mr. Straw: I do not remember suggesting that such a thing would happen in the first five minutes, nor could it, under any Government. I am interested in the calculations that make the right hon. Lady think that it would be possible—after five years, for example—to make all those industries, which would involve 65,000 prisoners, entirely self-financing. I am asking her whether she will make those calculations public.

Miss Widdecombe: First, Prison Service industries, which supply products for the Prison Service, will obviously not be self-financing. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] No, because those goods are bought only by the public sector. As prisons Minister, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), knows that they employ only a small minority of prisoners, whereas I want all prisoners

to have the opportunity to work. Our solution will be to have prison workshops that are run on the same basis as any other small business.

The word "calculations" has been used as though this proposal will establish a uniform business, uniformly applied in all prisons. I am appalled by the attitude of Labour Members who are not interested in this proposal: they despise it and do not want to do it. They have reduced the hours of purposeful activity in our prisons, but all they can do is sit there and say, "There ain't no solution", and they are not bothered about finding one. We have the solution, we will impose it, and it will be welcomed by the public and the Prison Service alike. The Government should be ashamed of the fact that there has been four years of wasted opportunity. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary seems to find that hilarious.

Mr. Martlew *rose—*

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Miss Widdecombe: I shall make some progress.

The law already allows—

Mr. Martlew: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. Is it right for the right hon. Lady to say that she will allow me to intervene after she has taken an intervention from the Home Secretary, and then to refuse to give way to me, although she had agreed to do so?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): To whom Members of the House give way is entirely a matter for them.

Miss Widdecombe: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am afraid that the quality of interventions has not been so wonderful that I would encourage them, but just to be kind I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Martlew: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. I have listened carefully to her remarks, and I shall briefly recap. Prisoners will have to pay for their keep, pay compensation to their victims and pay for the upkeep of their families. What incentive will they have to work, or will the right hon. Lady make it compulsory and turn prisoners into slaves?

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, I will make it compulsory. If a prisoner refused to work, he would be put on the basic regime and have no chance of being under the enhanced regime. I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that his Front-Bench team are looking horribly embarrassed. He misunderstands the nature of prison work by his reference to "slaves". At the moment, prisoners work 22 hours a week for about £9.50, which could be called slavery. I propose that they should have the chance to earn a proper wage. When a Bill was introduced—it was in our time and with Government support—to allow deductions to be made, Labour Front-Benchers supported the proposal.

Mr. Straw: We know that.

Miss Widdecombe: I know that the right hon. Gentlemen knows that, but his hon. Friend does not, so I am just telling him.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: Well, okay.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The right hon. Lady's proposition is very interesting. We are all interested in the detail. We presume that she has not launched into a tirade to make an irresponsible statement. Will she give us the figures? She must have worked them out. A paper giving the calculations must have been circulated among the Conservative shadow Home Office team setting out the basis on which she can draw these assumptions. We are genuinely interested. Can we see the data?

Miss Widdecombe: I visited all the prisons in my time as the responsible Minister. If the hon. Gentleman were to do so, he would find non-uniformity in the lamentably few prisons that have such enterprises. That non-uniformity makes it impossible to say that we will have that business in every prison and how much it will cost. That is nonsense. It would be important to do that if we were proposing that this scheme should be funded by the taxpayer, but we have already said that it will be self-financing. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] Labour Members have never run a business, so they have no idea how to make it self-financing. When one of the hon. Gentleman's constituents tells him "I want to set up a business that will be self-financing", he will ask "How?" It is such a startling proposition that the hon. Gentleman's mind cannot encompass it. The sooner we take the prison system out of the hands of Labour Members, who apparently do not even realise how anything can possibly be self-financing, the better.

We will begin to restart the process of reform, which we did, after all, start and which has been squandered by this Government. We will try to rebuild a real service from the decline, confusion and stagnation that this Government have introduced into our prison system. This Government have presided over an increase in overcrowding, the return of slopping out in three prisons, a rise in the assault rate, an increase in the number of suicides and a fall in purposeful activity. They have let things become so bad that their own director general describes conditions as immoral, and they do not even apologise for that. Yet this is the Government, and this is the Home Secretary, who in opposition had the gall to condemn our record when we were progressing in leaps and bounds.

Winston Churchill said that the test of a civilised society was how it treated its prisoners. The Government have failed that test, failed the people whom they should be protecting, and failed the offenders whom they should be reforming. They have also massively failed the thousands of decent, hard-working staff who struggle to do their jobs in impossible circumstances. They should give way to a party that cares enough to do something about the situation.

5.6 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"supports the policy of Her Majesty's Government to make prisons work better to reduce reoffending and thus cut crime; welcomes the improved investment in the Service, and the improved performance

of the Service in terms of security, literacy and numeracy, offender behaviour programmes, the reduction in drug taking and in under-18 regimes; offers its gratitude to staff and the many volunteers attached to prisons; but notes the significant and unacceptable variation in the effectiveness of different Prison Service establishments as highlighted by the Director General and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, and endorses the measures being put in place to secure higher and more consistent standards across establishments.".

I was grateful to the Opposition when I saw that they had applied for a debate on prisons, because it is important for the subject to be debated in the House from time to time. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) was entirely right to say that our manifesto stated that I would take proper responsibility for the Prison Service, and that is exactly what I have sought to do ever since. I have sought to take responsibility for the good things that have happened in the service, for the not so good things, and for the bad things. I am responsible for the service, not least to the House.

The right hon. Lady's speech was a parody of the director general's speech at the Prison Service conference, and also a parody of the record of both this Government and the Government of whom she was a member. She said that she would not go in for faulty recollection, and then suggested that during her time as prisons Minister—from five or six years after the publication of the Woolf report until May 1997—the service had progressed in "leaps and bounds".

One of the striking things about the right hon. Lady is her absence of memory. Let me jolt her memory with a few quotations:

"We created a false distinction between policy and operations which has reverberated around the whole of Whitehall, not just the Home Office;

We severely damaged relations with the private sector;

We have endured swingeing headlines in the press";

and:

"We left the Prison Service without a confirmed leader for five months, and we shattered its morale . . . And . . . did we eliminate disasters from the Prison Service? No . . . approximately 541 prisoners were released before the end of their sentences. They did not even have to break out."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 401.]

That was the right hon. Lady in her first speech in opposition summing up the previous five years, during which she had been the prisons Minister. Her conclusion about the Prison Service that she had been running was, "We shattered its morale."

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman is being very slightly tendentious—I suppose I am not allowed to say "tendentious" in the House, but I think that he is. If he looked at the whole of that speech, he would find that I paid tribute to the immense progress that the service had made, that I was talking about one very confined period, not the five years that followed the Woolf report, and that I specifically said that, in those five years, we had made massive progress. I said that that was due both to the Government and to the Prison Service. The right hon. Gentleman should read the whole speech.

Mr. Straw: The speech is rather too long to read it now, but I always do the right hon. Lady the courtesy of reading her speeches. It so happens that there were indeed other parts where she talked about the achievements of the Prison Service. I also remember that she criticised us, probably fairly, for trying to take away from the achievements of the Prison Service during that period. The simple fact is that she went through one or two things in her speech on 19 May 1997, but she reserved her strongest prose, her greatest condemnation, not just for her right hon. and learned Friend, as it were, the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), her boss and the previous Home Secretary, but for the previous Government as a whole. She did not say, "We shattered its morale" with any qualification.

There had been some achievements following the publication of the Woolf report. I am perfectly prepared—indeed, it was in my text before I knew what the right hon. Lady was going to say—to put those achievements on the record, but the other truth is that, thanks to the way in which she and the right hon. and learned Gentleman sought to run the Prison Service, morale was indeed shattered, the system was not working effectively and there was no proper ministerial responsibility or accountability for the service.

Moreover, the right hon. Lady had agreed to a budget for 1997-98 and for 1998-99 that was so tight it would have led to catastrophe, had I not been able to persuade my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer very shortly after coming into office, following an agreement in the manifesto that we would audit the resources available to the Prison Service before sticking to the previous Government's spending limit, that there should first be a £60 million uplift in 1997–98 and a further uplift, covering two years, of £112 million.

The point that the director general made in his speech last week at the Prison Service conference is one that I have also made on a number of occasions and that, in her wiser moments—I am sorry that there were not any in the speech that she has just made—the right hon. Lady recognises: with the Prison Service, as with any other public sector institution and large private sector institution, we can put the same resources into establishments, establishments can deal with the same people and can have the same number of managers, yet they produce very variable performance.

In the middle 1980s, the previous Administration drew stark attention to that fact in relation to the performance of schools. Something that I did support in opposition was the introduction of a national curriculum and of testing because it was important to ensure that similar schools performed in a similar way. Indeed, when I was at the Inner London education authority, we did some research to draw that out. That should not be a matter of argument between the parties. The issue of raising the standards of all prisons in similar categories, first to the level of the average and then to the level of the best, is a central part of the strategy of the director general, which the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), and I have endorsed.

The right hon. Lady mentioned various adverse reports by the chief inspector. I have a few comments on that, the first of which is that she forgot entirely to mention that, when I became Secretary of State, I found on my desk a pile of about a dozen reports from the chief inspector—some of which, as I recall, were well over one year old. Although I do not necessarily say that she was responsible for that, it is interesting that she said nothing at all about

it today. The reports had simply been shelved. They apparently conveyed embarrassing information and were shelved.

Miss Widdecombe: What has the right hon. Gentleman been doing for four years?

Mr. Straw: Almost my very first action on taking office was to say that a protocol would have to be agreed and announced between the chief inspector of prisons, the director general and me. It provided that, in very short order, report drafts would be submitted for factual accuracy to be checked; would go back to the chief inspector; and—unless there was a major argument on factual accuracy, not on the chief inspector's comments—would be published. If there was disagreement on factual accuracy, the draft would come back to me. I am pleased to say that that protocol has been very successful and we have ensured that reports are published.

Miss Widdecombe: What have the Government done?

Mr. Straw: Our first action has been to ensure that reports are published as quickly as possible. If reports were treated now as they were when the right hon. Lady was the prisons Minister, the public and Parliament would never know about bad prison conditions. The first thing that we have done is to shine light on those establishments, which the previous Administration refused to do.

Secondly, where there have been adverse reports, we have sought rapid improvements. As the director general said in his speech last week, there have been improvements at Wormwood Scrubs, Wandsworth, Brixton, Portland and Leeds. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the director general and I were the first to say that, yes, change was too long a-coming at Brixton. Consequently, we said that that establishment would have to be market-tested. However, we have done more than that.

Although I have publicly expressed my gratitude to the chief inspector for his reports on individual prisons and for his thematic reports, it became clear to us that we needed more than just those reports to ensure a continuous stream of information on the relative performance of establishments. That is being dealt with by implementation of the recommendations of Lord Laming's inquiry, which were published in July 2000. He has established that by laying the foundations for improving standards systematically and routinely, identifying under-performing prisons much earlier, and ensuring that robust remedial action is taken, there will, we hope, be fewer adverse reports from the chief inspector.

I have already given the House details of the additional funds that we have provided over and above those provided by the previous Administration for 1997–98 and 1998–99. There were additional funds in the comprehensive spending review that was announced in 1998 and came into force at the beginning of 1999. For the three-year comprehensive spending review period that starts at the beginning of March 2001, we are providing an extra £689 million, with a 7 per cent. cash-terms increase for 2001-02 alone.

The settlement will allow the service to increase capacity to cope safely with the expected prison population, which includes more than 2,500 extra places; to upgrade health care centres; to enhance security; to maintain the very good record on escapes; and, significantly, to increase drug programmes and other regimes to reduce reoffending. In return, the service is signed up to challenging new targets on regime delivery.

Among the right hon. Lady's non-answers to interventions by Labour Members, I noticed her very long non-answer to the question on whether she was committing the Opposition at least to maintaining the Government's planned spending. In all the ever-changing commitments from the shadow Chancellor, that question has never been answered. As the right hon. Lady knows, however, I am always happy to give way to her on this, or any other, issue.

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): Does the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) have the answer?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman is much more likely to have the answer, not least because he is a good friend of the shadow Chancellor. Whether the right hon. Lady is such a friend is open to doubt; it is a moot point.

The right hon. Lady failed to mention that industrial relations were continually bedevilled inside the Prison Service by almost institutionalised conflict. I have worked hard to ensure that there is a new climate. That has required me—forcefully, at the beginning of my period in office—to make it clear to the Prison Officers Association that I considered there was no place within the Prison Service for industrial action. I am not talking only about strikes, but about other industrial action. On one or two occasions, that led me to seek injunctive action in the courts against the POA.

We have moved on from there, and I am grateful to the leaders of the POA for their constructive approach. I am glad to say that last week I announced the creation of a new pay review body for prison governors and officers, which will be chaired by Sir Toby Frere. I fully expect this to lead to improvements in staff performance, and in response the POA has made a voluntary commitment never again to take industrial action.

The right hon. Lady quite rightly tweaked me about my remarks in opposition about the idea of private prisons. I confess that I did not like the idea when it was first put forward. I thought there was a danger that profit would be put above the care of prisoners.

Miss Widdecombe: The right hon. Gentleman has changed his mind.

Mr. Straw: As John Maynard Keynes famously said, "If circumstances change, I change. What do you do?" I confess; I have been informed by the facts. I plead guilty to that.

Miss Widdecombe: In two weeks.

Mr. Straw: It was not in two weeks. I spoke to the Bourne trust in 1995. *[Interruption.]* Of course I remember it; I remember a great deal. I was there, and my recollection is accurate. We shall come on to that later.

[Mr. Straw]

I changed my mind not least because, in March 1997, there was a unanimous report from the Select Committee on Home Affairs—involving Labour and Conservative Members—which provided a glowing endorsement of the conduct of private sector prisons.

Miss Widdecombe: I am very interested in this chronology; it is fascinating stuff. March 1997 was two months before a general election. If the Home Secretary had changed his mind then, did he make sure that people knew that he had had that change of mind before the general election? Local POAs were telling me that they were still being assured as late as March that prisons would no longer be privatised and that no further contracts would be let by the Government.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Lady is quite right to ask me about that, because my speech in October 1995 was rehashed in "Gatelodge". I am sorry that it was, but these things sometimes happen in the swirl of an election campaign.

Miss Widdecombe: So he did not tell the electorate.

Mr. Straw: The electorate were told, as a matter of fact. I certainly did not dine out on the issue during the 1997 election. I can give the right hon. Lady more details about the provenance of the "Gatelodge" article, which I do not think was persuasive one way or the other in the election. We did say that we wanted a mixed economy in which both the public and private sectors could flourish. We did not want the one-way street that she proposed, involving transfers from the public to the private sector only. We wanted a two-way street where increasingly the public sector would be challenged by the private sector, but where it too could challenge the private sector. That has happened in respect of Buckley Hall, Blakenhurst and Manchester, where the public sector continues to run the prisons but with clear arm's-length agreements.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): This is a serious issue. In March 1997, the Home Secretary had changed his mind on whether the private sector should be involved in running prisons. However, he allowed the POA—the vital sectoral interest whose members might change their vote depending on the policies of the particular parties—to labour under the illusion that he was still in favour of the public sector running prisons. That is an example of how the Labour party has run all its policies.

Mr. Straw: I do not think it is quite as significant as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I have already explained that the speech I made in 1995 was rehashed into an article in early 1997. I do not think that people were misled in the way he suggests. I have been as open as I can about the provenance of that, and about the fact that, yes, I have changed my mind.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Straw: I hope that the right hon. Lady will tell us whether she will commit her party to the same levels of spending. She is very welcome to ask me two questions, and I look forward to her intervention.

Miss Widdecombe: We will spend what is necessary to supply the prison places.

May I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the substance of the point that we are discussing, rather than what he may or may not have said before the last election? He has decided to bring both Blakenhurst and Buckley Hall, which have had favourable reports and are generally recognised as excellent, back into public sector control. Will he acknowledge that the private sector has a built-in guarantee of delivery in that if delivery does not take place there is a financial penalty in the contract, whereas there is no such penalty in any public sector contract?

Secondly, and more important, if the public sector can do a better job of running two excellent prisons than the private sector which created the excellence, why is not the public sector doing that in its own prisons? Why did the right hon. Gentleman not accept that bid and say to the public sector, "If that's what you can do, go and do it for one of the miserably failing prisons in the public sector"?

Mr. Straw: That is exactly what we are doing. There has been a service level agreement in Manchester, and we are seeking to roll that out in other prisons. Having SLAs and clear arm's-length relationships, with the people in the prison being on the line when it comes to delivery, is a very sensible approach for the public as well as the private sector.

The competition for Buckley Hall and Blakenhurst was won fair and square. I am responsible for the decision, but it was made, quite properly, by the director general, as accounting officer. There are necessarily some differences between the public and private sectors because the public sector cannot go bust. However, so far as possible, we have ensured that the same disciplines will apply to the team running the Buckley Hall and Blakenhurst public sector arrangements as apply to the private sector.

I note that again the right hon. Lady was silent on whether the Opposition will match our promises in respect of money.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: In the earlier exchanges, my right hon. Friend may have missed the shadow Home Secretary saying, "We will spend what is necessary to supply the prison places." Does my right hon. Friend read into that a substantial commitment to additional expenditure that has hitherto not been admitted in the House of Commons?

Mr. Straw: If it means anything at all, it means a lot more money, especially as the right hon. Lady seemed to imply that she would seek to eliminate overcrowding and a great deal more.

Let me deal briefly with overcrowding, health care, prevention of reoffending, suicide, race relations, young offenders and prison industries.

Mr. Simon Hughes: I want to ask the right hon. Gentleman about finance and resources before he moves on to other important matters.

The Library tells me that Prison Service expenditure from 1991–92 to 1999–2000 has risen from £1,462 million to £1,846 million. That is a 2 per cent. increase in real terms over nine years. In the same period, the prison population has gone up by 40 per cent. Are the Government prepared to make a commitment that, if re-elected, spend on the Prison Service will catch up with

what has fallen away and will keep pace with any increase in prison numbers that the Home Secretary appears to anticipate?

Mr. Straw: One point on which I entirely agreed with the previous Administration was that the Prison Service was capable both of increasing performance and cutting unit costs. There was substantial waste, and we have continued to cut it. The figures given by the hon. Gentleman are correct, but they would have been lower if we had not had to put in additional resources—£60 million and £112 million—for 1997–98 and 1998–99. I have already explained that the further three years of the comprehensive spending review involve a substantial increase, and that will provide, among other improvements, an additional 2,660 places.

We expect prisons to produce efficiencies, and I see nothing wrong with that. What was appalling about the pre-Woolf system was that it was both costly and poor. The increase in resources provided by the present Administration, particularly since the first comprehensive spending review for 1998–99, has been more satisfactory. I have sought to ensure that there are more resources. Numbers have risen, but at the same time all sorts of practices have improved.

I shall deal with a few more points briefly in the knowledge that many hon. Members want to get into the debate. On overcrowding, nearly 30 per cent. of prisoners in 1990-91 were held two or three to a cell. That figure has fallen to 16.9 per cent., which compares with a target of 18 per cent.

Some slopping out has been brought back, and that affects 123 prisoners at present. That differs from the arrangements that existed in 1990-91, however, because all those prisoners are able to obtain manual unlocking of their cells, so that they have 24-hour access, except if there is an emergency on their wing, to sanitation outside their cells.

Miss Widdecombe: On overcrowding, the right hon. Gentleman said proudly that the figure for putting two prisoners in a cell designed for one had fallen to 17.2 per cent., whereas the target was 18 per cent. Will he acknowledge that the figure that he inherited was 15.5 per cent., and that there has, therefore, been some deterioration?

Mr. Straw: I cannot remember the exact figure—

Miss Widdecombe: It was 15.5 per cent.

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. Lady will hang on a moment, she will find that I am perfectly ready to accept her figures. There has been some downward change, and I regret it. However, that change has been in the context of a rising prison population. We have increased the numbers, but if the right hon. Lady wants to make a political point—

Miss Widdecombe: No.

Mr. Straw: She says she does not. Given that the right hon. Lady had planned much lower resources than we have put in, there would, under her plans, be many more people locked up two to a cell than is now the case. Overcrowding is likely to remain a problem in prisons. It is not for me to set an artificial ceiling for the prison population, and I am not going to. We are putting in additional resources to ensure a considerable increase in the number of places available. I judge that sufficient places will be available.

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): Mr. Narey has called overcrowding in prisons a scourge, Lord Woolf called it a cancer and the former president of the Prison Governors Association called it an obscenity. Does my right hon. Friend accept that prison overcrowding has grave and damaging effects, and is it a priority of the Government to eliminate the problem?

Mr. Straw: Other things being equal, I should prefer there to be no overcrowding or having two prisoners to a cell. However, we must ensure that enough places are available to meet demand, and that is what we are trying to do. We are putting a lot of extra resources into the prison system to increase the total number of places available. In addition, some other Prison Service establishments that are experiencing overcrowding produce a good standard of care for prisoners, while others do not. Overcrowding in itself cannot be used as an excuse for under-performance, and we will not accept that it should be so used. In any event, the situation is radically different from that which prevailed 10 years ago.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald mentioned suicides. I am sorry that she tried to make a political point out of one of the gravest issues that faces the Prison Service. She used out-of-date figures. The number of suicides fell last year, although that is of small comfort. That fall—to 81, not 92 as claimed by the right hon. Lady—is the first for five years. At the Prison Service conference, I announced a new, proactive strategy to try to turn around the service's record on suicides.

We must work extremely hard to reduce the number of prisoner suicides, but we must work even harder to ensure that prisoners are safe in their cells. Last year, as everyone realises, the Prison Service failed in its duty of care to Zahid Mubarek. He was locked up, quite inappropriately, with a man who subsequently murdered him. The investigation revealed racism in the establishment—Feltham young offender institute. I both encourage and greatly welcome the investigation being conducted by the Commission for Racial Equality into racism in the Prison Service. When its recommendations are received, they will be acted on.

Not only is there racism between staff and prisoners, but it is also carried out by white staff on black and Asian staff. I am determined that it should be eliminated—as are my right hon. Friend the Minister of State and the director general. One of the ways we are trying to do that is by establishing a race equality for staff—RESPECT—network for black and Asian staff in the Prison Service. The network was successfully launched by my right hon. Friend last month; the event was attended by 1,500 delegates. The Home Office's network now includes the RESPECT network. It provides an active voice for staff, so I know that it will be extremely important both in raising the concerns of black and Asian staff in the Prison Service and in ensuring a shift in approach and attitude.

[Mr. Straw]

The right hon. Lady mentioned health care. When the national health service was established in 1948, one of the few things that the then Government got wrong was that prison health services were not incorporated into it. Since then, the prison health service has been a Cinderella.

Miss Widdecombe: Is the right hon. Gentleman going to change that?

Mr. Straw: Yes. We have already announced joint working between the Prison Service and the NHS. In some areas, NHS trusts provide health care. In addition, £35 million has been allocated over the next three years to improve health care facilities.

The Prison Service has increasingly suffered from the abject failure of the so-called care in the community policy implemented by the previous Administration—although I doubt that the right hon. Lady agreed with that policy. The closure of large mental institutions without the provision of alternative care was appalling; since the late 1980s, it has led to a sevenfold increase in the proportion of the prison population with moderate to severe mental health problems.

Prisoners suffering from dangerous and severe personality disorders are among those with the greatest mental health problems. On 20 December last year, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health told the House of our joint proposals for managing that group. We have committed £126 million to fund a programme of pilot projects across the Prison Service and the NHS over the next three years, to research both a rigorous assessment tool and effective treatments.

The next pilot will provide extra places at HMP Whitemoor, alongside the existing assessment pilot centre, where therapeutic interventions will be piloted and evaluated. In addition, two new units are planned at HMP Frankland in Durham. The units will be built within a secure perimeter and will provide 100 assessment and treatment places; they are due to open in early 2003. A 70-place unit will open next year at the Rampton high security hospital. A further 70 places are planned within the NHS by 2004.

Purposeful activity is of critical importance. To make prison work, we must ensure that prisoners are better when they leave it than when they entered it—better educated and, as far as possible, better trained. They should receive advice and help to get them out of their offending behaviour.

Mr. Edwards: I am sure that my right hon. Friend has previously heard me commend Usk prison for its training, education and sex offender treatment programmes. Will he be good enough to visit the prison? It could serve as a model for other prisons throughout the country.

Mr. Straw: I should be happy to visit Usk prison. Given the long list of visits that I have promised to make and have yet to fulfil, it may take a little time, but I shall certainly do my very best.

Purposeful activity has increased and the monthly figure for November was 24.6 hours. That is a steady improvement on last year, and we hope to meet the target that has been set.

Education is key. We have continued many of the good things that happened under the previous Administration—not the shattering of morale, which we have helped to restore. I am astonished that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald did not have the humility to recognise what had happened. We were determined to introduce a literacy and numeracy key performance indicator, which is now in place. By the end of this financial year, prisoners will have gained 9,000 full qualifications at basic skills level 2, making many of them employable on release for the first time.

We are investing £18 million over the next three years to secure a 50 per cent. increase in the number of qualifications obtained by prisoners. We have also put much more money into accredited offending behaviour programmes—my right hon. Friend the Minister of State can deal with that later—and a lot of effort and money into custody-to-work programmes to ensure that people in prison receive much better preparation to get jobs. We know for certain that if prisoners have a job to go to, they are much less likely to reoffend, and far too many of them do not have jobs to go to.

The last substantive point that I want to make is on prison industries. The right hon. Lady could not leave alone the issue of socks. *[Interruption.]* She is chuntering from a sedentary position that there are millions of socks. She suggested in her speech that 2.5 million pairs of socks had been produced in a year. In my world—perhaps not in hers—socks wear out, so if socks are not produced year by year, there is a really serious problem. All the sock production takes place in Gartree prison in the constituency of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), which is the centre of the Leicestershire hosiery area. The industrial production of socks in the prison service is darn good value and we have developed a holistic approach, but I wish that the right hon. Lady would stop putting her foot into the matter.

Some 600,000 socks a year are produced in prison industries to meet the demand inside the Prison Service. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady says from a sedentary positions that there are 65,000 people in prison, but she does not understand that many people leave prison within much less than a year, so the turnover of prisoners is much greater than she thinks. She keeps talking about early release, but every prisoner, apart from the 23 whole lifers, is eligible for early release.

Miss Widdecombe: Do they take the socks home with them?

Mr. Straw: No, I do not think they take the socks with them, although I am sure that they are not stripped of their socks as they leave prison. That minor, but important industry in Gartree is run for the benefit of the rest of the Prison Service.

I shall make some general remarks about industries in prison. Subject to meeting prisoners' other needs, the purpose of prison—apart from punishing prisoners with the loss of their liberty—is not only to have them producing things, but to try to make them better people so that they are less likely to reoffend. It cannot follow that the only way to achieve that is to give prisoners full-time work, because many of the functions that they undertake would not be ones for which they would find jobs in their own area when they come out. There must

be a balance, so I cast doubt on whether it is possible or sensible, within the overall aim of reducing reoffending, for every prisoner to be engaged full-time in work because there would be no time for anything else; it would be an inappropriate use of their time.

Yes, we should like more prisoners to be engaged in productive work. There is no argument about that. However, I have read the remarks that the right hon. Lady made on the subject at a Conservative party conference. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) is aghast at the idea. However, the more that I listen to the right hon. Lady on the subject, the more I think that her idea for a self-financing plan to provide work for everybody is as well constructed and put together as the announcement that she made at the most recent party conference. I am sure that other countries also lock people up for their second minor offence of possessing cannabis. We can also find a state in the United States where people are locked up for life if they commit three times offences such as stealing a pizza.

It is always possible in matters of penal policy to find some administration somewhere that has come up with a more crackpot idea than the right hon. Lady. She can be assured of that.

Miss Widdecombe *rose—*

Mr. Straw: Let me finish my point. However, by crackpot, I was referring to her ideas on cannabis.

Prison industry is a difficult issue. A Conservative Member raised the issue of our plans to expand the prison industry in his constituency with the director general. I shall give the right hon. Lady the hon. Gentleman's name in private because I have not asked him whether he is willing to have this case made public. The plan was far advanced, but the hon. Gentleman wrote in privately to suggest that it would seriously disrupt industries that pay its workers and he asked us to back away from the plan. Wisely in the light of the representations, the director general decided to do that because a serious number of jobs would be lost.

Some prison industries compete not with industries in this country, but with those abroad. For example, in data inputting—this may not be pleasant—we are competing with industries in the far east. That case does not create industrial relation problems or raise the issue of loss of profit here, but it is a difficult issue.

I am happy—this is a genuine offer—to sit down with the right hon. Lady to consider her calculations and examine how we can take her plan forward. We can argue about whether the figure is 65,000 or 30,000 full-time places, but we have a long way to go, so if we can create another 10,000 places, that is fine. However, she needs to be careful about making large promises that cannot and will not be fulfilled.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the Home Secretary give way?

Mr. Straw: Although other people are beckoning me to finish, I shall give way to her for the last time.

Miss Widdecombe: I shall be swift. Whenever the Home Secretary says that he is willing to consider an idea, that heralds the fact that he has stolen yet another jolly good idea from us. However, on this occasion, I am very happy to discuss the issue with him, because I am aware of the case that he has quoted. If he studies my speech, he will see that I was very careful to say that it is possible to develop prison industry without competing with local labour. It is possible and the right hon. Gentleman knows that. [HON. MEMBERS: "How?"] Hon. Members keep yelling "How?", but I suggest that they go to have a look at what happens in Blakenhurst.

Mr. Straw: If the right hon. Lady thinks that she can do what she says, let us try to pin the issues down. However, we must consider the calculations.

The right hon. Lady has suggested that none of us has ever run a business, but that is not true of many Labour Members—they have run businesses. However, one thing that I know for certain is that a number of my constituents are about to end up in the bankruptcy courts because they did not produce proper calculations when they went to see the bank manager to take out a loan. Calculations are critical to the running of a business. It does not matter which side we are on; it boils down to a consideration of the calculations and whether it is possible for the plan to be self-financing.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Will my right hon. Friend give way on this point?

Mr. Straw: Yes, but then I must conclude my speech.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Is there any need to beat about the bush? Is not the reality that the shadow Chancellor has told the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that he is not prepared to give her any more money, so she had to find a ruse to convince the public that more resources would be available? She has come up with an idea that she grossly exaggerates. Those are the facts, so why cannot we spell them out?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend could be right. For me, the jury is out.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): It will not be a jury trial.

Mr. Straw: I think that this case requires a jury trial. I wait to see the calculations.

When my right hon. Friend the Minister of State, the director general and I spoke at the annual conference of the Prison Service last week, we all emphasised the need to drive up performance and to maintain the pace of change in the service. The work done in prisons is difficult and I know that the whole House will join me in paying tribute to the dedication of governors, prison officers and other staff and to the work of the many volunteers who help bridge the gap in the community. I also pay a personal tribute to the Director General of the Prison Service and his staff at its headquarters for their excellent leadership.

The facts reflect my belief that conditions for the vast majority of prisons are improving. Understandably, we hear about the reports that the chief inspector of prisons produces on failing prisons, but we hear much less about the

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many more reports in which he praises prisons for adequate, good or excellent performance. We all recognise the need to continue to improve the performance of some prisons but, above all, we need to remember that it is the purpose of prisons to prevent offending and reoffending. That is the goal of our strategy.

5.50 pm

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): We welcome the opportunity to have such an important debate. Like the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the Home Secretary, we are glad to have a few hours in which to raise some of the issues, even if we do not receive all the answers. On a more mischievous note, I wondered whether the right hon. Lady had thought of becoming self-financing herself, which might be in everyone's interest.

The past few weeks have been vital for the debate on the Prison Service. The Lord Chief Justice made an important contribution in his lecture 10 years after the Woolf report and the director general made a crucial speech at last week's Prison Service conference. In addition, today's press includes an important article by Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham. He has been assiduous in making his views clear and has used his independence to do his job very well, as did his predecessor.

The Select Committee on Home Affairs made three initial proposals in its third report of this Parliament in the 1997-98 Session. It acknowledged that

"The increased prison population places enormous strains on the Prison Service and, given the budget constraints in which it operates, has an adverse effect on prison regimes and the amount of rehabilitative work which can be done in them."

It proposed a much better target for purposeful activity. In its second proposal, it confirmed:

"The rapidly escalating prison population makes it of paramount importance to investigate credible alternatives to custody and to use them wherever appropriate."

With regard to its third proposal, it said:

"We note the insistence of the HM Chief Inspector of Prisons that there are many people in custody who do not need to be there."

All those statements reflect Liberal Democrat concerns.

However, none of us underestimates the difficulty of running the Prison Service, whether as a Minister, Home Secretary, director general or anyone else who is involved in its management. It is a hard, but vital, job, and we thank those people who are involved in the service. I pay tribute to the governors whom I have met on my visits to prisons in the 15 months since I have had responsibility for home affairs. I appreciate the hospitality of their management and staff, who were willing to answer all questions. Almost without exception, I found them impressive and encouraging. They certainly know what they want to do and it was interesting that they often gave similar messages about where improvements could be made.

I want to single out one or two people. I had an interesting conversation with the president of the Prison Governors Association when I visited Durham prison a few days ago, and I intend to deal with two of his concerns. He made clear the widespread view that many people should not be in prison and that the service is unable to cope well with them. He explained that there may never be adequate resources to manage people who stay in prison for only a short time and who the service cannot prepare for life back on the outside.

I visited the women's high-security section of Durham prison. One woman told me that she should not be in prison because she stabbed someone after being mentally ill for a number of years. She said that she should be receiving treatment in hospital. Although I understand why the decision was taken to put her in prison, many people in prison have been failed by our mental health services. Hospital would have been a better place to deal with that woman.

I visited two very different prisons in a short time—Lancaster, which I think is the oldest prison in the country, and Doncaster, which, as one of the newest prisons, is also doing a particularly good job. I have changed my view on private sector prisons and believe that it might be appropriate for them to exist, provided that they have suitable, enforceable contracts with the public sector. It is useful to remind the public sector that the private sector offers an alternative and can set an example for it to follow. I accept that it is easier to produce better services in a brand new prison than it is in a very old prison such as Lancaster, which is hundreds of years old. However, even some old prisons do excellent work. Lancaster runs extremely good sessions on the rehabilitation of sex offenders and how prisoners can deal with drugs, alcohol and anger management. The fact that it is an old prison does not mean that it cannot follow good practice.

I have also seen transformations in London, although plenty still need to take place. Wandsworth prison has improved significantly, but that is not the case for Brixton. I am probably in and out of Brixton more than any other prison. I should make it clear that that is always for constituency reasons—colleagues know that I am here far too often for there to be any other explanation. Brixton prison is not only overcrowded but unable to cope properly with the pressure that is placed on it. Many of its prisoners are on remand and should not be there.

Leeds prison made the strongest impression on me. According to the league table, it has the greatest overcrowding of any prison in England and Wales. I visited it a few weeks after the new governor was appointed and could see the difference that Mrs. Stacey Tasker had already made. I did not know the previous governor, but little changes had apparently made a huge difference. Daily morning meetings allowed the management to exchange their experiences of what had happened the day before. The new governor decided to move the previous governor's office from the prefab outside the prison building to the middle of the prison, so that every time she went in and out of her door she could see what was going on. She also decided to walk around without colleagues, which made her much more free to talk to prisoners. I pay tribute to such innovative governorship, which should be seen more often.

I should also like the Minister to know that I was privileged to visit Leeds prison for two days when the prison inspectorate was carrying out an inspection. I think that I am the first Member of Parliament to participate in such a visit. It did an excellent job and I pay tribute to it.

Its staff were courteous and helpful, and effective across a range of activities. I enjoyed my time with them and thank them for that opportunity.

Prison numbers are rising significantly. There has been a 40 per cent. increase in the past nine years. We have more prisoners per head of population than any European country except Portugal and a large number of remand prisoners, although that has dropped slightly in the past couple of years, even though 50 per cent. of remand prisoners do not receive custodial sentences. It must be wrong to lock up so many of them before they are tried when the courts subsequently decide not to imprison so many of them.

The Home Secretary knows that I am concerned about Prison Service expenditure. In nine years, there has been a 2 per cent. increase in expenditure for a 40 per cent. increase in numbers, which cannot be explained by the service becoming more efficient. It is impossible to get 38 per cent. efficiency savings in that time. The Director General of the Prison Service made it clear how he and his colleagues had resisted the efficiency savings that it was unreasonable to ask them to make.

As the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald explained, prisoner activity has, sadly, been reduced. I was encouraged to hear from the Minister that purposeful activity has increased in the past few months. However, a parliamentary answer from the prisons Minister to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 12 December shows that since the Conservatives left office, purposeful activity has decreased, which is inexcusable. The figures vary widely throughout the prisons estate, but on average prisoners spend only 23.7 hours a week on such activity. Prisoners are not prepared for release and a constructive life outside if they spend half their time locked up with nothing to do.

The statistics for the amount of time spent on education, on farms and in industries seems to show a decrease while the prison population has gone up, which is a tragedy. *[Interruption.]* I say to the Minister that I am aware that figures differ throughout the service, and some prisons are better than others. That is true of all the prison statistics. Some prisons have no overcrowding, and others, such as Leeds, have 800 prisoners living two or three to a cell. The last statistic revealed by parliamentary answers that I should like to refer to is that the number of hours spent outside the cell varies hugely too.

That leads me to my first conclusion about what has been going wrong. The director general said that he was not willing to go on making excuses for what happens in the Prison Service. At the end of the day, it is the responsibility of management and Ministers to deliver consistency throughout the service. Although there has been improvement in some areas, many things have gone wrong in many places over the past four years. The director general admits that there has not been a general improvement.

Some of us believe that there are too many people in prison, and that we ought to try to reduce that number. The former Home Secretary, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), told me that there are comparable reoffending rates for those who have been inside and those who have not. Figures are difficult, and I do not want to make the matter too complex, but the ball-park figures are that 57 per cent. of those who go to prison reoffend within two years, which is not a great success rate, and those who receive sentences that are a good alternative to custody, such as community sentences, have a less than 50 per cent. reoffending rate. Good alternatives are therefore much more successful than wasted time in prison.

Lord Chief Justice Woolf made it clear that we often send people to prisons that have totally ineffective regimes for dealing with them, whereas a constructive alternative outside prison would be far better. We ought to ask ourselves who is in prison who ought not to be. There are many women, people with mental illness, prisoners on remand and people serving short sentences who should not be in prison. If policy makers considered those four categories of people, we could significantly reduce the prison population and introduce a sentencing regime that keeps many people out of prison while more effectively preventing them from reoffending. In prison, often little is done to prevent that, and sometimes positive harm is done by keeping people locked up.

In his lecture the other day, the Lord Chief Justice, referring to a comment made by Churchill when he was Home Secretary, said that one of the tests of a civilised society is how we look after our prisons.

Miss Widdecombe: Exactly.

Mr. Hughes: Before the right hon. Lady gets too carried away in agreeing with me, I point out that another test is how we treat asylum seekers and refugees. The real tests are the difficult issues and the difficult people, and we are currently failing those tests.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I agree with a great deal of what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but sentencing is ultimately a matter for the courts. The courts are not constrained to send people to prison, save in exceptional circumstances. When they send people to prison they are reflecting public opinion. The real task, therefore, is to change public opinion.

Mr. Hughes: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is very knowledgeable and I accept his point. I remind him, however, that in opinion polls the public say that sentences should be tougher. However, all surveys show that members of the public grossly underestimate the length of sentences. Public opinion is based on an inaccurate understanding of the facts. If the public knew how long sentences are, they would not call for them to be longer.

I am sure that the public want a better system for reducing reoffending rates. Prison governors are agreed that it is a priority to have regimes within prisons that hugely reduce the chance of people reoffending when released. There are only two ways of doing that. The first is to have a good purposeful activity regime of sport, work, training or education. The second method is to prepare people effectively for release. I have not found a prison in the country—a local prison with other responsibilities—where the staff have not said, "We have no time to prepare short-term prisoners for release. They have no training. They come in and go out before we can do anything with them because we are concentrating on long-term prisoners." It is those short-term prisoners who reoffend most often: they burgle; they go into prison and come out again; they burgle again and go back to prison. We are

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failing many of the people whom we put in prison. Sentencing is a matter for the courts, but they hope that when people are in prison, something will happen to persuade them not to reoffend. Nothing happens to them. They are locked up and then sent out with no assistance.

Mr. Stinchcombe: The single greatest factor in determining whether someone is likely to reoffend on release is whether he has a stable family life to return to. The lack of that increases the chances of reoffending by as many as six times. In light of that, is the hon. Gentleman disappointed that 26,000 prisoners are still held more than 50 miles from the Crown court where they were committed?

Mr. Hughes: I am disappointed. The hon. Gentleman is right, and I saw those figures in the Lord Chief Justice's report. Many people have made the point that we must move towards having community prisons for all but the most high-risk offenders. The director general said that that was still a dream. It should not be a dream. *[Interruption.]* I say to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald that I know that it is a difficult matter. As a south-east of England Member, as she is, I know that there are many prisoners from the south-east, but not enough prisons in the region to cater for them, so they get dispersed throughout the country. None the less, we must try to ensure that prisoners are kept as close to home as possible.

People must not only be prepared for release, but supported after release. If a prisoner has a family, work, a home and support to prevent him from going back to drug and alcohol abuse, he is far more likely to get back on the straight and narrow rather than to get into the reoffending cycle.

My conclusion is that the Prison Service delivers no consistency of standard throughout the prison estate, as is clear from the chief inspector's report. There is a lack of resources. That situation may be improving, but it is still appalling. My hon. Friends and I think that automatic mandatory sentences are wrong, but if the prison population is to increase, the Government must provide resources not only to build prisons but to do the rehabilitative work in the prisons too.

We must seek answers on overcrowding. The Home Secretary did not give a single specific answer about that. The Lord Chief Justice's question, which was also posed by the hon. Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) and others, asked what the Government will do to tackle overcrowding. When will they tackle the problem? Do the Government accept that it is the overwhelming priority, and will they give it the attention that the Lord Chief Justice called for? When will we have a full constructive activity regime over the 35-hour week? When will pre-release preparation be provided for every prisoner who is about to leave?

We all agree about the objectives, but we disagree on specific answers. The Minister said, sotto voce, that the Government must be congratulated on better working between the Prison Service and the health service. I congratulate them on that, but I fail to understand why the NHS cannot run the prison medical service. I have not met a single prison officer who does not agree with me about that. The Government have been weak about this for a reason that I do not understand. We need only an announcement that the national health service will take over running the prison medical service. It is not difficult because only one agreement is needed. The move would provide much better career prospects both for those working outside prisons and those inside them. A much better service would be provided for prisoners and prisoners' families in the prison estate.

In the sentencing review that is approaching, we must allow courts to be able to impose community sentences and licences and probation for two years, no matter how short the prison sentence is. At present, I believe that a short sentence cannot have a community condition attached to it. That is nonsensical. The sooner that is changed, the better. Greater flexibility will keep many more people outside prisons.

We must aim at more community prisons, and we must not be dogmatic about whether they are run by the public service or the private sector.

I say carefully, but equally strongly, that prison officers must be much more progressive in many cases and much less conservative. There are some very good prison officers but they are hardly the vanguard of reform of the Prison Officers Association. I may not be loved for saying this, but when Mrs. Tasker took over in Leeds, I believe that she found that the gym was not able to be used for much of the day because the officers would not manage the prisoners to use it. Workshops were lying idle for much of the day because officers would not manage movements in and out of them. When education facilities exist, but are not being used, it is nonsensical. Management, working with progressive leadership in the Prison Officers Association, must change the defensive regime and have innovative, constructive and maximum utilisation of the prison estate.

I hope that the Minister will give us targets for reducing the numbers of prisoners who should be imprisoned. I hope also that he will give us targets for achieving full and purposeful activity. In addition, I hope that he will answer the question posed by hon. Members on both sides of the House about when we shall have a real reduction in overcrowding. Liberal Democrat Members are sad that the Government appear to be accepting what I thought was a Tory view, not a Labour view, that there will be an ineluctable rise in the numbers of people in prison. We think that the numbers should not be increasing to the extent that the Government are predicting. If we try to keep as many people out of prison as we can rather than put more and more people into prison, it is likely that we shall be serving the public interest far better.

6.12 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who speaks with authority given his experience of prisons in the south-east, especially Brixton. He has a liberal approach, which I would commend.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) made some powerful points. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department also made some powerful points about the need for mental health prisoners not to be in prison. He spoke also of the problems of overcrowding and the

need for the medical service in the Prison Service to be taken into the national health service. The right hon. Lady made some important and powerful comments about Brixton and Feltham, with which I could not disagree. These are scandals and there needs to be a public debate about them.

My experience of the Prison Service is restricted to my constituency, and that is as a visitor. I have visited Usk prison on about six occasions. I have also visited one or two constituents in other prisons. That is the limit of my knowledge of the subject.

I well remember the Woolf report, which made some important recommendations. One of the first times I visited Usk prison was soon after the Woolf report was published. It is a category C prison. Also in my constituency is the Prescoed young offender institution. Usk prison now contains mainly sex offenders. That follows the concentration of sex offenders after the Strangeways riots, including the riots in the 1980s.

As I have said, I have visited Usk prison about six times. A couple of years ago, I was there when His Royal Highness Prince Edward visited. I was, too, on another occasion, when Her Royal Highness Princess Anne visited. However, I also visited only three weeks ago, and that was prompted by three distinctions that the prison had achieved. I am grateful to the governor, Ray Coomber, for the invitation and for the opportunity to discuss matters with him.

The first distinction for the prison was to be awarded the Investors in People award. It is the second time that that has happened in Usk. I well remember meeting the prison officers who achieved the award only a few years ago. There is tremendous camaraderie among the prison officers and a great sense of humour. They say that everything we ever saw in "Porridge" can be confirmed by prison life.

Recently, Usk prison was awarded a charter mark. Most importantly, it had a successful inspection report. The inspection was undertaken between 13 and 17 March 2000. The inspector identified what he called the Welsh dimension. In Wales, we have four prisons—Usk, Cardiff, Swansea and the private Parc prison at Bridgend. One of the problems is that we do not have a prison in north Wales. Another is that we do not have a women's prison. My hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Stinchcombe) and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey have spoken of the importance of prisoners serving sentences as close as possible to where they live. Prisoners from north Wales, many of whom will be Welsh speaking, will have to go to prisons outside Wales.

The inspector commended Usk prison, saying:

"In taking forward this role for the prison"—

that is, specialising in sex offender treatment programmes—

"the Governor and his staff have developed very effective procedures for dealing with this particular group of offenders, who have certain specific characteristics, including the facts that they tend to be unpopular, ageing and compliant. Impressively, the whole staff of the prison is involved with their treatment, every Department including the Chaplaincy and the Board of Visitors, playing its part. Sentence Planning supports throughcare and resettlement rather than being an exercise in itself. Education is the main provider of work, due to the lack of other facilities."

It is important that those other facilities be developed.

Later on, the inspector said:

"The result is a most impressive degree of support for programmes in their widest sense—and the staff who deliver them—which we highlight as good practice.

The Director General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, commented on the report:

"I would like to praise the Governor and staff for the excellent work which is being carried out at HMP Usk and HMYOI Prescoed, and commend the staff's enthusiasm in making it possible to carry out the Operating Standards Audit without any reduction in the regime."

The sex offender treatment programme has developed significantly over the past few years. About three years ago, three members of the staff were specialising in the programme. There is now a section of about 11, consisting of psychologists, probation officers and prison officers who undergo specialist training.

Given what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said about the progressive attitude of staff, it was interesting to listen to prison officers who described their attitudes when they first entered the service and how they have changed. They have become more progressive and more rehabilitative. They now realise, significantly, that offenders need not reoffend. They have an important role not only in punishing prisoners but in rehabilitating them for the society that they will invariably rejoin.

I remember one prison officer saying, "I was a hard-nosed screw when I came here." He is now involved in sex offender treatment programmes and other rehabilitation programmes.

I shall quote one of the prisoners who has gone through the sex offender treatment programme. It is called "Steve's Opinion", and the assessment is publicly available. It reads:

"The Core Programme . . . gave me an understanding of the ordeal that I put my victims through. I saw how my victim blamed herself for my offence, how afraid she was of telling anyone what had happened to her in case she was not believed, how her self-confidence was destroyed and how frightened she was of ever seeing me again. These are just a few of the things that I put my victims through."

He concluded:

"In short, I would say that to offend was the worst decision of my life; to attend the Core Programme was the best decision of my life. Having now completed the Core Programme, I would now go as far as suggesting that any sex offender who claims to regret his actions owes it to his victims and to himself to attend the Core Programme."

Nothing can condone what some offenders have committed. However, it is important that they have the opportunity to undertake sex offender rehabilitation programmes. I understand that the non-reoffending rate of prisoners who have gone through such a programme is 46 per cent. That is particularly significant, but it would be more significant if it was nearer 100 per cent. That programme needs to be developed throughout the whole Prison Service.

When I was last in Usk prison, I met prison officers and prisoners who go out to meet children and young people in schools and try to deter them from offending. I pay particular tribute to one prison officer, Ian Sandigate, whom I would describe as a rather rough-looking prop forward and someone who would frighten young people, but perhaps also a gentle giant. I also commend the prisoner whom I met; he is known as Mossy and he accompanies Mr. Sandigate on those visits. They work together and go to schools to give children and young

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people a realistic idea of what prison life is like. They will describe, not necessarily Usk prison, which may not be typical, but local bang-up prisons of which they have both had experience.

I saw the importance of the education and training programme at the new designated NVQ centre. Many prisoners at Usk are unlikely to get normal employment again, given their record. They are developing skills so that they can take up self-employment. I saw the information technology provision and the literacy programme, which is being organised through Coleg Gwent, the local further education college. I saw the IT facilities: the prisoners have much better IT facilities than the staff who are working on administrative affairs at the prison, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will look into that. I visited the farm, and saw the work that some prisoners are doing there. They are developing skills through the woodland strategy, which encourages them to understand woodland nature and to develop their own businesses in sustainable wood production.

In conclusion, the director general's recent report and speech were particularly significant. I hope that Usk prison will be regarded as a model for the country to follow. I accept that the nature of the prisoners there may make it distinctive, but it is important that the Prison Service gets the balance right to protect the public, provide punishment, provide disincentives to crimes that require that people go to prison, and rehabilitate people for the society to which they will return.

6.22 pm

Sir Peter Lloyd (Fareham): Like the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), I have visited Usk prison. I thought that it was very good, and I am glad that it is keeping up the standards that I observed; but many prisons are hopeless and degrading places, and many have always been so. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) quoted Winston Churchill; it is nearly a century since he said that a test of a civilised country is the way in which it treats its prisoners. The Lord Chief Justice, the chief inspector of prisons and the Director General of the Prison Service—in a passionate speech only last week—have all reminded us of how bad prisons can be. No doubt some tabloid editors who would, by implication, dismiss Churchill as a wimpish do-gooder, regard prisons as holiday camps. I do not believe, however, that most of the public do.

Whatever the arguments on civilisation and morality, it makes no sense for society to spend—or, as the Government would say, invest—so much on or in a system that produces over 50 per cent. reoffending, in the case of adult prisons, and over 80 per cent. in the case of young offender institutions. In reality, those figures are even worse than they appear, because crime is generally a young person's occupation, especially young people from fractured homes. Most of them grow out of crime by their early 30s, leaving the suspicion that those who do not have become embedded in a criminal substratum because of, not in spite of, their experience in prison.

Of course, there is a huge number of dedicated people throughout the Prison Service running excellent programmes and producing a positive effect on the prisoners in their charge. Quite rightly, the Home Secretary and my right hon. Friend have quoted them. However, by looking on the bright side and constantly doing justice to them, it is dangerously easy to obscure quite how negative and third-rate much of the system is. I am certain that no Minister, whether in this Government or the previous one, wants it like that. It is true that some of my colleagues in the previous Government thought that prisons should be austere—which is how most prisons remain—but they always preceded that adjective with "decent", and they meant it. The reasons why the problem nevertheless remains intractable are many and difficult.

First, there is overcrowding. As has been said many times in this debate and outside the House, there is a major impediment to constructive work if prison officers are obliged simply to run a convict warehouse. The Government's answer, like the previous Government's, is to build more prisons. However, that should not be their top priority; they should look at sentencing first. Short sentences, in which the prisoner is inside for only a few weeks or months, are pointless. They simply ensure that the prisoner loses his job, if he has one, and possibly break up his family, if he has one; the retention of both being key factors in his keeping out of trouble in the future. What is more, rapidly bringing him in and out of prison creates maximum disruption for the Prison Service, and does not give it time to do any remedial work.

On the other hand, long sentences, which drive up the prison population, have become increasingly common. There is no sign that, as deterrents, they are any more effective than rather shorter ones. It is plain that, even if the right programmes were available in prison, sentences are frequently far longer than is necessary to produce the maximum beneficial impact. Indeed, past a certain point, prisoners become institutionalised and are less able to lead a law-abiding life on release than they would be if released earlier. In practice, sentencing is a crucial process, but to me it seems hopelessly crude.

For the most part, judges are intelligent and thoughtful. However, when it comes to sentencing, they seem to be saying little more than "What do we usually give in this sort of case?" They increase the sentence by 20 per cent. for a bad example of the crime, and knock off 20 per cent. for extenuating circumstances. It is good that John Halliday at the Home Office and Lord Justice Auld are looking separately at that issue. I hope that they will go back to first principles and, in particular, do that which is seldom done: consider the effect that the sentence is supposed to have on the prisoner on whom it is passed.

I said that prison building ought not to be the priority. Of course, there is sense in building new prisons to replace those that were constructed in a way that makes it hard to provide the range of activity essential for a good regime. However, what is really needed, if conditions are to be improved, is the building of secure hospitals, in which the large number of severely mentally disordered prisoners can be properly treated. That would give them a far greater chance of recovery than they have in the prison system, which simply cannot cope with them, and would make it possible for prison staff to concentrate much more singlemindedly and effectively on those prisoners who remain more or less in touch with reality.

I was glad that the Home Secretary said that co-operation between the national health service and prisons is much closer than it was. However, that is an area in which completely joined-up government is

essential, and we have not got it yet. Pleaty has been said about the lack of education, skills training and drug, alcohol and offending behaviour programmes, and about the need for real work. The situation is much worse than it appears from the figures, because sometimes programmes that are recorded as being offered do not function, sometimes they are available only to a limited number of prisoners—indeed, that is generally the case—and many are not well run.

Disciplined, paid work, which my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary would put at the centre of the regime, has a lot of attractions and it would be interesting to see how much it can be developed. However, I hope that my right hon. Friend will not go too far down that route when she is Home Secretary. Inevitably, paid work in prison will be limited in range and skill content because of the size of prisons and the turnover of prisoners. What should be at the centre is a flexible range of programmes, directed at the needs of the individual prisoner and at those problems of skill, motivation and personality that get in the way of his capacity to lead a law-abiding life on release.

It is important, not just for the prisoner, but even more for the society that he will rejoin, that prison regimes address the individual prisoner's needs and problems, which should be identified in good sentence plans but often are not. What is most wrong in many prisons is not the poverty of the various programmes, but the fact that, too often, the prevailing atmosphere and relationships are conditioned not by the policies of the governor and his staff, but by the nastiest prisoners. It makes the work of well-meaning officers ineffective, and ensures that frightened and bullied prisoners cannot easily respond positively. There are some prisons where the governor's decisions and policies are carried through, and other prisons where they run into the sand or, at best, have a muffled and distorted impact somewhere down the line.

That is a major managerial problem in the service. Its solution must involve winning the understanding and full co-operation of more junior staff. Few mistreat prisoners, though some do, but far too many do not see it as their role to get to know the prisoners in their charge, to treat them with respect or to provide them with the positive encouragement that they need to make full use of the opportunities offered by the prison.

If prisoners are to learn to respect other people, and their persons and property when they come out, that is how they must be treated inside. What is the good of sending criminals to prison, undermining their dignity, winding them up in numerous petty ways and then turning them out into society angrier and more inadequate than when they went in? There needs to be far more training and retraining of prison staff at all levels, with much more serious oversight of their performance and a determination, however difficult and expensive, to terminate the services of those who cannot contribute to improving the way in which their prison runs and the prisoners in their care are treated.

Finally, I do not believe that Ministers of either party have ever appreciated how complicated the Prison Service is or how difficult it is to run. Prisons are a budget hotel chain, a string of training centres, a collection of mental hospitals, remedial schools and workshops in which guests, trainees, pupils and patients all badly want to be somewhere else. That is why the service is flooded with so many priorities, all making sense in themselves, but this week's one inevitably militating against the effective execution of last week's—and in its turn destined to be overtaken by next week's.

It is impossible for Ministers, even those who have the administrative skills, to run the system, as they have manifold other responsibilities and can attend to prisons for only part of their time. When I was at the Home Office in 1993, we set up the agency, which was intended to give professional managers the scope to manage well. It has had some success, but less than I had hoped because we did not go far enough—indeed, events subsequent to its setting up drew the Prison Service back more closely into the Home Office.

The time has come for Ministers to do that which Ministers find hardest—to surrender their daily power to intervene. That would leave Ministers free to concentrate on what they are really for: broad policy issues, of which there are more than enough in the Home Office requiring their attention. That would enable the Select Committee and Parliament to provide a continuing oversight. Above all, it would give management the chance to emerge completely from ministerial shadow, to provide the leadership and continuity that the organisation badly needs, and to embark on long-term institutional reform. If such a system is to be sustained, it will inevitably be long term—far longer than the term of office of even the longest-serving Minister.

The Government who devise such a robust and long-sighted system will do more to improve permanently the quality of what is done in the prison system than any number of well-meaning policy initiatives or short-term crisis management. I look forward in hope to what the Minister says in his winding-up speech.

Before I sit down, one other thought occurs to me. It has always been a source of frustration to those who want the prisons to serve the community better that community interest in the criminal justice system seems to stop at the prison gate. It is surely time for prisoners to be able to vote. It would certainly draw all candidates inside and be an education to them, their local parties and, through them, the wider public. As the number of prisoners is small compared with the number of voters outside, there is no chance that the interests of prisoners would be preferred to those of the rest of the electorate, but it would help to point up where the long-term interests of prisoners and society at large coincide, to the real benefit of both.

6.36 pm

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): I agree with the last point made by the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd)—prisoners should be able to vote, and I see no argument against that.

The Director General of the Prison Service made a courageous speech, and I suspect that that was the reason for today's debate. As I said in an intervention, I am, for once, in a charitable mood towards the Opposition. The Prison Service should be the subject of debate. I believe that this is the first time that the Opposition have raised the topic in this Parliament. Be that as it may, we have a responsibility, especially as so many of our prisons are an utter disgrace.

[Mr. David Winnick]

In his speech, the director general said:

"Year after year, governor after governor"—

he was not speaking of just the past four years—

"inspection after inspection, prisons like these have been exposed. Year after year the exposure has led to a flurry of hand wringing, sometimes a change of governor, a dash of capital investment, but no real or sustained improvement."

In the short time—three minutes—at my disposal, I draw to the attention of the House the level of violence, bullying and physical abuse that occurs in prisons and has done for so many years. The House should be extremely concerned about that. Sometimes, the physical abuse is carried out by prison staff. Former prison staff from Wormwood Scrubs were jailed only last year. More often, however, bullying and violence are carried out by prisoners themselves, which make life that much more of a hell for other prisoners. The aims of rehabilitating prisoners and helping a good number of them to lead a law-abiding life when they leave prison is undermined by what takes place day in, day out in prisons.

I shall make a few brief points before the Opposition claim their time. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who spoke for the Opposition, disagreed about the number in prison, but I agree with what has been said by others, particularly the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes). For many prisoners, there is no alternative to prison, but where there is a reasonable chance that the community will not be harmed, we should increasingly consider non-custodial sentences.

There is no chance, in my view, of substantial prison improvement and reform if prisoner numbers keep on rising. It is easy to send a person to prison and to believe that the community will therefore be safe, but what happens when prisoners other than those serving a life sentence are released? As a former Home Secretary, Lord Hurd, said, it is important to bear in mind that those who go to prison will eventually come out.

Finally, I have the greatest respect not only for the Director General of the Prison Service—I wish that he had spoken before—but for the chief inspector of prisons. Time and again, Sir David Ramsbotham and his predecessor spotlighted the failings. Yes, that embarrassed the previous Government and no doubt it embarrassed my Government, but I believe that what the chief inspector did was essential. I regret that Sir David is not being reappointed and I understand that an advertisement will be placed in the press to publicise the vacancy. The new chief inspector will not fulfil his duties properly if he does not speak out with the same courage and independence as the current chief inspector and his predecessor.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. This may be as much a point of frustration as a point of order, but is it not regrettable that, as a consequence of the Government making an education statement on an Opposition day, only one Conservative Back Bencher has been able to contribute to the debate? I feel slightly annoyed about that because I believe that I am the only Member who intended to participate who has sentenced someone to prison. I also happen to have two prisons in my constituency. It is regrettable that I have been unable to catch your eye, but is it not also regrettable that the Government have taken up an hour, which has truncated the debate in a thoroughly unsatisfactory manner?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): That is not a point of order for the Chair, but I note the hon. and learned Gentleman's comments.

6.40 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): We have had a good if all too brief debate and the complaint made by my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) testifies, if testimony were needed, to the Government's grossly insensitive handling of their business, which has deprived us of a proper opportunity to discuss our motion.

The debate was magnificently opened by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), the shadow Home Secretary. In a thoughtful, impassioned and statesmanlike speech, she made it abundantly clear that there was not a golden age for prisons under our Government. We acknowledge that prison conditions were poor, but they were improving then, so it is incumbent on the Government to recognise that they are worse and deteriorating now. That is the significant point.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) made a characteristically sincere, reflective and constructive speech and although I do not agree with all his remarks, I respect them none the less. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd) gave a timely warning against complacency from the vantage point of someone with real and direct experience of the system. The hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) legitimately pointed to improvements in service in his constituency, and he was justly proud of those. The hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), with whom I rarely agree, nevertheless made a fully civilised speech. He spoke with conviction and passion, but I am afraid that I profoundly disagree with him on the entitlement of prisoners to vote.

The facts in Her Majesty's inspector's reports speak for themselves. That on Brixton of June 2000 describes a service going "steadily downhill", conditions that are "totally unacceptable" and no wofkshops or education facilities worthy of the name. That on Feltham of September 1999 talks of only 15 hours purposeful activity a week instead of the target of 23.5 and of 90 people in full-time education and 700 receiving no education at all. Kids expect to be incarcerated for 23 out of 24 hours a day and get no fresh air for days on end.

At Portland, as the November 1999 report all too eloquently testifies, the conditions were, in the judgment of the inspector, "nothing short of scandalous". He observed, and all Members of the House would agree, that it was

"outrageous that young people and children should be required to live in such conditions."

If all that is not a sorry enough tale, the position at Wandsworth is equally bad. We are told that there is a "pervasive culture of fear" and an attitude that is "callous and uncaring".

What emerges from all the reports and the testimony of independent witnesses, who advise Members of the House, is that, too often, education in prisons, which

should be the route to reform and future hope, is grossly inadequate, poorly structured, rarely co-ordinated and therefore inevitably defective in the results that it produces. Too often, young people, chronically and almost criminally, I dare to say, are moved from one institution to another before they complete the courses on which they have embarked, the results of which could benefit them and the wider community. Indeed, in many examples it is sad, but, nevertheless, salutary to recall that people in prison can acquire doctorates only in barbarism and criminal study. That is a tragedy and a damning indictment of the Government, who have had four years to translate their highfalutin words into meaningful and purposeful reality.

Assaults on prisoners are up 25 per cent.; assaults on staff are up 20 per cent.; and incidents of self-harm in prisons and young offender institutions stand at 7,398, which represents a 35 per cent. rise. The Home Secretary cannot gainsay the fact, no matter how he tries to quibble, that prison suicides have soared under this Government. Appalling conditions are inadequately attended to and Ministers are grossly complacent, but still they busily implement the home detention curfew scheme, which has released 31,000 serious offenders, typically before they have served even half of their sentences. We know that, as a result, about 1,000 extra offences, including two rapes and several assaults on policemen, have been committed.

I say to the prisons Minister that those incidents have happened on his watch. They should be on his conscience, for the blood that has resulted from those early releases and violent offences is surely on his hands. Prisons should be places for reform, not ruination; for deterrence, not degradation; for punishment, not purgatory. The director general has challenged the Government to make a reality of the rhetoric of decency and of dignity. It is nevertheless sad to recall that the Government, as we see in example after example after example, are preoccupied with the trappings of office and the perks of power. They are all too remote, I regret to say, from the failures of their policy and the damage done to victims as a direct consequence of that failure.

The Government, the Home Secretary and the prisons Minister have failed prisoners, failed victims, failed hard-working staff and failed the public. Wherever we look, we see purposeful activity declining. The quantity and quality of education is inadequate. The increase in slopping out is deplorable. The morale of those charged with delivering the service has been depressed and is probably worse than it has been in a generation.

I suggest to the House and the prisons Minister, who should have a full opportunity to reply, that there has been a litany of woes from a smug, self-satisfied and complacent Government who have failed to deliver. After four years of consistent inadequacy and repeated failure, it is time for a Government with an insatiable thirst for public office to give way to an Opposition with an insatiable thirst for public service.

6.48 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): An Opposition with a great deal of brass neck! The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) comes to the Dispatch Box to deliver a speech that does no justice to the serious debate that we were having. The reality is that the Government have begun to address, in a determined manner, the underlying problems that have bedevilled the Prison Service for many, many years. Let us cool it for a moment and take a more reflective look at the seriousness of the task in hand.

The overriding Prison Service priority for any Government must be, first and foremost, the protection of the public. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) asked about the overriding priority of this Government—it is the protection of the public, which is best secured by holding prisoners in safe and decent conditions and addressing the underlying causes of their offending. About that, we are all agreed. That should underpin the vision that any Government have for their Prison Service. We will be judged on the extent to which we have met the objectives that we have set ourselves in that regard.

We should consider what has been achieved. The present Opposition have rightly and understandably fallen into the trap, because they are doing what the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) castigated the House for doing in March 1997, when she referred to the

"endless catalogue of damnation by the Opposition, who do nothing but point to the bad news."—[*Official Report*, 20 March 1997; Vol. 292, c. 1067.]

She is now doing exactly the same.

Let us stand back and examine what has been achieved. There have been improvements in security. There were 232 escapes from prison in 1992–93, on the Conservatives' watch, compared with 11 escapes in this financial year—232 to 11. We are entitled to be proud of our record. The right hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Buckingham talked about the importance of constructive activity in prisons. We are addressing the causes of offending through offending behaviour programmes—we cannot be any more constructive than that. Total completions of such courses are up 240 per cent. from 1,373 in 1996-97 to 4,664 last year. *[Interruption.]* The Tories do not like hearing the good news, but they are going to hear it whether they like it or not. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister has a right to reply.

Mr. Boateng: As for education in prisons, more than 32,000 full qualifications have been achieved in prisons since April 2000. The number of teaching hours increased by 10 per cent. The Government need no lessons from the Opposition on the importance of ensuring that prisoners work. The turnover from prison industries and farms in 1999–2000 was the highest ever at £53 million—up from £51.4 million in 1996–97. Judge us by the turnover from industry and farms, because it is up.

On sales of products, the right hon. Lady went on about socks, but they are given away, so let us consider what is sold. Sales of products from prison industries and farms to external customers rose from £6.7 million in 1996–97 to £10.45 million in 1999–2000. That is the difference between Conservative rhetoric and the Labour

[Mr. Boateng]

party in government delivering work and industries in prisons. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Buckingham will have his chance in due course.

I want to examine the serious points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) and the right hon. Member for Fareham (Sir P. Lloyd). They addressed two crucial issues. Rehabilitation is vital, and must be at the heart of what we are trying to do in prisons. My hon. Friend referred to the work in Usk. Rehabilitation of prisoners must lead to an understanding of the impact of their crime on their victims. We are addressing that in the work taking place in prisons. We are getting prisoners to see the harm that they have done to their victims and to confront what in their conduct has caused so much trouble and misery to others. *[Interruption.]* It is no use the hon. Member for Buckingham saying from a sedentary position that this has been going on for years. We should compare the Government's record with what our Conservative predecessors achieved. We are achieving change and giving prisoners the opportunity to change their lives, whereas the Conservatives consistently failed to do that.

Mr. Bruce: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Boateng: No.

We are making the important link between what goes on in prisons and what goes on in the community. The right hon. Member for Fareham, in a serious and considered speech, referred to the importance of ensuring that we address not only the issue of work in prisons, but the link with work outside prisons. The charity that he chairs does sterling work in that regard. We are now trying to build on the work of the voluntary sector to enable voluntary institutions to work more closely with prisons and to establish real links between prisons and the community.

Mr. Garnier: On the subject of those links, I was informed by the director of the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders at a JSB conference on Saturday that 50 per cent. of those leaving young offender institutions do not know where they are going to sleep on their first night of freedom. What is the Minister doing about that?

Mr. Boateng: I was in Pentonville prison just a few weeks ago to launch a new project. NACRO and the housing associations are involved in that work. We want to ensure that before prisoners leave an institution they have been given advice on benefits and their housing needs have been examined, so that they do not go out into the wider world without certainty of a roof over their heads and the means to pay for it.

Serious resettlement issues need to be addressed. The Prime Minister has launched his initiative from the social exclusion unit to ensure that we get the policy right. There are no easy solutions: glib answers are not enough. The problem requires hard work and effort. The director general is bringing pressure to bear on the Prison Service to improve management. As our amendment points out, there are discrepancies in what can be achieved with the same resources between one institution to another. We were given examples of such discrepancies in the debate. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey described his visit to Durham, deals with some difficult, damaged and distressed prisoners. All the evidence shows that when the national health service works alongside prison health care and prison officers are able to train and obtain officially recognised NHS accredited qualifications—which we have enabled them to do—we better focus resources on the needs of individual prisons. That helps better to protect the public, because it ensures that the mental health and other health needs of prisoners have been assessed before they leave prison, and they are more likely to maintain their links with the NHS and so are less likely to offend.

This is about management and building partnerships between the NHS and the Prison Service, utilising the voluntary sector. Importantly, as we have shown in the four years in which we have had the stewardship of the Prison Service, as a result of those partnerships we have improved the conditions of many people in prison, and we have begun to address the issues that were neglected for so long by the Conservatives.

Mr. Bruce: I know that the right hon. Gentleman has visited a number of the prison establishments on Portland. Has he examined the change in regime at Portland young offender institution, which seems to have caused more problems than it has solved?

Mr. Boateng: Indeed, I have examined the change in regime, and with the help of the youth justice board we are improving conditions in Portland. Any objective examination of that institution will show that to be the case.

This issue is about investment, management, partnership and, above all, avoiding the glib strictures that characterised the Opposition throughout their stewardship of the Prison Service. We are working hard to improve management, we are better focusing resources and we are improving conditions in all our prisons. That is what the Government have achieved, and what the Conservatives failed to achieve.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 159, Noes 248.

Division No. 114] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James

Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and
Mr. Stephen Day.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret

Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Williams, Alan W (E Carmarthen)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House supports the policy of Her Majesty's Government to make prisons work better to reduce reoffending and thus cut crime; welcomes the improved investment in the Service, and the improved performance of the Service in terms of security, literacy and numeracy, offender behaviour programmes, the reduction in drug taking and in under-18 regimes; offers its gratitude to staff and the many volunteers attached to prisons; but notes the significant and unacceptable variation in the effectiveness of different Prison Service establishments as highlighted by the Director General and Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Prisons, and endorses the measures being put in place to secure higher and more consistent standards across establishments.

"Shifting the Balance"

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): I inform hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.15 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I beg to move,

That this House believes that the First Report of Session 1999–2000 from the Liaison Committee, Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive, HC300, provides the right basis for the further development of the Select Committee system as a means of increasing the scrutiny and accountability of Government; and invites the Liaison Committee and the Government to bring forward the necessary Standing Orders for detailed consideration by the House.

The motion has been tabled in the names of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, of me as shadow Leader of the House, of three Select Committee Chairmen and of the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

The debate is unusual for two reasons. First, the Conservative party has been concerned that hon. Members on both sides of the House have been denied the opportunity to vote on the substantive motion on the Liaison Committee report, which seeks to shift the balance of power from the Executive, especially from the party Whips, to democratically elected Members who are not part of the Executive.

Secondly, the motion is not party political. Its wording comes from the second Liaison Committee report of 20 July 2000: it appears in the recommendation in paragraph 76. During business questions last Thursday, the Leader of the House said:

"Of course it is for the Opposition to determine topics for debate on Opposition days, and it is for the country to judge whether the Opposition's priorities reflect public concern."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 1075.]

I suspect that tonight's debate is not necessarily the subject on which many people outside the House will be focused, but it is of great importance to the democratic rights of the people who represent them: Members of the House.

It is surprising that the Leader of the House should have said that because, in May 1997, when things could only get better, the Government said in their manifesto:

"We believe the House of Commons is in need of modernisation and we will ask the House to establish a special Select Committee to review its procedures."

There was no asking. I and other Conservative Members believe that the Committee that was established by the Government undermines the role of the Leader of the House.

A Conservative Government will expect three things. First, we will expect the Leader of the House to reflect the views of hon. Members on both sides of the House in respect of House matters and Standing Orders. Secondly, we will expect a genuinely free vote on such a motion—not just lip service, but an opportunity for hon. Members to exercise a vote on House matters such as the Liaison Committee report.

At last week's business questions, the Leader of the House pointed out to me the vagaries of the free vote. She said less than a week ago:

"I point out that not all her colleagues will enter the Lobby to support the report if they are given a free vote."—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 1071.]

Let me say immediately that I not only accept but respect that. That is what the Leader of the House or shadow Leader of the House is expected to recognise.

Thirdly, under a Conservative Government, a Conservative Leader of the House will respect Back Benchers. It was a Conservative Government who introduced Select Committees, and it is a Conservative Opposition who are giving the House the opportunity to vote today. After the next general election, it will be a Conservative Government who will shift the balance.

I do not intend again to go through all of the Liaison Committee report, which we debated on the Adjournment on 9 November 2000. The report is the considered view of no fewer than 33 hon. Members, from all parties, many of whom are eminent Chairmen of Select Committees. Their views are very clearly stated and have already been debated by the House.

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): The hon. Lady has just told us that 33 very senior Members support the report. Does she accept that, when the Liaison Committee considered the report, only 22 of the 33 Chairmen were present? Is she saying that the report is fully supported—to a man and to a woman—by the 11 Chairmen who were not there and did not vote on it?

Mrs. Browning: I am not aware of a minority report. The usual procedure of Select Committees is that, when there are clear dissenting voices, those whose names are not listed as supporters of the report issue a minority report stating their views. Conservative Members on the Modernisation Committee have done precisely that in this Parliament. Although I realise that the hon. Gentleman is a relatively new Member, I hope that he will recognise that those Members had every opportunity to dissent from the report, had they wished to do so.

On 11 May 2000, the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) drew to the attention of the Leader of the House the fact that he had 203 signatures for his early-day motion 476, which stated:

[That this House warmly welcomes the first report of the Liaison Committee, published on 2nd March, which observes that the membership of select committees is effectively under the control of the Whips and that this has led on occasion to long delays in setting up committees at the start of a parliament and in replacing members thereafter and that members have been kept off committees because of their views; agrees that this is wrong in principle; and believes the implementation of the report's recommendations would strengthen parliamentary scrutiny of the Executive to the positive benefit of both.]

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am glad that my hon. Friend has already reached the subject of the Whips. Has she noticed that the Government Whip on duty has twice scoffed at her remarks—when she said that we are debating not a party political matter but a House of Commons matter, and when she said that the House would be treated with more courtesy by a different Government? Will she bear it in mind that that is why Whips are not suited to making those appointments?

Mrs. Browning: The very reason that we are having this debate—*[Interruption.]* Regardless of which party is in office, the system in this place has to change and become more democratic.

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: Yes, but I want to make it clear that I do not intend to give way many times. As the hon. Lady will know, I usually give way frequently. As today's debate is for Back Benchers, I shall say what I have to say and then give hon. Members an opportunity to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: In the light of the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), does the hon. Lady appreciate the incredulity of some new Labour Members when listening to her remarks? Although Conservative Members had 18 years in government to make those changes, it is only now that they are in opposition that, suddenly, they allegedly see the light.

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Lady was rather self-effacing by saying that she is a new Member, which she is. I remind her that it was a Conservative Government, under the great Margaret Thatcher, who established Select Committees in 1979.

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The hon. Lady should be a little more accurate. She might be right about the structure of departmental Select Committees, but they go back much further than that.

Mrs. Browning: I am sorry that the right hon. Lady is still in the same mood as she was in last Thursday. I hope that, by the end of today's debate, she will recognise the importance of Select Committees, and the fact that the previous Conservative Government demonstrated that we wanted to make them more accountable to ensure that hon. Members can use the Select Committee structure to call the Executive to account.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Browning: As it is the hon. Gentleman, who is an assiduous member of various Select Committees, I shall give way just once more.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: The hon. Lady talks about making Select Committees more accountable, but does she remember what happened to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)? He was Chairman of the Health Committee, but the previous Tory Government removed him because he objected to Government policy. How can she make such a speech when her party is riddled with hypocrisy on these matters?

Mrs. Browning: On the contrary, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has signed

[Mrs. Browning]

today's motion. I have made it very clear that I do not care which party is in office, but I want democratic change to the way in which Whips and the Executive control Committees of the House. *[Interruption.]* That is the whole purpose of this debate.

The Government have been pressed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, especially by the hon. Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot), to allow the House to have a vote on this very important report.

The Government's response to the Liaison Committee report was very critical. They had clearly not spent much time on it. Indeed, on the Cabinet Office press release, the Liaison Committee itself was prompted to say that

"its description of the contents and effect of the Government Reply was remarkably selective . . . this was presentation, but not of a type which the Government should employ in its relations with Parliament."

If today's debate is about anything, it is about the relationship between the Executive and Parliament.

The hon. Member for Thurrock has been quite assiduous in raising the issue. One sensed his frustration, however, at his not being given a vote on the report. Earlier, I heard the Government Whip accuse me of duplicity. Perhaps he will listen to the words of the hon. Member for Thurrock. Last year, in a question to the Leader of the House, he said:

"Has my right hon. Friend heard the cruel and callous rumour, which is full of calumny, that the Government might try to kick into touch any consideration in Parliament of the Liaison Committee's report 'Shifting the Balance'? Can she give the House an assurance that, despite the fact that there are varying views on the report's contents and recommendations, the Government intend to bring the matter to a head and allow hon. Members a free vote ..?"—[*Official Report*, 25 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 897.]

Later, when I deal with the matter of a free vote, we shall see where the duplicity lies.

As I said, I do not intend to deal again with all the contents of the Liaison Committee report, which we debated on 9 November 2000. Despite the overwhelming response of hon. Members on both sides of the House to today's debate and vote, we did not receive an assurance that there will be a free vote. Although the wording of our motion is not party political, Labour Members will still not be allowed a free vote on it. The wording has been presented to the House by members of the Liaison Committee, on which all parties are represented.

Today's debate should send warning signals that although the Prime Minister says that there will be a free vote the Government will twist and turn to deny one. Is he not the same Prime Minister who has promised the people of the United Kingdom a free vote on keeping their own currency?

Last July, in an exchange with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister claimed on the Floor of the House—as hon. Members have reminded the Leader of the House on many occasions—that there would be a free vote on the report. However, the Government have taken every opportunity to ensure that hon. Members are denied the opportunity to exercise that right.

Fortuitously, earlier today, on a ledge in the House, I noticed a bright pink piece of paper showing this week's Labour Whip. I notice that, far from having a free vote tonight, Labour Members are subject to a three-line Whip at 10 o'clock.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): It is an Opposition day.

Mrs. Browning: Interestingly, the Whip on duty says more from a sedentary position to defend the Whips Office and the Executive than I have heard a Whip say in many previous debates.

Conservative Members expect the Prime Minister's word to be his bond. As the Whip has pointed out, this is an Opposition day debate, so the Prime Minister's promise to hon. Members does not count any more. When the Prime Minister said that there would be a free vote, he did not mean on an Opposition day. That was not pointed out last summer. That promise does not count today, even though the motion is not an Opposition motion but one from the Liaison Committee. The Prime Minister's word does not hold good.

That begs the question, when does this man's word ever hold good? I hope that not only hon. Members but people outside will learn the lesson. We have seen how the Government have twisted and turned to deny their Back Benchers a free vote. How much easier will it be to twist and turn to deny the people of this country a free vote when it matters?

Is not this the Government who, under the chairmanship of a Cabinet Minister, forced changes to the Standing Orders of the House under the guise of modernisation? Is not this the Government who espouse the philosophy of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) and Mr. Alastair Campbell—that the days of democratic representation are coming to an end? Is not this the Government who hold their own Back Benchers in contempt, including those who hold office as Select Committee Chairmen? Is it not time for a Conservative Government to restore democracy to the Benches of this House?

7.32 pm

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes the First Report from the Liaison Committee, Session 1999–2000, Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive, HC300, and the Government response thereto, Cm 4737; considers that the Select Committee system has proved its worth as a means of increasing the scrutiny and accountability of Government, endorsing in particular the Liaison Committee's judgment of the value of Select Committees (in particular paragraphs 4, 5 and 24 of the Committee's First Report); commends the initiatives already taken by the Government and by the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to improve the accountability of Ministers to Parliament, including the provision in Westminster Hall of the opportunity for some 200 extra back bench debates each Session, and over 20 debates on Select Committee reports; but does not believe that concentrating patronage in the hands of three senior Members of the House would increase the transparency or effectiveness of the Committee system.".

The Opposition motion invites the House to agree that the Liaison Committee report should form the basis of changes in the way in which the House approaches its

Select Committee work. As the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said, this is the second opportunity the House has had to discuss these issues: the first was a debate on the Adjournment held last November to give the House a preliminary opportunity to examine the report and consider its implications. Unfortunately, by the time that debate took place, the Leader of the Opposition had already committed his party, as a party, to accepting the report. He seemed to do so on the grounds—here I paraphrase—that the Government exercise unprecedentedly large power and so must face unprecedented restrictions on that power: restrictions never placed on any Conservative Government.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Tonight I have a free vote, as printed on the Whip issued by the shadow Chief Whip, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-East Hampshire (Mr. Arbuthnot). I do not believe that that is true of Labour Members. Given that the terms of the motion are precisely those issued by the Liaison Committee, should that not be the case if the Prime Minister's word is to be his bond?

Mrs. Beckett: I think that the hon. Gentleman was in his place at business questions on Thursday, and he will have heard that question put to me repeatedly. He will also have heard my answer: this is Opposition business, not House business, and Opposition business is whipped.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: If it is on the same point, I will not. I can come back to it later if the hon. Gentleman wishes, but I want to make a little progress.

I shall come in a moment to the substance of the report and its proposals, but first I want to dispose of the canard that in some way the Government are unprecedentedly abusing power and so must be unprecedentedly restrained. There are some things that are unprecedented about this Parliament; one is that, sadly, so few Members on the Conservative Benches have any experience whatsoever of Opposition.

When that is coupled with a collective bout of total amnesia about the record of past Conservative Governments, it leads to the repetition of a series of claims levelled without reference to the facts—claims about the size of the Government's programme, the length of recesses and the number of guillotines. Claims are made about all manner of House business, which are all claimed to be unprecedented when, in fact, none of them are.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is.

Mrs. Beckett: All right, "is"—if the hon. Gentleman wants to be picky about the grammar.

One of the interesting aspects of recent genuinely thought-provoking debates on these issues has been the assertion by Opposition Members that we should return to a time when the Government did not set the agenda for the House. When challenged, most admit that such a time has never existed and that what they demand today are fetters on us that were never placed on them. To be fair, in November, the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) did identify a golden age when, he claimed, Parliament was truly sovereign. It was apparently during the Cromwellian period, some 350 or so years ago. I am no historian but I presume that that was before Cromwell just dismissed a Parliament. It was certainly before any of us would even have had the vote, which rather dampens my enthusiasm for the parallel.

Let us be perfectly clear: the proposals contained in the Liaison Committee report are certainly interesting, but they are not modest, they are not simple and they do not return us to anything at all. They are profound, they are complex and they carry the potential for a substantial change to our constitution; and, far from taking us back to a lost idyll, they take us forward into completely uncharted waters.

The proposals seem to me to fall into four broad categories. There are those that are already within the power of the Committees themselves or of the Liaison Committee. Many relate to best practice and, although the Government are sympathetic to them, they do not require us to act. Where they impact on Government, such as in the review of Select Committee recommendations, we have issued guidance to ensure that Government Departments co-operate.

There are uncontroversial suggestions that the Government are happy to agree for better practice on our part—suggestions for more effective dialogue between Government and Committees, for how we carry out pre-legislative scrutiny, for joint working or for secondments. Again, here we have common ground.

There are then two other sets of proposals where there are differing views: first on how members of Select Committees are appointed and, secondly, on expanding in a number of ways the roles the Committees exercise. It is in these two areas that we see some proposals that are without precedent.

The acceptance has always been hitherto that the role of Select Committees is to scrutinise the work of the Government, yet in the report we begin to see proposals to substitute their judgment for that of the Government. In this Parliament, members of the Executive must be Members of Parliament. Their accountability for what they do as Ministers is direct and personal, in their capacity as members of this body. They are not apart, or separate.

However, the report proposes, for example, that by statute we set up confirmation hearings for public appointments. Where such appointments are made by Ministers, accountability to the House is through the Minister, not the individual; the appointee is responsible to the Minister and the Minister to the House. It is not clear, at least to me, what the line of responsibility will be if a Committee has a statutory role.

The report suggests a substantial expansion of control over the agenda of the House; for example, extra days on the Floor for Select Committee debates, a takeover of the Tuesday slot for ten-minute Bills now available to Back-Bench Members—thus relegating Back Benchers to Mondays—debates on Select Committee reports to be on substantive motions; and the ability to change the context for other debates by deciding to tag to them specific Select Committee reports. That includes debates initiated by the Opposition or by Back Benchers in Westminster Hall. All that is in the context of the call for a more specific career

[Mrs. Beckett]

structure and role for members of Select Committees—a role intended to carry with it greater powers and interest than that of an ordinary Back Bencher.

Mr. Bercow: I would like to probe the right hon. Lady on the Liaison Committee's recommendations on the appointment of members of Select Committees.

Whips are like sewers—they perform an important function, but they should not be idolised. In inviting the right hon. Lady to stand back, just for a moment, from her usual role of democratic centralist, which she performs in exemplary fashion, I ask her to say why members of Select Committees should not be appointed by independent persons rather than by the agents of patronage.

Mrs. Beckett: With deep respect to my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), I have never heard of anybody idolising the Whips. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is timely, but perhaps marginally premature, as I was about to come to precisely that point. I refer to the fourth area, on which I have the greatest reservations about the effect, as opposed to the intention, of the report's proposals.

Let me first do what the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton did not, and remind the House of what is proposed. Three Members, said to be characterised by their seniority and impartiality, shall, at the outset of a Parliament, be chosen by the House. Those three will then appoint every member of every Select Committee. They will seek self-nomination, as we do in the Labour party. The hon. Lady was silent on the procedures followed in her party. They will have regard to experience and to interest, but they will choose the names that they put to the House.

From those so chosen, each Committee will elect its Chair and they will join the initial three as the Select Committee Panel. A smaller group from among them will form an executive of that Committee. They may seek more detailed day-to-day control of the whole budget for Committees, not just of travel. They will administer discipline, appoint replacements to fill vacancies, and so on. The Chair of the Committee will, after the Queen's Speech, advise the Government what legislation he or she feels the House should see in draft, thereby exercising an influence on the timing and hence the content of the legislative programme.

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): On the selection of the members of Committees, the panel would suggest names in a more meaningful way than at present, when the Whips decide. It would be for the House to decide to accept any recommendation. I suggest that that acceptance would be much more meaningful because Members could vote against it. They would be voting not against the Government but the panel, however it was constituted.

Most important, is it not wrong for the Government to decide the members of Committees that are set up to criticise and examine the Government? Should the Government decide the appointments of people who are to scrutinise the work of the Government?

Mrs. Beckett: My right hon. Friend knows that I hold him in great respect and esteem.

Mr. Bercow: The right hon. Lady was born there.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is right: I was born in my right hon. Friend's constituency, of which he is a distinguished servant. However, I say to him with the greatest respect that, certainly in our party, the Whips do not decide who is appointed. I cannot speak for the Conservative party, and I notice that nobody does on this point.

I take my right hon. Friend's point that it would be wrong for the Government to appoint those who scrutinise them. The Government do not appoint; they do not appoint, for one thing, members from other parties. They do not even appoint members from their own party.

Our procedures are imperfect, of course; they are open to question, of course. However, it is open to members of our party to self-nominate, not least when there are vacancies, but even at the outset of a Parliament. Those names go to the parliamentary Labour party and have to be agreed within that party. Only then are they put forward by the Whips. It is not a matter of the Whips choosing the names that they will put forward—at least, not in our party.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman is about to tell me how the Conservative party appoints members of Select Committees, I shall be most interested to hear from him.

Mr. Grieve: I seek some clarification from the right hon. Lady. She told us a moment ago that this was a serious constitutional change, yet in her answer to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), it became apparent that it was a minor change of procedure, with no constitutional significance. Will she explain why she said earlier that it was a major constitutional change?

Mrs. Beckett: Indeed. First, I think that the hon. Gentleman might have misunderstood me. The constitutional change to which I referred is twofold, but I accept that the most significant part is that to which I have already referred—substituting the judgment of Select Committees for that of the Government rather than their scrutinising matters. However, I do not regard the changes proposed to the way in which we handle the appointment of membership as a matter of triviality. I notice that, yet again, the hon. Gentleman failed to say how Select Committee members are appointed in the Conservative party. Given that we had this discussion in November, and everybody waxed very eloquent about the virtues of the proposed system, they have had plenty of time to change the system in the Conservative party. I take it from the silence on the Conservative Benches that they have not done so, which casts an interesting light on the sincerity with which the motion has been moved.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I thank my right hon. Friend for reiterating what is in the Liaison Committee report about the way in which the Chairman of Committees and the two Deputy Chairmen

would be appointed. Can she also clarify whether the two Deputy Chairmen would be allowed to be Chairmen of Select Committees?

Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is an incestuous aspect to the relationship? To be elected as Chairman and Deputy Chairmen, candidates would presumably have to solicit the votes of Back-Bench Members of Parliament who would be likely to ask what they would get in return. Far from independence, there would be a network that would favour Members of Parliament who had been present in the previous Parliament rather than those, of any party, who had only just arrived and were not involved in the highly developed networks among existing Back Benchers.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. One aspect of the proposals on which I had not previously focused is the fact that the three who were elected would all chair Select Committees and presumably, at a later point, it would be decided which Select Committee they would chair.

I repeat that I genuinely hold my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne in affection and esteem, and I am sorry that he is retiring from the House. We shall miss him. I know that he will not take it personally when I make two observations on these proposals. First, not even into his hands would I casually give the proposed powers. Secondly, as he is retiring, this may be the last occasion on which, if the original motion were carried today, Members might feel wholly free to challenge the exercise of power by the Chair of the Liaison Committee.

A couple of days after his election, Mr. Speaker, with the kindly smile with which we are all becoming so familiar, assured an hon. Gentleman who raised an issue that he was sure that he intended no offence. "Everybody", he said, "likes the Speaker." With regard to these proposals, everybody will like the Chair of the Liaison Committee and his or her two senior colleagues. They will be beset by friends. They will control membership—choosing, if they wish, a pro or anti-European majority for the Treasury or Foreign Affairs Committees. They will have the capacity to punish non-attendance. They will control travel, they could control funding, they could control staffing, and they could control time in the House as well as in Westminster Hall. As in the United States, seniority would bring with it not only respect but real and lasting power.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) said, such a structure would require information to assist in reaching a judgment on members. There will be channels of information; there will be channels of advice. It is said—my right hon. Friend repeated it—that the system would be more transparent than it is now because the relevant motions would come before the House and could be amended, but those are the procedures in place now. It does not happen often, but amendments can be moved, and have been during the time in which the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton and I have been in the House.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): In 1992, I was appointed by patronage to be a member of the Select Committee on Transport. By a revolt against pressure by the Labour Whips, Labour Members supported the late Robert Adley as Chairman of that Committee—and how right we were. The point is that undue pressure was placed on me and my colleagues to abide by a grubby carve-up between those on the two Front Benches. The power that my right hon. Friend refers to would be power for Parliament, taken away from the choreographers of the Opposition and the Government, who are both to blame and both the same in this matter.

Mrs. Beckett: With respect to my hon. Friend, who knows that I have genuine respect for him, he has just made a point opposite to that which he intended. As he has just said, it is, within the structures that exist at present, open to the House to overturn any recommendation from any quarter. Given that Robert Adley, a most distinguished and skilled Member of Parliament, was a Conservative, it was presumably the Conservative party—the born-again devotees of democracy sitting opposite me tonight—who wanted Mr. Adley's nomination to be opposed.

Mr. Bercow: We were not all here then.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is quite right; some of them were not here.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must press on.

Mr. Cash: The right hon. Lady has given way twice to those on her own side.

Mrs. Beckett: How shocking.

Mr. Cash: Twice.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is being a little silly given the well-known views of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay).

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Would my right hon. Friend care to make it a third time?

Mrs. Beckett: How can I resist?

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Many of us want reform, as my right hon. Friend knows. We want to strengthen the powers of Select Committees and to give them a greater element of independence. However, who will measure the basis of qualifications and suitability? Who will measure work commitment? Are the three people to take it on themselves to decide such critically important issues? What knowledge would they have? The recommendation is nonsense, and the Select Committee should start over. The objective is excellent, but the route is rubbish.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point, and he is well known not as a born-again devotee of either democracy or the rights of Back Benchers, but as one who has pursued both assiduously for a long time.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mrs. Beckett: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cash: I am deeply grateful to the Leader of the House, after all that.

[Mr. Cash]

The right hon. Lady said that it would be possible for a person to be chosen to chair a Committee or be a member of a Committee on the basis of pro or anti-European views. Although I make the point with humour, I intend it seriously when I ask how, during the whole time since the European Communities Act 1972 was enacted, chairmanship of the Select Committee on European Scrutiny—previously the European Legislation Committee—was always in the possession of the Opposition until it came into the possession of the present Government? Why and how did that happen? I mean no disrespect to the present Chairman of the European Scrutiny Committee by saying that, whether the Government, the Whips or someone else decided that that should happen, it undermined scrutiny by the House.

Mrs. Beckett: As the hon. Gentleman said, no one disputes the way in which the European Committees operate, and no suggestion has been made that scrutiny has diminished. I remind the hon. Gentleman that, one change made by my Government is a substantial expansion of the role of the Select Committee on European Scrutiny. There is no longer one Committee, but three. *[Interruption.]* With respect to Opposition Members, that is the point. Under the previous Government, which the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) supported, many areas of European business were excluded from scrutiny by the House. In particular, the by no means insignificant area of legislation initiated by the Commission and the proposals that came from the pillars of, say, justice and home affairs, were all excluded from scrutiny by our Committees. This Government brought those matters under scrutiny.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I must make progress. I have given way a great deal, and, like the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, I do not want to take too much time so that there is time for Back-Bench speeches.

Mr. Bercow: But we are enjoying it.

Mrs. Beckett: I am delighted to hear it.

I tell the House bluntly that, whatever claims may be made for the new system, within a short period—perhaps as little as six weeks—of such a structure being set up, no one who has failed to achieve the appointment that he or she sought will believe in its transparency. All the talk will be of who is friendly with whom, and of who has the ear of the Chair. Before anybody claims that those arguments are heard now—I fully accept that that is so—let me remind the House of one simple, and perhaps to some unpalatable, fact. Whips come and go. Chief Whips come and go. Prime Ministers come and go. All of them come and go with much greater frequency than Chairs of the Liaison Committee.

It is only because my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne is retiring that we shall shortly have a third Chairman of the Liaison Committee—if he were staying on, I doubt that anyone would imagine but that he would hold the position for another 10 years. During the terms of office of the last two people to chair the Committee, we have had eight holders of the office of Government Chief Whip.

Mr. Grieve: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: With respect, I must get on.

That brings me back to how the three original wise persons will be chosen. They will be chosen by a motion before the House. It appears in the report to be assumed that three suitable candidates will emerge, and that the motion or motions will be put and can be amended. I surely cannot be the only person who notices a strong resemblance to the method by which we have in the past chosen a Speaker.

No doubt I shall be told that that is just a basis, and that each major party could choose its own candidate and would choose an acceptable person. However, I mean no discourtesy to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth)—I am sorry that he is, uncharacteristically, not in his place; I have considerable respect for his skills as a parliamentarian—when I say that it is by no means inconceivable that a majority in his party might regard him as a suitable candidate to be one of the three wise persons; or his party might consider some other senior Member, such as the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg).

Mr. Grieve: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: With respect, no. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his points later.

I understand and sympathise with the wish—I am at one on this with my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours)—to see the work of Select Committees being esteemed and influential. I remind the House of the improvements that the Government have already made. As I have already said to the hon. Member for Stone, the remit of the Committees charged with scrutiny of EU business has been expanded, so that all business can be covered—no ifs, no buts, but a permanent change.

While the Liaison Committee was discussing the proposals in the report, and before it had had a chance to reflect on them, the Modernisation Committee was proposing extra sittings in Westminster Hall, and those have since been expanded still further. That is an experiment, but it is not the Government side that doubts the worth of the experiment. We believe that experiments have value and provide something on which we can build.

Mr. Page: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Beckett: I will give way to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) because he has been standing for ever.

Mr. Page: I am grateful to the right hon. Lady. She has spent most of her speech addressing the issues in the Liaison Committee report and making it abundantly clear that she, on the Government's behalf, is opposed to the

report. Bearing in mind that she and the Prime Minister offered a free vote on the substance of the report, and given that the Government are not providing Labour Members with a free vote on that tonight, should we assume that the Government decide their position not on the content or substance of a motion, but according to who moves it?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman merely reiterates a point that has already been made. In my remarks tonight, I suggest to the House that the right course for us to follow is to continue and build on those experiments; they already give Select Committees greater power and more time.

I urge the House—not least some of my right hon. and hon. Friends, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock—not to fall into the poll tax trap, with which Conservative Members will be painfully familiar: to make the leap from perceived flaws in what we do at present to the assumption that absolutely anything would be better, especially if that anything is described in terms as attractive as "independence" and "transparency".

Our Select Committee system enjoys justified respect. Let us strengthen it where we can by giving much greater time to the debate of its reports. To leave those reports languishing and undebated can only be much less effective. Let us see how we can build on the strengths of the system to contribute to pre or post-legislative scrutiny. Let us see how we can adapt its structures to cross-departmental working—sadly, the Liaison Committee report said little about that. However, let us not rush to bind the House to new processes and procedures whose consequences might be much more far-reaching than Conservative Members are likely to claim today.

8.1 pm

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): If the Leader of the House had a case, she seriously overstated it. The suggestion that the Liaison Committee proposal is revolutionary and unprecedented is no more unprecedented than was the initial decision—taken more than 20 years ago—to set up Select Committees.

If the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues had introduced the motion in a partisan spirit and a contentious manner, one might have had more sympathy for the right hon. Lady's knockabout reply. However, the motion is extremely serious; it relates to recommendations made by some of the most experienced parliamentarians among us—many of whom have held high Government office. Most of them have Front-Bench experience and are not unaware of the needs of the Executive.

In the stand that she has taken today in her attempt to control the House, the right hon. Lady reverts to the worst centralism. That runs right against much of the Government's constitutional programme during this Parliament. It could surely be said that the devolution of power from this place to Scotland and Wales was without precedent; but, in most quarters, it is regarded as a great success. The argument that something is unprecedented is not an argument against its weight.

The right hon. Lady seems to exaggerate when she suggests that the Liaison Committee's recommendations on how Select Committee members should be appointed would tend to substitute the judgment of Parliament for that of the Government. That is not a necessary consequence of the recommendations. She overstates the constitutional doctrine when she suggests that the Government propose and that Parliament disposes—or that, inevitably, the Government must always have their way without regard to the views of Parliament.

Normally, the Government command majority support for their point of view. Party loyalties are strong in this place. However, on some occasions, it is helpful to the Executive to hear the voice of the Chamber and to hear the voice of Select Committees that have deliberated carefully on the matters under their scrutiny.

During the 35 years that I have served as a Member of the House, I recall several occasions when the House as a whole has voiced a view that modified that of Executive. For example, the report of the Roskill committee on the treatment of serious fraud cases proposed that certain matters should be decided in court by a judge and assessors instead of being dealt with by a jury trial. The then Government were minded to accept that recommendation and said so publicly. However, during a debate in the Chamber, 10 of the 11 Members who spoke were against the proposal, so the Government dropped it and it never resurfaced. That was not an attempt by Parliament to substitute its judgment for that of the Government; it was an attempt by Parliament to advise the Government as to how to proceed. That is what this place is about.

The difficulty with proffering advice in this place, however, is that so many of our debates are of a generalised nature. They may well conclude with the comments, "We have heard many points of view. Thank you all very much indeed. The Government will do what they intended to do in the first place." The attraction of the Select Committee system is that it contains the possibility of focusing debate sharply on issues of concern to Members of Parliament and to members of the public.

If we took the advice of the Liaison Committee that Select Committees should be allowed to put substantive motions to the House, we could even more effectively target debates and give the House a much clearer opportunity to express its views. Not only is that bound to be of direct assistance to Governments, by helping them to avoid traps that they may not have seen; it would also sustain the reputation of the House, which, as the Government not infrequently remind us, is in some disrepair.

Some of the issues considered in the Liaison Committee report were canvassed earlier in the debate. They are extremely modest proposals. One, which has not figured large in the debate so far, is that a half-hour debate should be held following the publication of a Select Committee report that has urgency and immediacy. Such reports should not be considered long after the event, but as soon as the findings have been published.

The right hon. Lady produces no significant argument of substance against that proposal. She suggests that, by moving ten-minute Bill debates from a Tuesday to a Monday, one is taking a shocking constitutional step. I cannot understand that at all. To downgrade Mondays rather than Tuesdays is a novel constitutional doctrine.

Mrs. Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman may not have been able to be present when we last debated those issues—I do not criticise him for that. On that occasion,

[Mrs. Beckett]

I said rather more on my views on that aspect of the Liaison Committee's proposals. I do not want to be repetitious, but I make two brief points.

First, as the right hon. Gentleman must be perfectly well aware, half an hour on the Floor of the House in prime time is not at all insignificant. Half an hour of such time each week takes up time that could otherwise be occupied by a whole piece of Government legislation. That is not unimportant for Government business managers.

Secondly, prime time on a Tuesday afternoon is available to Back-Bench Members at present. Given that the report has so many references to strengthening the role of Back Benchers, it is not insignificant that it is they who will lose out if those debates are moved.

Mr. Maclennan: First, I did read what the right hon. Lady said and, even more importantly perhaps, I also read what she said in detailed response to the Liaison Committee's views on the subject, and I am bound to say that it was distinctly unpersuasive. She seemed to take the view, which she is repeating to an extent today, that half an hour of Government business is, ipso facto, of greater importance than the deliberations of a Select Committee. If we were talking about the procedure every day of the week in prime time, frankly, she might have a point, but half an hour on Tuesday? Her objection calls in question the peroration of her speech, in which she suggested that the Government are seriously interested in what Select Committees have to say in their reports.

As a former, long-serving member of the Public Accounts Committee, I believe it very important that such debates are held soon after the completion of the original inquiry. The problem with the annual Public Accounts Committee debate is that it is not so attached in time or immediate and, therefore, it does not receive hon. Members' focused attention; nor can it be so sharply pointed as the departmental Committee reports, because it suffers, too, from the defect of which I have already spoken—the one-day debate involving, to an extent, a tour d'horizon.

Acceptance of the proposals will give real substance to the Liaison Committee's recommendations and show the country that detailed matters of policy are being considered in a detailed and responsible fashion. That does not necessarily mean that the proposals are hostile to the Government's interests or necessarily adversarial in their approach; nor does it mean that the Minister will be required to give an instant response. If the issues raised are complex, it may be necessary to allow some time for proper consideration.

On the nomination of members, I am bound to say that a fair amount of humbug has been spoken by the Leader of the House about how they are chosen and the beauties of the present system. It appears to be quite plain that the Whips and the usual channels play a controlling part in those nominations. To some extent, the beans were spilled by the former Conservative Member of Parliament for Brigg and Cleethorpes, Mr. Michael Brown, who now writes in *The Independent*. In an article, he said:

"I certainly recall, as a government whip, doing my utmost, when a new vacancy occurred on a select committee, to nominate only MPs who knew nothing about the subject and who simply wanted to be 'helpful' to the government. I would even successfully persuade them, against their will, to go on a committee in which they had absolutely no interest. My desire, on behalf of my superiors, was simply to block far more effective and knowledgeable MPs. I have no reason to believe that Labour Government whips do not behave in precisely the same fashion."

Mrs. Beckett: With respect, that is a disgraceful assertion. I am happy to say that I have no knowledge of how the Conservative party chooses members of Select Committees—although I have a good idea—but such comments cast some light on Conservative Members' honesty in this debate. As the right hon. Gentleman ought to be aware, there is a proper structure of nomination in the Labour party. That structure has to be approved by the parliamentary Labour party. Indeed, the parliamentary Labour party rules state:

"For all Select Committees, the Chief Whip shall consult the Chair of the PLP, the Front-Bench Spokesperson if appropriate, the Chair of the appropriate Departmental Committee"—

the Back-Bench Committee—

"and prepare from the records kept by the secretary . . . a list of names to go forward to the House, or the Committee of Selection, as appropriate.

The lists of suggested nominees should be placed before the PLP in good time before any decision is made by the Committee of Selection or Motion taken by the House."

Of course, it is in order for that to be referred back or amended. I simply tell the right hon. Gentleman that that procedure may not obtain in Liberal Democrat party or in the Conservative party, but why should we change the rules of the House because those parties' procedures are totally undemocratic?

Mr. Maclennan: I simply make two points in response to that somewhat lengthy riposte; its very length suggests that the right hon. Lady is a little sensitive on the point. First, the words that she quotes refer to the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesmen. That suggests an oppositionist attitude, which does not reflect the reality of the Labour party in government. No doubt, the person who decides who sits on the respective Select Committee is the very Cabinet Minister whose work will be examined after the event. She makes precisely the argument for not following the procedure.

Mrs. Beckett: I simply say that it is perhaps time that the right hon. Gentleman ceased to make suggestions about the way in which the Labour party's structures work. What he says is totally incorrect. There is no question whatever of the Cabinet Minister of the day suggesting who should sit on Committees. Does he think that my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) would be on a Select Committee if that were the case?

Mr. Maclennan: I am more interested in examining the constitutional procedures of the House than the internal affairs of the Labour party, but I was merely referring to what the right hon. Lady had said. She referred to the Labour party's Front-Bench spokesmen. If their selection does not involve Cabinet responsibility, perhaps we might invite her to tell us who is involved; we should be delighted to hear. Is the Whip answerable to the Cabinet Minister involved? Is she suggesting that that interposition in some way distances the appointee from the control of the Executive? The answer is fairly

clear to the House: the Government simply wish to ensure that such matters are managed by the party business managers.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: If the hon. Gentleman is so sure of what he says are facts, why has there been a string of reports from Committees with Labour majorities, attacking Government policy during recent months? Last week, the Treasury Committee produced a critical report. A couple of weeks ago, the Home Affairs Committee report on asylum seekers was also critical of the Government. Labour-dominated Committees have repeatedly criticised the Government, so what is the problem?

Mr. Maclennan: Members of the Committee, when appointed, exercise a certain healthy, robust independence. Perhaps, in some cases, the Government are simply making assurance doubly sure by seeking to appoint their friends, or those whom they want to satisfy.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Maclennan: I had better make a little progress, as this is, to an extent, a Back-Bench debate.

One of the most attractive arguments in the Liaison Committee report is the notion that there should be a separate career for Members, which would be distinct from the route to high Executive office. That is what the report is most likely to result in if it is implemented, and the House ought to grasp that.

I very much regret that the Government have not yet given us the opportunity to vote on such matters in the normal way. It is unsatisfactory that such matters have been debated on an Opposition day, but I do not blame the Conservative party for that; it is the Leader of the House who has failed to take earlier opportunities to table substantive motions to reflect the wishes of the Liaison Committee. Indeed, in evidence to that Committee she said that those opportunities were likely to be provided in last year's spill-over period. That undertaking has not been met, which is why we are debating the matter tonight. Whatever the outcome of tonight's vote—I profoundly hope that the House does not simply split along party lines—these issues test the sincerity of the Government in seeking to modernise Parliament and make it more effective in its scrutiny and control of the Executive.

The House will have to return to these matters time and again. I hope that, before too long, the recommendations are accepted and that what the Government perceive to be revolutionary will be taken as the natural way for a modern legislature to proceed.

8.19 pm

Mr. Robert Sheldon (Ashton-under-Lyne): The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) was right to draw attention to Norman St. John-Stevas and the epoch-making role that he played in bringing about the departmental Select Committees. The idea was put forward by John Mackintosh, who unfortunately died rather young, and David Marquand. Eventually, Norman St. John-Stevas was able to introduce them in the early years after a change of Administration. That is the best time to act, and we might have been better placed if we had made further changes in the early years of this Administration.

My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House of Commons quite rightly said in *The House magazine* on 29 May last year that she would like to go down as a reforming Leader of the House. I hope that eventually she will. However, it saddens me to disagree with her, because she has a love and affection for Ashton-under-Lyne that equals mine, and I have admired her work greatly in the various roles that she has played.

I am sorry that the debate is taking place on an Opposition Supply day. By its very nature, it will be a party political debate and it would have been much better if the Government had tabled the substantive motion that we asked for again and again.

We are trying to show that Back Benchers have a role to play when they enter the House. However, many who come here have no role outside the House in the way they did when I first came here many years ago. They therefore try to find a role for themselves, and that is not easy. However, the Select Committee provides such a role; and it is a rewarding task to be able to go into the detail of policies in a way that it is not possible in the Chamber. One can discover all sorts of things that are not easy to discover here.

In particular, members of Select Committees can return to a question again and again until they receive an answer. I remember the best question I ever heard was asked in the Public Accounts Committee by the current Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Back in the mid-1960s, when I was one of the first members of the Committee, serving on it was not a very attractive job. In fact, its members were pressed men and women—and nearly all men—because the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee ran the show.

I became the Committee's Chairman because I wanted to ensure that the National Audit Office got off to a good start, and I limited my role. However, the NAO's existence enabled us to generate greater interest in the Committee's work and as, the right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross knows, I limited the speeches of members of the Committee to 15 minutes. They were shown a card to let them know when their time was up.

The present Secretary of State for Northern Ireland was pursuing a question under that system and was repeatedly being blocked by an astute civil servant. Finally, my right hon. Friend—the House knows his character so it will appreciate this point—banged the table and said, "I've only got one minute; I am going to get an answer. Yes or no?" "Yes", came the reply—my right hon. Friend had got his answer. The Select Committee system can provide answers. Committee members can become knowledgeable on the detail, and the House does not normally give one the chance to do that. We want to improve the system so that Members can obtain the answers and become much more knowledgeable.

All of the more than 600 reports produced by the Public Accounts Committee were unanimous. They were genuinely unanimous—not fudged. It is the task of a Select Committee to face the facts. Its members start off bound by their own political dogma, or whatever it may be. However, as time goes on, the Committee's Chairman must make sure that its members begin to respect each

[Mr. Robert Sheldon]

other. That means that, when they look each other in the face, they must not resort to the dogma of political life but be determined to discover the facts. That produces something that is really worth while—politicians considering the facts and coming out with them in their reports.

As soon as a Select Committee report is published, there should be an input. That is why the idea of a half-hour debate is one good way—if not the only way—of providing such input. The Chairman would be able to present the report—five minutes is all he needs—and the Minister could take five minutes to give the Government's official reaction. That reaction very often appears in the press, but there is no reason why it cannot be given in the House. A few comments would be made and, although no decisions would be taken, the issues would be given an airing at a time of maximum interest.

The detail is what counts. The eighth report of the Public Accounts Committee considered a decline in the standards of probity in relation to regional health authorities in the west midlands and the Welsh Development Agency. We drew attention to that decline, but the then Prime Minister was not very enthusiastic about the report that we produced. However, he later became enthusiastic, because he realised the value of a Select Committee considering detail outside the Government machine. Civil servants are mired in Whitehall, but ordinary Members of the House, with their knowledge of their constituencies and their understanding of ordinary people, are able to examine the detail. As a result of their greater understanding, they are able to produce a valuable report that is different from the type of report that the Government machine would produce.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Radice) introduced some good changes to the system—for example, confirmation hearings. Although they have no power, they mean that someone who is appointed by the Government has to come before a Select Committee and justify himself. That is a useful weapon in ensuring that minimum standards are maintained. In addition, weekends when the members of a Committee bond together are also enormously important. They mean that its members begin to respect each other. When they have respect for each other, they tend to have respect for the facts and the truth. That is another great advantage of the system.

Mr. Blunt: I, like almost every Member of the House, have great respect for the right hon. Gentleman. He is making a decent and courteous case for his Committee's reports. He put to the Leader of the House the words of Peter Riddell, a cheerleader of the Blairite project, who said in response to the first report of the right hon. Gentleman's that it was "arrogant, mendacious and contemptible". In putting this case so decently, is the right hon. Gentleman not frustrated that he is dealing with an "arrogant, mendacious and contemptible" Government?

Mr. Sheldon: I do not know about that, but it is important that Select Committees acquire such information in a different way from the Government machine.

If the Committees are going to act as outside bodies that gather facts and information and put their opinions in a concerted form, with Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members reaching agreement, then their members must be free from Government interference. It is clearly wrong that the Government should choose Committee members whose purpose it is to examine the Government. My right hon. Friend is right; it is possible to deal with such issues in a less direct manner, but perception is important. There needs to be a greater remoteness from the Government machine.

The issue is not without importance. I hope that the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) will contribute to the debate. He was a distinguished Chairman of the Health Committee. As a result of his outspokenness, his party devised a system to debar hon. Members from spending more than two terms in post. I was Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee for four Parliaments and was pleased that the contagion did not spread from the Conservative Benches.

Labour Whips are not bad people, but they have a role that could be carried out by the House as a whole. Perhaps we need to consider the system in a different way. That is just an idea. However, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) said, the crucial consideration is the objective, which must be that the House should determine the composition of the Committees. There needs to be an alternative career for people who are not going to get into government. That is especially relevant when the Government have a large majority. I understand that hon. Members believe they are most fulfilled when they are invited to join the Government, even at a lowly level. I am sorry about that, because we lose some good people. However, hon. Members who stay as Back Benchers should have a means of influencing the way the country is run.

Select Committees will monitor the work that has been done. Every year the National Audit Office tells the PAC how far it has succeeded in influencing the change in Government procedure. We want Select Committees to participate in similar monitoring. I can see no real objection to the many changes that we are suggesting. They might need to be modified and perhaps different methods of approach should be considered, but they are all possible.

Mrs. Browning: The right hon. Gentleman says that modification might be necessary. Does he recognise that the motion suggests that both the Government and the Liaison Committee introduce proposals for discussion by the House? Even with the reservations that the Leader of the House expressed, that gives them the chance to work in partnership with the Committee to iron out some of the differences.

Mr. Sheldon: I have no objection to the wording of the motion, but the debate is taking place on an Opposition Supply day. Perhaps I have been in the House too long, but such days have a certain connotation for me. Although I shall not be able to vote for the motion, I shall not vote against it either. I hope that early in the next Parliament we will reconsider the issues in a more relaxed manner, so that we can manage to get closer to the Liaison Committee's recommendations.

8.32 pm

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): Twenty years ago, the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and I went to China

together. When the general election comes, we will sail into the sunset together. That will be as much a pleasure as it is to follow him in the debate.

I have various interests to declare. I am a signatory of the motion and a member of the Liaison Committee. In light of the observations made by the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) about how people become members of the Committee, I should explain that I was a perfectly innocent and ordinary Back-Bench member of the Health Committee, minding my Ps and Qs, when I was put in an armlock by the Front Benches on both sides of the House and frogmarched into the Chair of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee. Not all of us get on a Committee by the processes that she described.

I was a member of the Norton commission and, once, a Whip. Without idolising me, my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) said that I was the best pairing Whip he had ever experienced—*[Interruption]*—up to that moment. As the Leader of the House alluded to the number of people on the Conservative Benches who have been in opposition before, I should declare another novel interest: I was one of them. As she led with her chin, I recall when I won a place in that antique ballot for speaking on the Consolidated Fund in the middle of the night. She was Under-Secretary of State, Department of Education and Science at the time, and dispatched her private secretary to ask me to withdraw from scrutinising the Executive at that inconvenient hour.

The Leader of the House's speech tonight leads me to recall the episode of Winston Churchill shooting at Blenheim. The gamekeeper said to him, "Mr. Churchill, that hare four fields away, at which you are taking aim, is really outside your range." Churchill replied, "I just wanted that small animal to feel that it had some part to play in our proceedings." A number of the targets that the right hon. Lady selected tonight were the same distance from the agenda of the motion as the hare was.

I spoke in the debate on 9 November, to which allusion has already been made. I shall quote the final sentence of my speech. The House will realise that my speech was foreshortened because it was the last before the wind-ups, and was therefore somewhat elliptical. I said:

> "I wanted to say something about the influence of the Whips on the composition of Select Committees, and specifically about the disappearance of the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) to be Mayor of London and the fact that he was not replaced by someone of comparable political views—the use of the Whips is extremely dangerous when it excludes people who could make a contribution to the Committee—but as we are pressed for time, I shall now sit down."—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 535.]

I am in the debt of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), because by securing this debate she has enabled me to say what I would have said if I had had slightly more time. The Clerk of the Liaison Committee, on which I serve, implied that he had the sense that I was participating in a serial story in a ladies' magazine, and that it would be necessary to wait for the next instalment.

The next instalment is what I would have said if I had had slightly longer. I want to dwell on the loss of only one member of the Select Committee: the hon. Member for Brent, East, who left to seek the mayoralty of London. I congratulate the Government Whips on having appointed him. He added enormously to the Committee, because the nature of his views on Northern Ireland widened the spectrum of views on the Committee and gave much greater authority to the Committee's views. His appointment could be argued as proof that, as paragraph 9 of the Government's response to the Liaison Committee's first report says, the Government are not seeking to ensure

> "a docile set of Select Committees."

Four Labour Back Benchers have been appointed to the Select Committee since the hon. Gentleman left. I remark neutrally that, individually admirable though they have been, and of course they are ornaments of the Committee, none has replaced the hon. Gentleman and thus restored to the Committee the authority that he conferred on it. That is why I want the Whips' role to be removed.

The late Ward McAllister decreed that since only 400 guests could be accommodated in Mrs. Astor's ballroom, there were only 400 people in New York. Whatever the result of tonight's Division, let no one in the Government Whips Office imagine that, on a free vote, the result would be the same as will be secured tonight by the law of Mrs. Astor's ballroom. On free votes, and the Government's commitment to them, the Leader of the House and the Prime Minister remind me of the man who returned to a car park, where, in his absence, his car had been damaged, to find a note on his windscreen that read, "As I write this, there is a large crowd gathering around me. They imagine that I am writing down my name and address, but you and I know different, don't we?"

I offer the Leader of the House, through her deputy, the advice of Mark Twain:

> "Always do right. This will gratify some people, and astonish the rest."

If we cannot have a free vote tonight, let us have one before the general election while the members of the Liaison Committee that made these proposals still sit in the House.

8.39 pm

Mrs. Lorna Fitzsimons (Rochdale): I congratulate my fellow north-west MP, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), the Chairman of the Liaison Committee, on his work and on restoring to the debate the tone that is needed for the discussion of the Committee's report. I agree with him that if Opposition Members wanted Labour Members to enter into the debate, they should not have tabled it as an Opposition Supply day debate, with all the connotations that a Member of his lineage has identified.

Mrs. Browning: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Fitzsimons: No, I shall make some progress first.

My right hon. Friend has been prayed in aid as someone who has given many years of service to the House. He has noted that if more genuine comments were wanted rather than partisan politics, the issue should not have been handled as it has.

Mrs. Browning: Perhaps the hon. Lady will tell me how I might have tabled a substantive motion. We tabled

[Mrs. Browning]

a motion on the Adjournment of the House. What else is open to the Opposition if we are to have a debate that is not in Opposition time?

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Opposition—I hope that the hon. Lady gets used to being in opposition.

I have listened to many Members who have been in this place much longer than I have. I speak from the experiences that I have had so far in the House. I concur with the idea of an alternative career route. It would provide an alternative way of dedicating ourselves to the service that we are elected to undertake in this place. There are great merits in increasing the resourcing of Select Committee Chairs and Select Committees themselves.

The Government should be given some credit for increasing the access that Select Committees have to parliamentary time through Westminster Hall and other means since 1997. It is now possible to refer to many more Select Committee reports than hitherto. The reports were obscure and there were few references. It is cynical of the Opposition suddenly to jump, as though on a life raft, on the Liaison Committee's report. In 18 years of government, they did not advance the agenda. Some Opposition Members are slightly cynical.

It is incumbent upon us to be honest. The motion suggests that we swap one form of patronage for another. Three wise men would preside over the selection process—those Members would probably be men because men constitute the majority in this place. The majority of Chairs of Select Committees are men. There is no more democracy in that process than in the present system.

The bottom line currently is that the House decides. The usual channels, based on the numbers proportionately of Government Members and Opposition Members decide on the allocation. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, the matter goes first to the parliamentary Labour party for reference, and it is then put to the House. The Conservative party nominates Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats and Unionists, for example, decide who they will nominate. Thereafter, the Labour party decides who it will nominate through our democratic processes. There can be objections. There have been many debates about who should serve on Committees and who should be selected as Chairmen. Some Back-Bench Members will be aware of that. I hope that the Conservative party and the Liberal Democrats have had similarly vigorous debates. Some of my hon. Friends will have memories of the PLP and vigorous debate.

Mr. Brady: Are not Select Committees supposed to decide for themselves who will be their Chairmen? The hon. Lady has given a revealing insight into the extent to which the parliamentary Labour party tries to control the appointments of Chairmen.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that there is agreement on both sides of the House through the usual channels. Why do you think that we have Opposition Chairs? The Select Committee on Social Security is one example. There is agreement and you know that and I know that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Lady keeps using "you". She must try to use correct parliamentary language.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Chair—I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The Opposition are trying to suggest that the Government have sought to manipulate and belittle Select Committees and have given Back-Bench Members fewer rights on them. That belittles the truth since 1997. Any member of a Select Committee will be aware that, with pre-legislative scrutiny and extra sittings in Westminster Hall, there is, rightly, far more ability to publicise a Select Committee's work than there ever has been before. I come back to my point about patronage. The bottom line is that it is disingenuous in the extreme to suggest that nominations by the Chairman and two Deputy Chairmen, as proposed in the Liaison Committee report, would be more democratic or more fair.

Mr. Grieve: Is there not the following distinction? When patronage comes from Back-Bench Members, I accept that there will be some patronage in all cases. However, it would be much more open to the House than it is at present to challenge decisions collectively if it was not satisfied with the way in which the system was being conducted. Effectively, the buck currently stops with the Executive, who control the whole decision-making process.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: That is simply not true. If the House wishes to object, it can do so. In talking about the usual channels abusing the position, we could refer to the debate in which my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) objected to the recent appointment of a Parliamentary Commissioner. Members who objected to the usual channels' nominations decided to debate them. The rules as they stand therefore allow Parliament and Back Benchers to object. The fact that we choose not to do so, for most of the time, is down to Members. Within the parliamentary Labour party, there have been debates about the way in which Members are selected and the balance on Select Committees.

To suggest that three wise people, as proposed in the report, would be more democratic and have less patronage is wrong, misleading and cynical. People outside who are watching our debate and are not familiar with the strange proceedings of the House of Commons may think that the proposal includes more democracy than the current arrangement. I contend otherwise. I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne agreed that the proposal needed to be developed; he said that it contained flaws, but was a suggestion or start. I am worried that the report does not make provision, as there currently is, to hold Members to account for nominations and the process of membership of Select Committees.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Fitzsimons: No, I have been generous and other Members wish to speak. I have given way to several Conservative Members.

Because of the cynical way in which the subject has been introduced in an Opposition day debate—

Mr. Bercow: How else?

Mrs. Fitzsimons: None the less, it was done that way.

I agree with the worthy intent at the heart of the Liaison Committee report to increase the expertise on Select Committees by inducing Members to stay with a Select Committee, rather than take the only way out currently available to Members seen to be doing a good job—the ministerial route. There is great merit in that. However, the matter has been introduced in a partisan way, with scant consideration for the past 18 years and the previous Government's blatant disregard for Select Committees. As has already been suggested, the Opposition changed the rules on how long one could be a Chairman because they disagreed with the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who is Chairman of the Select Committee on Procedure, on which I serve. It is therefore extremely cynical to use the matter in a partisan manner.

Only a few other things need to be put on the record concerning my disagreement with the motion and decision to vote against it.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Fitzsimons: No, I will not.

At the end of the day, it is worrying that the administering of discipline was slipped into the report. I find it worrying that there is suddenly reference to other bodies apart from Parliamentary Commissioners having responsibility for discipline. Perhaps there is more than meets the eye in the intention of some to pursue the report. Perhaps they are seeking to set up a patronage substructure that would undemocratically suggest the membership of Committees and seek to discipline members. No reference is made to how that would happen and by what criteria.

I cannot support the motion because, as I said, it is an Opposition motion, and also because we would be adopting a form of patronage that would be less representative than the system that we have.

8.50 pm

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): When I first learned that the matter was to be debated this evening, I was tremendously encouraged. Hon. Members on both sides of the House will appreciate my commitment and dedication to the House of Commons. I felt that this would be a cross-party House of Commons debate—not a debate with the Opposition seeking to score points off the Government, not an occasion for the Government to score points off the Opposition, but an occasion when hon. Members could debate restoring to the House power, authority and integrity, to enable the House to hold to account the Government of the day, of whatever party, and to monitor the Government and their policies.

The right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who chairs the Liaison Committee with great distinction, will recall that following a Liaison Committee meeting last week, before the business of the House had been announced, I advised him that it was my understanding that the debate on the Select Committee reports, entitled "Independence or Control?" and "Shifting the Balance", would be the second debate on the Opposition Supply day today. I said that I hoped that the right hon. Gentleman might be able to support the motion and be a signatory to it.

I also approached the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who chairs the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee. She, too, was tremendously encouraged that the debate was to take place. I approached the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who chairs the Select Committee on Social Security, so that there would be cross-party support for a debate in the House on a matter that is of considerable importance to the House.

I did not want to score political points. I wanted to put to the House ways of restoring its power and authority so that it would be meaningful, acting as we are on behalf of the people, in holding the Government of the day to account and monitoring their progress and policies.

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne for indicating that he will not vote against the motion. I believe that the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich, likewise, will not be in the Lobby tonight. These right hon. and hon. Members who chair Select Committees have been leading members of the Liaison Committee and appreciate what they put their name to. It would be utterly wrong and dishonest if they voted down a motion to which they had agreed in the report that was sent to the Government and presented to the House.

The hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) is a hard-working, assiduous member of the Select Committee on Procedure, which I have the honour to chair. May I tell her that there are very few ways in which the Opposition can table subjects for debate, other than on Supply days? That is the only opportunity that Her Majesty's Opposition and other Opposition parties have to raise issues. The Leader of the House has frequently said from the Dispatch Box that the Opposition have an opportunity to bring before the House matters that they consider to be important, and that they should use their Supply day debates to do so. That is precisely what we are doing today.

I have the greatest regard for the Leader of the House, but I do not think that in the future she will be proud of the speech that she made in this debate. She added little to the debate. Many of her arguments were disingenuous and, I believe, inaccurate as they referred to matters that were not even discussed in the Liaison Committee reports, and she sought to misrepresent some proposals.

As one or two Members have said already, the motion asks the Government to work with the Liaison Committee to introduce new structures to the House along the lines that we suggest. We do not expect every recommendation to be accepted, but we believe that the House, rather than the Government exercising their influence through a three-line Whip, should have an opportunity to decide whether the report "Shifting the Balance" provides a case on which the Government and the House should negotiate. I believe that it does and hope, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) said, that we can still have a full debate on a substantive motion before the end of this Parliament so that the whole House, on a free vote, can decide whether the decision of the Liaison Committee is acceptable not to the Government, but to the House of Commons.

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

One or two Members have referred to my experience. I say to the hon. Member for Rochdale in particular that I became a member of the Health Committee when it was established in 1990, following the splitting of the Social Services Committee between social security and health. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) took the Chair of the Social Security Committee; I took the Chair of the Health Committee. I did that against the votes of my party, but with the support of the Labour and Ulster Unionist parties and through my own vote.

My party would have preferred a good friend of mine, Sir David Price, who was a member of the Social Services Committee and in his last Parliament, to chair the Health Committee, but the Committee decided that it wanted me. I enjoyed the job and my work on Select Committees has been the most rewarding work that I have done in the House.

Of course, in 1992, when the Select Committees were reappointed, the Whips Office—the usual channels of my party—in collusion with the Labour Whips decided not to reappoint me for the reason, right or wrong, that it did not like me doing the job that the House of Commons wanted me to do. A Select Committee Chairman who undertakes an inquiry must base his report on the written or oral evidence that he is given and must not allow personal prejudice to prevail. That did not suit my party, which was in power. I think that it was wrong and that that decision brought it a great deal of unpopularity.

Mr. Bercow: Discredit.

Mr. Winterton: I thank my hon. Friend. The decision did bring my party some discredit.

I say to the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office that I believe that my party has learned from that, which is why we have used this opportunity to introduce a debate on a substantive motion on restoring to the House of Commons its integrity and its independence. I repeat that the second report, which comments on the Government's reply to our first report, is entitled "Independence or Control?". If I asked each Member in the Chamber, "Do you want Select Committees to be controlled by the Government or be independent and representative of the views of the House?", every single one would say, "We want Select Committees to be independent of the Government of the day." That is what the two reports are about.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) made? If Select Committees are not independent, why have so many of their reports in recent months criticised the Government? If the hon. Gentleman's assertion is correct, why are Select Committees so publicly critical of the Government? Their reports are also debated in Westminster Hall, which the hon. Gentleman chairs, so there is greater opportunity to criticise the Government.

Mr. Winterton: Fortunately, a majority of Select Committees have been prepared to base their reports on the evidence given to them. There is nothing they can do if the evidence is critical of either a Conservative or a Labour Government. They are obliged to publish their reports accordingly, and to reflect that criticism in their conclusions and recommendations.

Mr. Cash: The shenanigans of the Select Committee on Education and Employment the other day suggest that some Select Committees sometimes go deeply off-message.

Mr. Winterton: I have quite a few jobs in this place, and I have not been following the shenanigans—as my hon. Friend puts it—of the Education and Employment Committee, but I shall certainly read its report with interest when it is published.

Membership of Select Committees must be taken out of the hands of the Whips and the usual channels. The Chairman of Committees and two Deputy Chairmen would have the integrity, experience and ability to nominate members to Select Committees and, if necessary, to advise, but each Committee would appoint its own Chairman. The nominations made by the Chairman of Committees and two Deputy Chairmen would have to be confirmed on the Floor of the House. At present, a motion is tabled by the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, which sadly is dominated and influenced by the usual channels. The recommendation is that a motion would be tabled by the Chairman and two Deputy Chairmen to the House, and Members could decide on a free vote who they wanted and could confirm the membership of a Committee.

Mrs. Fitzsimons *rose—*

Mr. Winterton: I shall not give way again, as the hon. Lady has spoken and I want to finish my remarks.

Some hon. Members have talked about the co-ordination of departmental Select Committees. I can tell the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, who chairs the Liaison Committee, that we dealt with that issue in paragraphs 64 to 69 on joined-up Committees. We recommended a structure that I believe would be ideal to handle this situation, and I ask the Government to give it serious consideration.

I am a House of Commons man. I have been in the House for almost 30 years. I have never been on the Government or Opposition Front Bench, although on two or three occasions when we were in opposition between 1974 and 1979 I spoke from the Front Bench, as part of the agriculture team, late at night on milk orders and other such issues. I have never been a Front Bencher, and I suspect that, sadly, I never will be. I am keen that the House should provide an alternative career structure for some Members, most of whom will be long-serving Back Benchers, but some of whom will have had service on the Front Bench, such as the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne, who was a distinguished Treasury Minister. That would enable those Members to have a meaningful career that is recognised by right hon. and hon. Members in this place. That is highlighted in paragraphs 29 to 34 of the report.

I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will admit that it is about time that those who serve this place should be given a role. My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), who is sitting next to me, has given tremendous service in this

place. We should not have to stoop and creep to become Ministers. We should be honourable Members standing up for the integrity of the House of Commons.

9.4 pm

Mr. John Healey (Wentworth): I had not intended to speak, but I was disturbed by the speech of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). I was disturbed in the same way when I listened to the exchanges that opened the debate on 9 November. Moreover, I consider this issue to be fundamental to all Members.

I have another reason for wishing to speak. Like the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), whom I am pleased to follow, I have served on the Employment Sub-Committee of the Education and Employment Committee. I must say that this is one of the most worthwhile things I have done during my short time in the House. We developed a specialist knowledge of our subject, dealt in detail with issues presented to us on the basis of hard evidence, expressed criticism and were able to push the Government further.

There were, I think, two hallmarks of our success. One was able chairmanship, for which I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster); the other was constructive cross-party co-operation, for which I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady). I am glad to see that that provided a launch pad for a further step in the hon. Gentleman's career, and that he is now on the Opposition Front Bench.

This is an important report, featuring a number of dimensions with which I find myself in strong agreement. It sets out effectively the need to reinforce the place of pre-legislation scrutiny, and proposals to make joint—or joined-up—Committee working easier. It also presents an effective argument for the need to improve presentation, publicity and the provision of public information. The problem of slow or superficial Government responses to Select Committee reports needed to be criticised, and is criticised forcefully in the report. The case for better back-up resources seems unarguable to me.

When I checked the sessional returns for 1998–99—the last available—I was staggered to find that the entire work of our Select Committees was supported by 77 members of staff, not counting out-and-out secretarial staff, and that the total cost was only £4.6 million. That is £300,000 less than the Short money that we paid to Opposition parties last year. I leave Members to make up their own minds about which is better value for money.

Let me return to the debate that took place on 9 November. I was dismayed by the way in which it was dominated by the Chairs of Select Committees who were responsible for the report. I note from the sessional returns that in 1998-99 no fewer than 388 Members served on Select Committees. I was disappointed then—I am slightly less disappointed now—that more Members did not choose to become involved in the debate on these matters. As my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said on 9 November, the proposals that we are debating

"would impinge on the role of every individual Member in the House".—[*Official Report*, 9 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 480.]

There are, however, two major points on which I have some disagreement with the Liaison Committee's report. The first relates to the selection of Committee members. It must be said that, if the report's recommendations on the Select Committee panel were accepted, a very small number of people would be given formidable powers in relation to parliamentary appointments and the business of the House. I strongly object to the proposal that three Members, however senior and however wise, should decide Select Committee membership, should largely determine the distribution of Select Committee chairmanships and should largely control replacements when vacancies arise.

The report does not make the case for that step; and it is not self-evident that three people, rather than the Liaison Committee, will produce a process that is more transparent, less susceptible to patronage or more likely to lead to more effective operation of Select Committees. Simply asserting this, as paragraph 20 does, is no substitute for arguing the case. The report fails to do that.

Mr. Bercow: I have a high regard for the hon. Gentleman, but he is repeating the point that was made by the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons). Does he accept this proposition? Although, inevitably, a panel of independent persons will be subject to attempts by the unctuous and sycophantic to get on to Committees, it will be able to resist that pressure. The key difference between the panel of independent persons and the Whips as the determinant of the composition of Committees is that the panel will have no interest whatever in a Member of Parliament's record of being malleable and in whether that person intends to be malleable in future. That is how it is distinctive from and to be preferred to the Whips for that purpose.

Mr. Healey: My concern about the proposal is that it would replace, as my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) said, one form of patronage with another. It is likely to be less transparent and it will not necessarily lead to more effective Select Committee work. I appreciate the concern about the independence of Select Committees, which underlies the recommendations and the hon. Gentleman's intervention. That is important to our Select Committee system, but I am still not convinced that the problem of independence is of a scale that the report's sledgehammer proposal suggests.

Mr. Cash: Having listened to a great deal of the debate—time is getting on—I would like to pose one question. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there is only one way to deal with the power of the Whips and patronage? Having been at the rough end of that in the Maastricht debates and on many other occasions, perhaps I have some authority to speak on the matter. If Standing Orders made it a contempt of the House for a Whip, or any other person, to seek to influence an hon. Member in the conduct of, for example, his role on a Select Committee, it would sort the matter out once and for all. Without doing that, venality, patronage and the desire for appointment or otherwise will always prevail.

Mr. Healey: The hon. Gentleman suggests an even larger sledgehammer to crack the problem, which I am not convinced is on the scale that even the Committee's recommendations warrant. I notice that even the hon. Member for Macclesfield winced a little when he made his point. The Select Committee corridor is some distance from the Whips room. In my experience, the knowledge

[Mr. Healey]

and expertise that Select Committee members build in taking and sifting evidence gives strength to the judgments that are reflected in reports. A number of notable all-party reports have criticised Ministers and Government policy. That belies the idea that Select Committees are falling far short in their duty to subject Government to independent scrutiny.

The proposals on the selection of Committee members ignore one of the fundamental realities of our Parliament and its Select Committee work. The Liaison Committee report acknowledges that in paragraph 9, which says that

"operating within the political framework, select committees are to some extent affected by party loyalty and organisation, which structure the way in which Parliament and its institutions work."

We cannot escape that reality, to which the Committee directs our attention.

I turn to the opportunities for the House to pick up on the work of Select Committees in reinforcing the scrutiny that they conduct on our behalf. The Committee and the report make some very real points on that matter.

Just before the November 2000 debate, I asked the Library to analyse the number of Select Committee reports that were published and the number of reports that were debated in the House, excluding reports from the Public Accounts Committee, the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and the European Scrutiny Committee. In 1997–98, 157 reports were published, but only 16—about 10 per cent—were debated. In the following year, 182 reports were published, but only 26 were debated. I am not including the reports—comprising about 17 per cent. of the total—that were dealt with by being "tagged" as relevant in other motions.

Westminster Hall has certainly been helpful by allowing a detailed and deliberative airing of some of the issues raised in Select Committee reports, but what counts is not the general link with the House but the specific link with this Chamber. Debate is not the best format to ensure enhanced scrutiny of Government. Paragraph 40 of the report recommends weekly half-hour debates after Question Time. However, not only is half an hour too short for a decent debate, but a debate is the wrong method to use if we are more effectively to hold Ministers to account.

I propose that, instead, we have a half-hour Question Time in which we deal with reports and the Government's response to them on major issues. A Question Time could give priority to Select Committee members, but would also allow other hon. Members to exercise their scrutiny function. It would also rightly raise the profile of the work of Select Committees.

In conclusion, I pray in aid part of paragraph 8 of the report. I agree strongly and fundamentally with the assertion that

"After two decades—and especially in the present climate of constitutional change—we think it is time for some further reform and modernisation."

I believe that it will be more important in the next Parliament for the Government to grasp the challenge of reinforcing the scrutiny role of Select Committees. I urge my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House not simply to pick out the parts of the report with which they can agree and react to the specifics, but to accept the general challenge of maintaining the Government's modernisation initiative and consider their own proposals in the areas in which there is a well-founded case for strengthening the work of our Select Committee system.

9.17 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) made a very thoughtful speech, and his suggestion to have a half-hour Question Time rather than debate is well worth considering. Indeed, it fits entirely with the motion that we are debating, which states that the report

"provides the right basis for . . . further development".

We are asking the Government to give serious, positive and constructive consideration to a very thoughtful report. I well understand why the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) feels unable to vote today. Although I greatly regret that and know that he will be with us in spirit in voting for the motion, I realise why he feels that it is essential to sit on the Bench while we vote. Nevertheless, I join him in saying that it is a great pity that we have had to use what is still commonly called an Opposition Supply day to debate the report. Although I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on choosing the subject for today's debate and am delighted that she did, it is a damning indictment of the Government that the Opposition have had to find time for it.

Although I have a personal regard for the Leader of the House, which the Parliamentary Secretary knows to be genuine and true, and I dislike criticising people in their absence, I think that she made a shoddy and shallow speech today that did not do her or her office any credit whatsoever. She did not face up to the issues that the House is addressing. The way in which she dismissed the suggestion for half-hour debates was in marked and shameful contrast to what we have just heard from the hon. Member for Wentworth. On balance, I would still prefer a half-hour debate, but he has made a suggestion that is well worth considering. It is the first time that I have heard it and I would like to reflect on it.

I am absolutely convinced that when colleagues—the 388 who, according to the hon. Member for Wentworth, have served on Select Committees in this Parliament—have worked hard on Select Committees, investigating crucial subjects in depth and reporting thoughtfully to the House, normally on the basis of a unanimous, cross-party report, it is appalling that their reports are pigeonholed.

I accept that that has not happened only under this Government. I have suffered from the malign influence of the Whips Office in the past. My hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton)—who, as always, made a very good and rumbustious speech—at least did get to Chair a Select Committee. I served on the first Select Committee on education in 1979, as what was called the ranking Tory Member. When the chairmanship changed—Christopher Price lost his seat in 1983—I had certain expectations. I knew that I was not going to be climbing the ministerial career ladder and I thought that being Chairman of that Committee would be rather agreeable.

I was told by one of the Whips, in no uncertain terms, that I was not reliable enough. We had approved a number of reports that were mildly critical of Government policy. Sir William van Straubenzee, who had not sat on the Committee, was asked whether he would come in. I did

not challenge that, because I had such a genuine affection for the late Bill van Straubenzee—who served with great distinction in Northern Ireland—that I did not wish to find myself in conflict with him. I withdrew from the Committee.

That illustrates the power and influence of the Whips in a Select Committee. The Leader of the House protested far too much tonight when she brought out her rule book and read chapter and verse what the Labour party does and does not demand. Everybody knows that the Whips have a very real influence and that that is where patronage truly lies.

I disagreed with the first part of the hon. Member for Wentworth's speech, in which he spoke of an alternative patronage. If there is an alternative patronage, I would much rather that it were exercised by independent-minded senior Members on both sides of the House—

Mr. Campbell-Savours: People like you.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Yes, people like me, and people like my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield and the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). The three of us would certainly decide without fear or favour who were the most suitable people. We would take into account the credentials and CVs of those who wanted to serve on Select Committees so that we did not have the absurd situation in which somebody with a detailed knowledge of, say, transport was kept off the Transport Select Committee, as happened in the past.

I have a real regard for the hon. Member for Wentworth, but I say to him that it is far better to have that patronage exercised in House of Commons matters by House of Commons men and women—who are answerable to this House for their every action and their every recommendation—than by the Whips Office. Just as I will rethink my support for debates in favour of questions, I ask him to rethink his support for Whips' patronage in favour of a different sort of patronage.

Much has been made of the three wise men or women making decisions. However, it does not have to be three, as my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton agrees. If, after consultation, it were decided that this would be far better done by a wholly independent selection committee of six or eight, my hon. Friend would accept it, I would accept it and I strongly suspect that the Chairman of the Liaison Committee would accept it.

Mr. Sheldon *indicated assent.*

Sir Patrick Cormack: The right hon. Gentleman is indicating as much as I speak.

We are concerned not about how many there will be, or even who they will be, but about how the appointments are to be made. If Select Committees are to maintain their tradition of independence and to provide the alternative career ladder that is so important, we need to reform the manner in which appointments are made.

There was a time when to come to this House was the summit of most men and women's ambitions. To represent a constituency in this kingdom was an honour than which there was no greater. Far too many people now come at a very young age. One remembers the quote about every private having a field marshal's baton in his knapsack. Members behave as if the briefcase in the boot of their Ford Cortina were a ministerial red box—or a ticket to exchange it for one. They come here with ministerial ambitions and are often rather muted in their criticism of their party, whether in government or in opposition, because they have aspirations.

I would like to see more people coming to this House who merely want to serve here, but of course they want to exercise their talents, develop their gifts and progress. There is no better way of doing that than via the Select Committee system, particularly as the Chairman of a Select Committee.

I believe that this report, "Shifting the Balance", creates the opportunity for that to happen. The final paragraph of the Liaison Committee's second report, "Independence or Control?" says:

> "There has been much discussion about shorter sitting hours, and more family-friendly scheduling of business in the House. This may be all very well; but any real modernisation of Parliament must provide better accountability and tougher scrutiny of the Government of the day. This is our aim. We believe it is the test by which the public will judge the effectiveness and value of Parliament. This is not something that will go away."

What wise words. The Leader of the House talked rather disparagingly of this debate in business questions last week. She should have read those wise words.

There is no more important subject for the health of the body politic than the effectiveness of the parliamentary system, and particularly of the place of this House within it. It is extremely important that the Government attach importance to those words.

The Prime Minister may shortly decide that he will not complete the five years that he said he would complete. He may decide to cut and run and hold an election. If he does, he will hope to come back with another majority. We shall to our best to ensure that he does not. However, if he is ever in a position of authority again, he should recognise that the strength of a Government is measured not by the size of their majority but by the quality of their legislation. The quality of their legislation and their actions is largely determined by the effectiveness of scrutiny in this place. It is crucial, therefore, that we give to Select Committees—which are, of all bodies, the best equipped to scrutinise—a new and revived authority.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has, for all the inconvenience it may cause him, pledged himself to accept this report. Even at this late stage, I urge the Minister, when he winds up the debate, to say that he will tell the Leader of the House that we have had a debate in which only one Member has supported her line uncritically. The House of Commons demands to be heard and it wants, before the election, free votes on substantive motions in Government time on these issues.

9.29 pm

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). I had not intended to speak, but it struck me that this is one of the most crucial debates in which someone who loves the House of Commons can take part.

I inhabited the sewers of Westminster for 10 years as Opposition Chief Whip. I had to do many of the shabby things that have been referred to, although much of what I did was entirely honourable, such as the defence of Back Benchers against the undue influence of certain members

[Mr. Derek Foster]

of the party leadership. If I had not done that, those Back Benchers would never have been appointed to Select Committees. That story has never been told, and may never be told or written, but one of my functions, I took it, was to ensure that every Member from my party should have the opportunity to serve on a Select Committee, no matter what the wishes of certain individuals.

One thing that I learned—very painfully—during 18 years in opposition was that most of the cards are stacked on the side of the Executive, no matter which party is in power. Perhaps under the previous Government, that was not quite so: their majority was 22 and fell to just one. At that time, the House of Commons began to take some powers.

Our dilemma is that the country often wants strong government, which means a strong Executive who can have their way most of the time. Sometimes, however, the country falls out of love with a strong Government, deciding, for example, that although it wanted Lady Thatcher to do some things, it did not want the poll tax and she had had far too much power. Indeed, many say the latter of the present Prime Minister. They ask why the House of Commons does not use its powers to bring the Government more to account. It is a good question, to which we have no very good answer at present.

The Liaison Committee report, of which I am proud to be a signatory, was an attempt to shift the balance, only marginally, from the Executive and towards all the Members of the House of Commons. It is a little strange for people to argue superficially—perhaps in the hope of congratulations from the Whip on the Front Bench—that the Committee was arguing not for Back Benchers, but from some other motive. Our motive was to enhance the position of Parliament vis-a-vis the Executive, and it is important that we should achieve that.

Our solutions may not be the best possible. I strongly favoured taking the power of appointments from the Whips. I reached that conclusion after exercising that very influence for 10 years. I did not reach that conclusion before I stopped being Chief Whip, I admit, but towards the end of my tenure of that job, I concluded that one of the best ways to enhance the powers of Select Committees would be to remove appointments from the power of the Whips. That is because we want those appointments to be independent. It could well be that the Whips Office exercises its control over the appointments extremely responsibly, but there must be a perception that the people who scrutinise the Government are appointed by people who are independent of the Government. That perception is important both for the country and for Members of this place.

We may not have come up with the best solution, but the motivation is right. We want to achieve that end, and with the good will of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office we could play a historic part in enhancing the power of the legislature against the Executive. With a majority of 180, the Executive have nothing to fear. That is why it is so important to take such steps during this Parliament. The Executive have nothing to fear from the enhancement of the power of Parliament.

I shall join my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) when we vote this evening, but I want my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench to realise the motivation of their colleagues in advancing and signing the report; it is not against the Government, but to ensure that the Executive, whoever is in power, are brought much more to account by Members of the House.

9.36 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I shall speak only briefly, as I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will make important contributions. I have little to add to the remarks that I made on the Whip system in a debate last July.

The quality of this debate has increased dramatically towards its end. I was disappointed that the Leader of the House engaged in no more than some rather unnecessary party politics. She made some good points—from her point of view—but the debate is of immense importance, as is the report of the Liaison Committee.

I was very taken with the speech of the former Labour Chief Whip, the right hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster). He understands that the Government will have problems in accepting the recommendations of the report, but that, if there is good will on all sides, many constructive results could emerge from it.

However much we examine the issue, it is ultimately about accountability, scrutiny and questions. The House depends entirely on the ability of its Members to call the Government to account. We can do that only by asking questions. There is a difference between debate and questioning. A debate can take the form of a question, but questions are the bottom line. If we are to ask questions of people with enormous power and influence, who know things that we do not know, and if we have to scramble about to get the answers to those questions, we need people who know what they are talking about. We need people who are prepared to dedicate their time and their lives—some call it a career, but I prefer not to do so—to ensuring that the Government are properly held to account.

The appointment of Select Committees by Government Whips, by agreement between the usual channels or by the Whips on both sides of the House is not the best way to proceed. That point is the jewel in the crown of the report. It is vital that such an important report was produced. It is an enormous pity that the House as a whole could not have had a free vote on the subject.

I have been a member of a particular Select Committee since 1985. As someone who has been excluded from its chairmanship—perhaps by virtue of my long tenure but perhaps also because of the long-standing knowledge of my views on its subject—I believe none the less that it is vital that the essence and reasoning behind the report of the Liaison Committee should be accepted by the whole House.

Lastly, as I have previously proposed, Standing Orders should exist to deal with any undue influence exerted on Members of Parliament, by Whips or anyone else inside or outside the House, so that the people who exercise that undue and unfair influence could be brought to book. I emphasise the fact that that no real distinction should be made between external and internal influences on matters that could affect the effectiveness of the House in bringing people to account. This is a debate about scrutiny, and it should not be determined by the Whips. The most

astonishing aspect of this debate is that it represents a three-line attack on the House's scrutiny, and I find that a very extraordinary proposition.

9.40 pm

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): This has been a worthwhile and, indeed, fascinating debate. I find it particularly so because, looking at the pile papers on which I have noted the comments of the contributors, which I normally separate into two halves—those with whom I agree and those with whom I disagree—it is apparent at the end of this debate that, with the exception of the hon. Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) and the Leader of the House, I found myself agreeing with the vast majority of speakers.

The hon. Member for Rochdale provided us with the most fascinating insight into the mindset of what appeared to be a cloned member of the parliamentary Labour party. She described a system under which agreements and decisions are taken entirely behind closed doors and how, once those decisions have been taken, the corporatist instinct involves a carve-up between the Whips. She offered us the Panglossian suggestion that this was the best approach to take in the best of all possible worlds. It was a most depressing contribution, but it simply echoed entirely that of Leader of the House, who has treated us—it was sometimes difficult to keep a straight face—to a series of pronouncements on the fact that we were all taking leave of our senses by suggesting that the present system should be changed and, moreover, that what we are proposing represents a huge constitutional change. That seems rather odd, given that it comes from a party that has introduced more huge constitutional change in three years than perhaps any other, especially as, in fact, all that has been suggested are changes in the procedures of the House designed to try to enhance the way in which we work.

As for the contributions that I find it easy to support, even if I disagree with them in part, I hope that I may be excused if I start with that of the hon. Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), because I found his speech extremely interesting. He made a thoughtful speech and his proposals, for example, that we should have a further half-hour Question Time on Select Committee reports and the Government responses to them, made a great deal of sense. However, I disagree that the proposals for the appointment of Select Committees are like using a sledgehammer to crack a nut. I appreciate, however, that they caused him anxiety.

In response to the hon. Gentleman, first, the Liaison Committee report says that the proposals represent the basis for the future, not the detail of the future. That is what we are being asked to consider this evening. Secondly, I ask him to consider the point made by numerous of my hon. Friends—such as my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke) and my hon. Friends the Members for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and for Stone (Mr. Cash)—that the mischief of the present system is that whenever we disagree with the way in which the Executive ultimately control such appointments, it becomes an issue of confidence in the Executive. We all know the reality; the House operates under a system of party politics. We are constantly asked to temper our views so as not to rock the boat. Indeed, the system of government could not operate unless that were the case; it is an important discipline for us. However, when the House considers issues that, frankly, do not relate to any fundamental matter at all, is not it desirable and sensible that we should alter our procedures to remove the Executive's hold and to allow more informed discussion?

Let me give the hon. Gentleman an example. Let us suppose that somebody disagrees fundamentally with the way in which a Select Committee membership has been set up. To question that if one is a Government or Opposition Back Bencher means questioning those in authority in one's own party and the discretion that they have exercised. There would be no need for that to happen if the system that has been proposed by the Liaison Committee's report were to be followed. I suggest that it would then be very much easier for anyone in the House to ask questions precisely because those questions would not touch upon a confidence in either the Government or the Opposition. That is where I see merit in the proposals that have been made.

It has been argued that the proposals will create patronage. Of course, everyone can exercise patronage; anybody who can exercise power can grant patronage. However, I would be much happier for that power to be exercised by someone whom can I question, I can team up with Opposition Members or Government Back Benchers to table a motion and criticise and, ultimately, I could remove without bringing down the whole pack of cards of government. Surely, that is a better way to proceed, and that is what the right hon. Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and the members of his Liaison Committee were proposing.

I draw the House's attention to some of the Government's responses to the report. They show an extraordinarily blinkered frame of mind. The principle at the nub of our debate is the question of who does the appointing and paragraph 11 of their response to the Liaison Committee report says:

> "The Government believe it is right that the opposition should supply the chair of some Committees, and cannot accept a system which might place this in jeopardy."

I shed tears over those remarks. Do the Government seriously think that we will be concerned if the members of an independent panel, who command the trust of the House because of their personal standing, make appointments even when that might mean that, at times, the appointments of the chairmanship do not follow the hallowed processes that the Leader of the House has put forward?

I need think only of the Committee on which I sit, the Environmental Audit Committee. It has a Chairman who is an Opposition Member, but I recollect that, at the time of his appointment, some members of the Committee felt great anxiety about his appointment. However, because of his standing and the way in which he has conducted the Committee, the problem disappeared. We all know the reality: if people get on to Select Committees and do a good job and if the Chairmen are impartial, the truth is that, as numerous Members have said, we start to operate on a cross-party basis. Because the remit of Select Committees is scrutiny, they frequently tend to ask the Executive awkward questions about how they are carrying out what they say they are carrying out. The Committees do not necessarily question wider areas of policy.

As the House approaches the decision that it must take at 10 o'clock, I am mindful of the fact that this is a Supply day and this is an Opposition motion. I recognise that

[Mr. Dominic Grieve]

some Government Back Benchers might feel embarrassed about going into the Opposition Lobby, but does that not precisely illustrate the point that I have been making in the past few minutes? It is high time that we took this issue away from the realm of party politics. That is feasible.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): If the hon. Gentleman wants to take the issue out of the realm of party politics, why has he chosen to debate the matter under an Opposition day motion? Does he not think that that has done great damage to the cause that is being espoused?

Mr. Grieve: The hon. Gentleman was not here for the debate, so I have to tell him that we have had no other opportunity to hold this debate on a motion with a Division. Therefore, having asked repeatedly for such a debate, we thought it fit to bring the matter before the House. I am truly sorry that the motion is an imperfect mechanism, but it is the only one at our disposal.

I very much hope that the debate persuades hon. Members on both sides of the House to implement the proposals. I am certain of one thing—I know that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has a deep and heart-felt commitment to restoring the ability of the legislature to scrutinise the activities of the Executive. We set that out clearly in our paper on reforming Parliament, and when we get back into office, we will do just that.

9.50 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): The debate on the Liaison Committee's first report has been lively. In many respects, it parallels the previous debate in November because the arguments rehearsed then have been re-run this evening. Apart from some different shades and emphasis, it is fair to say that little new has been added. However, there is one exception: my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Mrs. Fitzsimons) and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House made clear the way in which the Labour party proposes names for Select Committees. It is a much wider process than many believe.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton *rose—*

Mr. Tipping: Although I usually give way to the hon. Gentleman, I cannot tonight because time is tight.

Given the challenges of the Opposition parties, it is interesting that darkness and cloudiness surround the way in which they select names for Select Committee membership. It may well be that the role of the Whips is more prevalent and heightened in those parties.

Given the tone of the debate, I wonder why the Opposition have decided to table the motion. The debate has been about process rather than product. It has focused on the way in which we run our business instead of concentrating on the outcomes of our activities. The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) said that the issue would not command public interest because it is a House matter. However, I suspect that the Opposition are reluctant to discuss outcomes because we have a stable and growing economy; spending per pupil has increased; infant classes are smaller and standards are rising; there is extra capital spending in the national health service and reduced waiting lists; and, since the general election, there has been a fall in crime.

Sensing that there is the possibility of embarrassment, the official Opposition have tabled a motion on a House matter. It will come as no surprise, therefore, that, in the face of mischief-making, the Government are taking a strong line against it. My right hon. Friends the Members for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon) and for Bishop Auckland (Mr. Foster) clearly recognised that position.

Let me be unusually combative and tackle two fundamental issues directly. The Government do not agree with the methods that the Committee suggests to increase the independence and influence of Select Committees. We reject the notion that giving power to a small group—however senior—over whom Back Benchers have no hold will increase the status or effectiveness of Committees. I think that the Committee's premise has been distorted by people outside the House who may not understand that there is two-way traffic between Back Benchers and the Whips. To be blunt, any Whips Office that forgets the nature of this relationship is in for a shock.

A sub-theme of the debate is an understanding of how the Whips Office works. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Mr. Maclennan) referred to the former hon. Member for Brigg and Cleethorpes, who now writes for *The Independent* as, I should explain, a humorist. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said that Whips were not idols. I agree entirely.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland confessed to being a super-sewer. He would say no more on that, but perhaps the book will be written one day. As someone who has experienced his black arts, I look forward to reading it. We consider that although there may be disadvantages to the current method of selection, it has produced Committees that are effective and independent of Government. The Liaison Committee reports are in themselves proof of that.

Although the Liaison Committee believes that greater debate on substantive motions would increase the Committee's profile and effectiveness, we believe that it would bring party politics into the heart of the Committee system. Some may consider that today's debate shows that we are right to be concerned.

More positively, although we disagree about the methods for producing an effective Select Committee system, the Government want Committees that are independent and effective. The Liaison Committee is in danger of selling the existing Committees short. The right hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross talked about sharpness of focus and my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne talked about best practice in Select Committees. The Committees can do much of what he advocated within their present remit.

We agree wholeheartedly with the Liaison Committee's basic premise that the 1979 Committee system has been a success, that it is, and should continue to be, an entrenched part of our constitution and that the Committees perform a valuable role in holding the Executive to account. We can never agree on the present proposal on appointments or on motions on the Floor of the House, but let us set those questions aside. Let us consider matters on which we do agree.

The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) and my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) recognised that the Liaison Committee's report contained areas of agreement. Committees should have greater resources. That is primarily a matter for the Commission, and the Government will certainly not stand in its way. I understand that there are continuing discussions on that matter.

There should be increased scrutiny. The European scrutiny system has been reformed and extended. We have accepted the Procedure Committee's recommendations on the scrutiny of treaties. Departments have been instructed to co-operate in any review of recommendations that a Committee may make. Pre-legislative scrutiny will continue. I hope that we will be able to do more, and I join my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth in desiring that.

Committees should have more influence. The Government have accepted the Procedure Committee's recommendations that if a Committee recommends a debate on a treaty, that will normally be granted. Select Committees will win respect by the force of their arguments—that point was made several times tonight. Westminster Hall ensures that Ministers will not be able to avoid those arguments.

I have already dealt with the substantive motion. I do not believe that transferring a debate from Westminster Hall to the Chamber would increase attendance. The Liaison Committee itself notes:

> "Debates are an extremely effective way of focusing the minds of Ministers and officials on a report, and the need to justify the Government reply."

Thanks to Westminster Hall, more Select Committee reports are being debated than ever before, and that number will increase. Overall in the previous Session, 28 Select Committee reports were debated. So far in this Session, a further five have been debated. That represents debating time beyond reformers' wildest dreams. The hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) dreams on and asks for more debating time. I hope that in time we will be able to help him.

Committees should have greater powers to work together. We have undertaken that any request from the Liaison Committee for an ad hoc Committee will be seriously considered. Whenever a Committee has requested powers, we have tabled a motion to grant that request. I have been happy to speak to two of those motions. Sadly, as colleagues will have noted, there has been difficulty in getting certain business through the House. I make no complaint about that, but I regret that the difficulty that we have encountered in dealing with minor matters has meant that we have not yet been able to introduce the more radical changes to Standing Orders that I foreshadowed in my earlier speech. Only last week, the Chairman of the Liaison Committee requested a change in Standing Orders to enable a sub-Committee to be established. If he looks at today's Order Paper, he will see that we hope to oblige him.

The last time the Liaison Committee's report was debated, I said that it was important to recognise that the balance had already shifted in favour of the Committees. Indeed, it is likely to shift further in future—

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire) *rose—in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 170, Noes 280.

Division No. 115] **[10.2 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark

O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wills, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Sir George Young and
Mr. Nicholas Winterton.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive

Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 276, Noes 164.

Division No. 116] **[10.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
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McNulty, Tony
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Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
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Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis

Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Snape, Peter
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
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Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
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Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
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Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Anne McGuire and Mr. Clive Betts.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Maclennan, Rt Hon Robert
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nicholas Winterton and Sir George Young.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes the First Report from the Liaison Committee, Session 1999–2000, Shifting the Balance: Select Committees and the Executive, HC300, and the Government response thereto, Cm 4737; considers that the Select Committee system has proved its worth as a means of increasing the scrutiny and accountability of Government, endorsing in particular the Liaison Committee's judgement of the value of Select Committees (in particular paragraphs 4, 5 and 24 of the Committee's First Report); commends the initiatives already taken by the Government and by the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons to improve the accountability of Ministers to Parliament, including the provision in Westminster Hall of the opportunity for some 200 extra back bench debates each Session, and over 20 debates on Select Committee reports; but does not believe that concentrating patronage in the hands of three senior Members of the House would increase the transparency or effectiveness of the Committee system.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Code of Practice for Examining Officers) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Question agreed to.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Rail Freight

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I compliment the Government, the Under-Secretary of State, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill), and his ministerial colleagues on their positive and constructive approach to rail freight. They have shown that they believe that rail has a significant and growing role to play in freight transport in Britain, which is most welcome. For many decades, Governments gave little serious attention to rail freight. It has been the poorest of poor relations in the transport fraternity, while the development of road transport has dominated departmental thinking and grown at an extraordinary rate.

Rail passengers have been the Government's and industry's prime concern, perhaps understandably because they have votes and freight containers do not. As a daily rail commuter, I want a first-rate passenger service, too. Sadly, we have seen in recent weeks that the transportation of people has had its own problems. Those, too, seem set to continue. Our Government have, however, recognised that increasing the amount of freight carried by rail is important for the future and that roads alone cannot take the whole strain of ever-increasing freight volumes. Roads will continue to have the major share of freight traffic and it is unrealistic to imagine that rail will replace road as the primary freight mode. However, the proportion taken by rail should be substantially increased.

I wish to raise three concerns. First, the Government's targets for rail freight are too modest. Secondly, current investment in rail freight is too low, even to achieve the Government's modest targets. Thirdly, Railtrack is not taking rail freight seriously in any case, believing, I suspect, as many have before, that rail freight is inherently uneconomic. Rail freight is commercially profitable elsewhere in the world, even over quite short distances, and can be so in Britain with the right investment.

In their 10-year plan for railways, the Government have established a target of increasing rail freight by 80 per cent. over that decade. That is 8 per cent. per year in simple terms and equivalent to 6 per cent. compound annual growth. That must be set against predicted annual growth in total freight traffic, which would mean that the proportion of freight carried by rail would rise from 7 per cent. to around 10 per cent. A rise of 3 per cent., even if achieved over that 10 years, would still be too small and shows that 80 per cent. of not very much is still not a lot. The Government should therefore raise their sights and set a considerably higher target for rail freight over the next 10 years.

There are a number of reasons for that. The road system will not be able to cope with the likely volumes of freight that we should anticipate for the future. Indeed, the roads have difficulty coping now. If we wish to develop an efficient freight transport network, we must make greater use of rail. The freight transport industry should be developed as a coherent whole, with the full support and co-operation of hauliers and railway operators. Co-operation, not competition, must be the way forward, with rail providing a service to hauliers tailored to hauliers' needs.

[Mr. Kelvin Hopkins]

Another major reason for increasing rail freight more substantially is that large parts of the economy, and those that are faring less well, will need better freight transport links with the continent of Europe, in particular, if they are to prosper. The north, the midlands, Scotland and Wales must have reliable commercially economic freight links with Europe if they are not to suffer because of their geographical peripherality. Choked roads and unreliable freight links to the ports and channel tunnel will be an increasing disincentive to investors in the English regions and in Scotland and Wales. However, new freight links providing regular and dependable services, especially through the channel tunnel to the continent, could throw an economic lifeline to the industrial heartlands of Britain.

Hauliers tell me that what they really want is a dedicated lorries-on-trains service through the channel tunnel. Indeed, I have been informed this weekend that one haulier could use one whole train each way between Germany and Britain every day.

A less obvious reason for increasing the proportion of freight carried by rail is the enormous cost of road repairs and the congestion that they cause. The Under-Secretary of State will, I am sure, be familiar with the fourth power law linking axle weight to road wear. That states that road wear is proportional to the fourth power of axle weight. Thus, doubling axle weight increases road damage by 16 times and tripling axle weight increases it by 81 times. A lorry axle weight may be several times that of a motor car, causing many times the amount of road wear. Lorries have to travel on roads, but shifting thousands of them on to rail every day will be beneficial in public expenditure terms as well as environmentally.

Road repairs cost the Exchequer many millions every year, as well as causing bottlenecks, congestion and delays on the trunk road network, bringing frustration to hauliers and car drivers alike. EWS, the rail freight company, recently drew attention to a Confederation of British Industry estimate that congestion costs the economy £15 billion a year. Taking a larger proportion of road freight off the roads and putting it on to rail would save considerable sums in roads expenditure and save time, fuel and costs for road hauliers.

My second concern is that investment in rail freight is inadequate to meet even the Government's own targets. It seems clear now that the existing strategic rail network is going to have its work cut out simply coping with future growth of passenger traffic. I understand that there are significant and worrying problems on the west coast main line with capacity, signalling and investment needs. Passenger traffic will take pride of place and crowd out freight—especially the serious, long-distance, heavy freight, and most notably international freight using the channel tunnel route.

Writing recently in "Rail Freight Group News", my noble Friend Lord Berkeley said that there is already competition between freight and passenger traffic for existing rail capacity. It is time, he says,

"to face up to the challenge of demand for track space exceeding supply."

In any case, high-speed passenger services and much lower-speed freight traffic do not mix. Freight trains have to wait for slots or travel at night. That is not the type of service that will be attractive to hauliers. In Germany, an experiment was tried recently sending freight trains on high-speed passenger lines at night, but it was later abandoned as a failure.

There is also the gauge problem. It is currently not possible to carry full-size lorries on the backs of trains on the British rail network. A lorries-on-trains service would need new, purpose-built lines. That is already happening on the continent of Europe, notably in southern Germany, and a dedicated freight line is being built from Holland to Germany. The specific investment difficulties should be set in the context of our historically low levels of railway investment. The French and Dutch have specifically invested between two and three times as much in railways as we do in Britain each year, and—goodness me—it shows.

I am informed that the amount of track repairs and modernisation currently being undertaken by Railtrack, even in the current crisis, is barely more than the normal amount of track work that was undertaken in the days of British Rail. If we are serious about rail freight, we have to think much bigger and be much bolder. According to the Rail Freight Group, Railtrack cannot even accommodate today's rail freight on the west coast main line, north of Crewe, once the Virgin tilting train timetable comes into force. It might even sell off all the additional 42 paths south of Rugby to passenger train operators.

My third concern, therefore, is that I am unconvinced about Railtrack's commitment to rail freight. There are optimistic noises in public, but an article by Railtrack in this month's "Railfreight Handbook" is significant. It states:

"Achieving the government's target of 80 per cent. growth over the next 10 years would"—

note the conditional—

"be our greatest success . . . It can be done!"

That betrays a lack of confidence that even the Government's modest 10-year target can be achieved. With more time, I could provide more statistical and anecdotal information, and I shall do so later, in writing, to my hon. Friend the Minister.

It is clear that what Britain needs is new, dedicated freight line capacity providing full-scale lorries-on-trains services between strategic centres in Britain and the channel tunnel. Such a scheme has been proposed, and my hon. Friend will not be surprised when I refer him to the proposals made by Central Railway. That scheme will provide a spinal link from the north of England, skirting London and then on to the channel tunnel. Perhaps an aorta might be a more appropriate metaphor.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hopkins: I really have very little time, and I have had only one notice of an intervention. I apologise to my hon. Friend.

The line would make use of old Great Central track bed for much of its length and would link Liverpool with Lille in northern France. It would provide a full-scale lorries-on-trains service, and Central Railway proposes an initial four trains an hour in each direction. It is proposed to build major loading facilities on the route in south Yorkshire, the midlands and close to London, and it will

make use of the currently closed Woodhead tunnel through the Pennines. Later extensions to other parts of Britain could be developed.

If hauliers could load their lorries, swap bodies and containers in the north and then guarantee a time of arrival in northern France. that would bring new life to our industrial heartlands and integrate them more fully in the wider European economy. The Central Railway service would also provide for double-stacked containers, which is effectively two train loads in one train's length.

The scheme is compelling in its logic and would transform rail freight in Britain. My hon. Friend will understand that, in my own best of all possible worlds, I would like to see such schemes developed in the public sector. However, the modern fashion for private development fits entirely with Central Railway's proposals. It is a wholly commercial and commercially viable scheme that will require no Government funding or underwriting.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Whatever the merits or demerits of the freight-only railway, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the position in which my constituents—and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve), and many others—are placed is wholly unacceptable? Their properties are blighted by a scheme proposed by a company with very little in the way of financial substance, yet the company shows no inclination to bring its proposals forward for any formal scrutiny in the short term. That leaves my constituents in an impossible situation.

Mr. Hopkins: I have reminded the hon. Gentleman in previous debates that Central Railway has proposed a generous property compensation scheme that was praised by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. Clearly, building any new infrastructure of this kind has effects on the people who live close by. That is inevitable and it would have to be faced by the Government.

The scheme would be linked into the rest of the rail network and would take freight traffic from elsewhere, too. It would make the channel tunnel truly commercially viable and take up the vast amount of spare capacity that the tunnel currently has. Ten years ago, Eurotunnel forecast that there would be 22 million passengers and 11 million tonnes of freight using the tunnel each year. It has actually achieved only 7 million passengers and less than 3 million tonnes of freight; less than a third of predicted levels. Boosting passenger numbers will be difficult, so there is a massive capacity for freight growth if only there were an effective delivery system on the British side. A rail freight link to the north of London carrying lorries on trains must be the answer.

Central Railway will take 8,000 to 10,000 lorries off our motorways every day by 2010. The scheme is vital to Britain's future infrastructure needs. If such a scheme had been proposed in France, Germany, Spain or Holland, I am sure it would have been built by now. Central Railway will make a major contribution to Britain's future economic success and it must not be allowed to fail.

There are other important factors in the case for the scheme. European freight is carried on lorries and Central Railway's proposal is the only scheme that meets the needs of hauliers. The existing UK railways cannot take lorries, and there is ample evidence that Central Railway's proposal is workable. I am informed that Central Railway's construction costs are along the lines of the TGV and the channel tunnel rail link phase 1. It has also been endorsed by SNCF's engineering arm, which believes that Central Railway's operating plan is realistic.

Lorries-on-train operations are a daily practicality across the channel. Central Railway is designed to be compatible with continental freight train standards and works at a European level, fitting in with EU operational objectives. Cross-channel freight is doubling every 10 years, growing much faster than the domestic freight market. Without Central Railway, almost all the additional lorry journeys will be by road, many of them on the M1 passing through my constituency of Luton, North.

If we are serious about raising the proportion of freight carried by rail and about regenerating the industrial regions of Britain, we cannot afford to let this opportunity slip and see the road arteries of Britain clogging up as the years go by, causing serious damage to Britain's future economic health and prospects.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hopkins: I am sorry, but I have too little time.

Over a century ago, Sir Edward Watkin had a vision of a channel tunnel linked to the great central railways. Sadly, he became ill and died before he could see his vision come to fruition. I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to give his most serious attention to the Central Railway scheme and to ponder the thought that if he and our right hon. and hon. Friends lend their support to the Central Railway scheme, they could be credited with having made possible a venture of historic proportions.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) on securing this debate. I also thank him for his courtesy in giving me notice of the key issues that he wished to raise in his speech. The issues that he raised in respect of the challenge facing the rail freight industry are of great interest to the Government. They are precisely what we are addressing through the implementation of our integrated transport policy.

The Government inherited a railway system that was suffering from years of under-investment. It had been fragmented by privatisation and had no framework for the strategic planning of the industry as a whole. It is clear that mistakes were made in the privatisation process. Since 1997, we have been working to turn the industry round, and there have been tangible results in that time. After many years of decline, the amount of freight moved by rail volume has risen by nearly a quarter, and it continues to grow. Much of that has been due to the considerable investment by freight operators. They have invested in new rolling stock and facilities, they are actively pursuing new markets and new operators are emerging. The Government are matching that commitment, as I shall explain.

[Mr. Keith Hill]

We are committed to more freight on rail as part of an integrated sustainable freight transport distribution system. We have set out in our 10-year plan for transport an unprecedented investment programme to enhance the capacity and capability of the network. Through the Transport Act 2000, we have established the Strategic Rail Authority with a remit to promote rail freight. We have also revitalised the freight grant regime to encourage companies to transfer more freight off the roads. We have made it clear that we wish to see greater investment in the railways to cater for growth in both passenger and freight traffic over the next decade. We have asked the SRA to take forward the detailed plans for applying that investment. As a first step, it will shortly produce its strategic agenda.

The Transport Act 2000 marks a major step forward in delivering the Government's vision for transport in this country, and provides for the development of an integrated approach to the transport of passengers and freight. The shadow Strategic Rail Authority had already started discussions with the industry about its plans for rail freight.

As well as setting up the SRA proper, the Transport Act provides a framework for influencing the behaviour of key industry players, such as Railtrack, in the public interest. For example, it will allow the SRA to apply to the Rail Regulator for directions in respect of railway facility enhancements. This new power will create the right to compel Railtrack, and other rail facility owners, to carry out investment and enhancement schemes on terms determined by the regulator and not by Railtrack or the other owners.

The SRA has also taken over from my Department the responsibility for freight grants. Indeed, the Government have made more than 130 grant offers since 1997, including a record 47 grants during the last financial year. Grant payments will soon reach £100 million, diverting close to 40 million tonnes of freight from Britain's roads.

We want to make even more use of the money available to get freight on rail and inland waterways, where that is justified by the environmental benefits. The money is there to be used if the industry comes forward with the right projects. We have established the Strategic Rail Authority to ensure that development of rail freight becomes part of the strategic management of the network. The SRA is already undertaking work to improve the grant regime and to develop its strategic plan.

The SRA's freight strategy will include modernisation and increased capacity on key routes such as the west coast and east coast main lines, upgrading of freight routes to major ports such as Felixstowe and to the channel tunnel, the elimination of strategic bottlenecks on the rail network, better integration with other modes through investment in new freight interchanges and investment in rolling stock.

My hon. Friend mentioned Central Railway's proposals as a possible solution. Of course, I am aware that he has supported the scheme over many years. I confirm that the company has informed my Department of its wish to abandon its proposed Transport and Works Act 1992 application to gain approval for its scheme and has instead requested the Government's support for a Bill.

It must be for the company to decide whether it wishes to allow its proposals to be examined openly under the TWA procedure. That is the normal means of considering infrastructure projects falling within the scope of the 1992 Act. It would not preclude the possibility of the Government promoting a hybrid Bill if we considered that to be an appropriate means of authorising a scheme. However, it remains the case that Central Railway has not submitted its proposals. Bearing that in mind, I cannot give any assurance now that the Government would wish to sponsor a Bill to support the project. It is, of course, open to any hon. Member to propose a Bill in support of a private scheme.

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hill: Very briefly.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister's right hon. and hon. Friends have said in the past that they cannot pass comment on the Central Railway scheme because of the possibility of having to judge it in a quasi-judicial role if it were the subject of a TWA application. The company has made it clear that there will be no TWA application and that it is seeking the Government's political support for the scheme. When and how will the Government make their view known to the House of Commons and to the wider public?

Mr. Hill: I was coming to that. We have asked the SRA to review the Central Railway proposals, and it goes without saying that, until we have seen that, it would be both inappropriate and impossible for the Government to take a view.

I am aware that Central Railway maintains that its project is to be an entirely privately funded scheme and that it is economically viable, but my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North will appreciate that it is vital that all the technical and commercial aspects are examined carefully for a proposal of this scale and complexity. That is why the SRA is initiating a review of Central Railway's proposals.

My hon. Friend is aware that the scheme has, albeit in a different form, been put to the House before, when it was overwhelmingly rejected. If the Government are to consider supporting a Bill, it is right that the SRA should seek to learn more about the proposals before taking a view. I have outlined the basis of the Government's commitment to rail freight and the SRA's role in helping to achieve the industry's objectives. Any review that the SRA undertakes should be carried out in the context of our 10-year plan and the authority's own strategy for freight. I shall follow the SRA's review of Central Railway's proposals with interest.

New facilities require land and the support of the local community. That is why we published guidance last March for local transport plans, which looks to local authorities to take account of opportunities for a greater use of rail freight in their areas. In their land use planning, we will expect authorities to protect sites and routes that could be important in the development of new infrastructure, to promote opportunities for rail connections through industrial sites and to ensure that disused transport routes with the potential for reuse are not unnecessarily severed.

In December, we announced details of the local transport capital settlement in response to the transport plans submitted by local authorities in July. We are

allocating £8.4 billion of public investment over the next five years to be spent locally on projects identified at local level. A good proportion of that funding will be spent on public and integrated transport and smaller schemes, which may include developing facilities for rail freight.

I am encouraged by the enthusiasm that local authorities have shown in considering the role of rail freight in their local transport plans. Underpinning all that is the 10-year plan. We are planning for private and public expenditure of £60 billion on the railway over the 10-year period. During that time, we envisage a further 50 per cent. growth in passenger journeys by rail, an 80 per cent. increase in freight volumes and a further significant increase in rail's share of the freight market to around 10 per cent.

The £60 billion includes capital investments of £38 billion for renewal and expansion of passenger infrastructure, £7 billion for the replacement and expansion of the passenger rolling stock fleet—around 6,000 new vehicles—and £4 billion for investment in additional freight capacity. I seriously question my hon. Friend's claim that our rail freight targets are modest. The Government are committing huge sums of investment to that development.

Mr. Grieve: Does the Minister agree that any successful freight scheme must be compatible with the expansion of passenger use, which the Government are greatly promoting? For instance, if the Central Railway scheme resulted in an inability to use the Chiltern line in my constituency for passenger commuter services, which have expanded and doubled over the past few years, that would be a strange environmental benefit as it would put thousands of people into their cars and on to the roads who currently use the train.

Mr. Hill: As I am wont to say, I have some hinterland on this matter. If the hon. Gentleman took the trouble to consult *Hansard* for the debates on Central Railway in 1995—the previous Parliament—he would find evidence of that. Under the TWA proposal or the hybrid Bill proposal now being considered by the SRA, it is incumbent on the Government to adopt an entirely neutral stance at this stage.

Nearly half the £60 billion that I mentioned will be Government funding. We would have provided some of that money in any case: for example, £5 billion for the channel tunnel rail link; between £5 billion and £10 billion for continuing franchise support; and £1 billion for expenditure on such items as the residuary liabilities of the British Railways Board and contributions to railway industry pensions.

However, a great deal of the Government funding is new money—to halt the decline in passenger operating subsidies and to promote the biggest rail expansion programme for more than a century. We launched the new £7 billion rail modernisation fund, which will lever in substantial amounts of private capital and will provide support for both passenger and freight enhancements.

The new fund will allow the SRA and the industry together to formulate a long-term investment programme for rail—we estimate nearly £50 billion over 10 years—encompassing a range of funding mechanisms, including capital grant and debt finance. The passenger-freight split will depend on franchise replacement and on the conclusions of the SRA's rail freight strategy.

More generally, the 10-year plan provides much greater certainty as a basis for long-term investment. The stop-go attitude to investment followed by previous Administrations created a climate of uncertainty in the supply industry. Time scales for supply and payback are long, both for rolling stock and infrastructure; that stop-go approach clearly discouraged many suppliers from investing as they otherwise might have done. Clearly, that has to change.

Of course, Hatfield dented the progress that the industry had been making. Although there are lessons to be learned from the disruption over recent months, it is vital that everyone involved in the industry continues to act together to ensure that the interests of all customers are paramount. My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Transport is leading the rail recovery action group to maintain regular contact with the industry and to ensure that it is wholly focused on getting the railroad running normally as soon as possible. The group includes a freight representative and is scrutinising carefully the impact of the recovery plan on freight services.

I want to reassure my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North that whatever their immediate impact, the recent difficulties on the railways will not deflect us from our long-term goal. The Government have confidence in rail freight and high expectations of it. So far, the rail freight industry has returned that confidence with investment on a scale not seen for decades—in vehicles, terminals, staff and new business, with real growth in freight volume, and with the arrival of new operators who are giving the established players a run for their money. They, too, can see that rail freight has a real future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 13 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 27 February

MEDWAY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS].*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 27 February.

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Pedestrian Safety

1. **Mr. Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What progress has been made in reducing dangers to pedestrians from rigid car fronts. [148439]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): The European Commission has not yet made a formal proposal for making car fronts safer. On 6 February, the Commission hosted a meeting on this issue, and it is now considering how the matter should be taken forward. We are continuing to press for the best deal for pedestrians.

Mr. Flynn: May I congratulate my hon. Friend, and welcome him to his first Question Time as Minister? In Europe, 2,000 deaths and 18,000 serious accidents are caused every year by the rigid fronts of cars, usually by bullbars or by what the Americans call "killer grills". It is possible to prevent such deaths, given that the bullbars and rigid fronts concentrate and multiply the force of accidents. The effects are usually concentrated at the level of a child's head or the vital organs of an adult. Why is such slow progress being made on this matter? I do not question the enthusiasm of the British Government, but why is it taking so long to introduce the reforms? Lives are being sacrificed in the name of vanity and fashion.

Mr. Ainsworth: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcoming remarks, and congratulate him on his work over a long period in advertising the effects of bullbars. He will know that we have commissioned research by the Transport Research Laboratory, and that we have put forward to the European Commission a proposal to include in pedestrian protection proposals for cars the banning of dangerous bullbars. We have also submitted a proposal showing how the existing external projections directive could be modified to proscribe the fitting of bullbars. Discussions are continuing after last Tuesday's Commission meeting, and we will continue to try to find the best way to make progress on proscribing bullbars.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Is not a particular problem the large number of four-wheel drive vehicles on the road, some of which are excessively large, certainly for going down to Tesco's once a week? Is any special research being undertaken into the problems caused by such vehicles? If not, will the Minister initiate such research?

Mr. Ainsworth: As I said, we have had the Transport Research Laboratory do the research. It is true that such items are mostly fashion accessories. People do not realise how dangerous they are. We must advertise the fact that they are a danger and that people should not fit them. We must then make the best possible progress towards a ban on dangerous accessories on the front of cars.

Ports

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on modernising British ports. [148440]

3. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What his policy is on the construction of container ports on non-brownfield sites. [148441]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): The Government announced the publication of a ports policy paper, "Modern Ports", on 27 November. Ports have an important role in integrated transport policy. The paper identifies a number of specific initiatives that we hope to pursue. We intend to promote better regulation of the industry, and agreed national standards and good practice for port management and port operations alike. The paper sets out a balanced policy on port development that aims to make the best use of existing and former operational land and secure high environmental standards while supporting sustainable projects for which there is a clear need.

Mr. Quinn: This is a very important strategy nationally, but the work to be undertaken soon in the port of Whitby will be extremely important to many of my constituents. Does my hon. Friend agree that the harbour infrastructure developments in the port—to the tune of some £850,000, I understand—in addition to the needed rail and road land links into the port of Whitby, will deliver an important and viable future for my constituents? Will he support my plea for an inter-modal study to ensure that we can deliver the integrated transport policy to which he referred?

Mr. Hill: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's warm support for the Government's new investment in the port

of Whitby. As he will be aware, my Department has approved nearly £500,000 for Whitby, and we have also approved investment worth £350,000 for the port of Scarborough. Both ports have received extra funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food for other refurbishment projects totalling £500,000. My hon. Friend has made powerful representations in favour of improved rail connections to Whitby and road links to Scarborough. The Government are considering his proposals very carefully.

Dr. Lewis: The Minister having decided to group my question on the Government's policy on the construction of container ports on non-brownfield sites with the previous question on the Order Paper, I am sorry that he has not felt able to answer it more specifically. Is he aware that yesterday Hampshire county council rejected by 21 votes to none to turn down the proposal to develop the Dibden bay container port on the edge of the New Forest? Is he aware of the devastating effects that that development would have on Totton and the people of the waterside villages if it went ahead? Does he know that Associated British Ports has now admitted that it is not part of a national economic need that this port needs to be developed? Can he reassure my constituents, who were extremely worried to hear the hon. Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney), the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for the Environment, state on television on 8 February:

"I think it is a very valid proposal for developing a much needed container port in the United Kingdom."

Given that the Secretary of State has called in this proposal, how can we have confidence that it will be fairly and impartially adjudged when a PPS to a Minister in his Department appears to have made up his mind the wrong way in advance?

Mr. Hill: On the broad issue, we recognise that there are strong views about Associated British Ports' proposals to develop new port facilities at Dibden bay on Southampton water. That is exactly why we have recently announced our decision to call a public inquiry, which should start later this year.

In the circumstances, the House will understand that the Government cannot comment on the merits of the proposals. As regards his remarks about my hon. Friend the Member for Bradford, North (Mr. Rooney), the hon. Gentleman really is a bit of a chump to bring such a matter to the Floor of the House. To set the record straight, what my hon. Friend actually said was that there was a balance to be struck between economic development and the environment, and that that was why we are having a public inquiry. In my experience, my hon. Friend is usually right about everything, and in this matter he was, as usual, spot on.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): I welcome my hon. Friend's statement and invite him to visit the historic port of Whitehaven, as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has done on previous occasions. If he does so, he will see the enormous potential of the regeneration of the port for tourism, water sports and fishing, but does he recognise that the full potential can never be realised unless road improvements are carried out? Will he therefore look very closely at the proposal to improve the A595 from Lily Hall to Parton? It is a modest scheme in national terms, but would nevertheless be of enormous economic and social benefit to Whitehaven and the people of West Cumbria, including those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours).

Mr. Hill: Of course I would love to visit the port of Whitehaven. The Government are committed to improving both rail and road links to ports as part of our 10-year plan for transport. I am aware of the campaign for the road, spearheaded by the *Whitehaven News*, and of the fact that the road was Cumbria's third priority in its recent local transport plan.

The Government have indicated that we expect to receive further local transport plan submissions in the summer, and I look forward to the opportunity of considering Cumbria's proposal for the road in its next set of plans.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): Will the Minister go back to the issue of Dibden bay and answer the question that has been posed by Mr. Brian Dash, the local county councillor who for the past 10 years has led the campaign against the development, about whether it is in the national interest? Successive Ministers in this Government and the previous Government have made the point that the Dibden bay development should not go ahead unless it can be conclusively proved that it is in the national interest for it to do so. As that manifestly is not the case, will the Minister confirm that the public inquiry is a complete waste of time?

Mr. Hill: I suspect that those who take an opposing view on the Dibden bay development might consider that it manifestly is in the national interest. It is precisely to determine whether the development is in the national interest that we have convened the public inquiry to which I have referred. Furthermore, it may in due course be necessary for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to make a decision about what is or is not in the national interest.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Will my hon. Friend acknowledge the success of the port of Dover, which is still a trust port and is the busiest ferry port in the world? When he makes representations on the European directive on ports, will he acknowledge the special differences between ports in the United Kingdom and ports on the continent? Will he ensure that the framework is set up in such a way that the rules do not prescribe against ports such as Dover and that those ports will not be disadvantaged?

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who is, as ever, a doughty advocate of the port of Dover. Representations on the matter have been received from the UK Major Ports Group; we are also aware of the views of the British Ports Association and of several port and terminal operators. Our general policy on the proposed directive is to support the broad principles of liberalisation and competition in the provision of port services, subject to appropriate safeguards and standards.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): What is the point of a ports policy, or, indeed, of an integrated transport policy, that does not address the most important issue

facing ports, especially in the south-east—that of capacity? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the industry forecasts that ports serving the south-east are likely to run out of container capacity within the next one to two years? Is that not typical of the Government's integrated transport policy? The policy is merely more pretty pictures, more warm words and more truisms. Like the railway, the tube and the road jams—the worst we have ever had—the Minister's policy is nothing but paralysis by analysis. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Hill: That was, "paralysis by analysis"—just in case the House did not get it.

The hon. Gentleman really should have a word with his colleague, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and with his Front-Bench colleagues who are looking daggers at his back. Do I detect the possibility of a division on this matter among Opposition Members?

Concessionary Bus Fares

4. **Mr. Jim Marshall** (Leicester, South): If he will make a statement on his support for concessionary bus fares for pensioners. [148443]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): Local authorities in England spend more than £390 million on concessionary bus fares each year—money largely funded by central Government. The local government finance settlement for 2001–02 takes account of local authorities' responsibilities in this area. In particular, we have injected an extra £54 million to cover the additional costs of introducing the mandatory half-fare scheme for pensioners and disabled people under the Transport Act 2000.

Mr. Marshall: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Perhaps this is a rare occasion. May I congratulate the Government on the implementation of another election pledge—namely the introduction of mandatory concessionary fares. Will my hon. Friend tell the House how many pensioners and disabled people are likely to benefit directly as a consequence of the scheme? For the information of the House, can he also tell us the view of the Tory Opposition on the scheme when it was debated in the Standing Committee?

Mr. Hill: I am extremely grateful for my hon. Friend's congratulations. Our mandatory concessionary travel scheme will guarantee at least half fares on local buses for pensioners and disabled people. The bus pass will be free of charge. Where more generous schemes are already in place, they will, of course, continue. The scheme will come into effect from 1 April in Greater London and from 1 June in the rest of England. We expect about 5.5 million pensioners and up to a further 1.5 million disabled people to benefit from the new arrangements.

Notwithstanding the Conservatives' new-found passion for pensioners, it is worth recalling that the Conservative party voted against the scheme. The scheme will be especially welcomed by pensioners in those Conservative-controlled authorities where, until now, there have been no concessionary fares schemes at all.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Given that we read in the newspapers today that the Government are keen to outlaw age discrimination, will the Minister explain why the Government want to continue the discrimination whereby a man has to wait until the age of 65 to receive a concessionary bus pass even though a woman receives one at the age of 60? Is the Minister aware of the case before the European Court, and of the fact that he only has until next week to make a decision on whether to contest that case, at great expense to the Government, or to accept that, on entitlement to bus concessions, there should be equality for men and women at age 60?

Mr. Hill: The Government certainly are aware of the Matthews case, which is before the European Court, to which the hon. Gentleman alludes. We are considering the implications of that case and our response.

Mr. Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my hon. Friend endeavour to speak to Tory-controlled Gedling borough council, which, despite the extra money that we have put into the half-fare scheme, has decided to axe the full-fare pass scheme for pensioners from April 2001? Will he do all that he can to get Tory-controlled Gedling borough council to change its mind because thousands of pensioners in my constituency are outraged at the fact that the council is receiving extra money but choosing to axe the full-fare scheme?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend makes a powerful case in condemnation of that Tory authority. I very much hope that that Tory authority will understand the force of his representations and the passions of local pensioners. It is an absolute outrage that Tory-controlled Gedling borough council has abolished the full-fare pass for pensioners from 1 April 2001.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): The Minister has visited Purbeck on several occasions. I wonder whether he will have a word with the treasurer of Purbeck district council, who tells us that the bus concessionary scheme that it is being forced to introduce, which is very welcome to Purbeck pensioners, will put their council tax bills up by as much as 17 per cent. Will he please look at where the money has gone to, because it certainly has not arrived in Purbeck to pay for the scheme?

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for drawing my attention to the situation in Purbeck. My presumption is that, heretofore, Purbeck has not provided such a concessionary fare scheme. The reality is that, although the Government, by allocating £54 million extra to local authorities, has made a proportionate allocation to each authority to allow it to introduce the scheme, those Scrooge authorities that heretofore have not had such a concessionary fare scheme will have to bear some pain in the process. However, the hon. Gentleman should think not only of the implications for the local ratepayers, but of the wonderful opportunities that will be opened up to pensioners in that locality.

Local Strategic Partnerships

5. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): If he will make a statement on the new local strategic partnerships. [148444]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong): Local strategic partnerships will provide a single, overarching local co-ordination framework, which will enable local stakeholders to address issues that really matter to local people. They will prepare and implement local community strategies and local neighbourhood renewal strategies. They will allocate neighbourhood renewal funds, which have now doubled to £200 million for next year, and rationalise local partnerships, working to deliver better services.

Mrs. Humble: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. She can be assured that the additional £6.5 million of neighbourhood renewal funding allocated to Blackpool over the next three years will be very warmly welcomed by my constituents. Will she confirm that the successful existing partnerships that Blackpool council has developed can form the basis for the new local strategic partnership, so that that very welcome additional investment can be effectively targeted for the benefit of my constituents?

Ms Armstrong: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her commitment to ensuring that the deprivation is effectively tackled in Blackpool, and, indeed, elsewhere. This Government have recognised the importance of effectively targeting deprivation, wherever it arises. I assure my hon. Friend that local agencies should seek to build on the local arrangements that have already worked well, rather than starting again from scratch. As cross-sector, cross-agency umbrella partnerships, LSPs offer real opportunities to streamline existing partnership arrangements and to make them more effective, by making better connections between individual initiatives.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Could the right hon. Lady put her first answer into plain English?

Ms Armstrong: I am very sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not able to hear because of the way in which his colleagues on the Front Bench were behaving. We are establishing local strategic partnerships throughout the country. Each local authority is working out how it can most effectively develop a strategic partnership that has an overview of the whole area, and really ensure that it identifies the strategic priorities, who will work on them and how they can ensure that services work much better in their areas. I am sure the hon. Gentleman supports that objective.

Global Warming

6. **Mr. Alan W. Williams** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): If he will make a statement on discussions between his Department and the new US Administration on global warming. [148446]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): The Government are keen to encourage the new United States Administration to engage constructively on climate change. We have supported the deferral of the next round of talks by a few weeks to give them more time to prepare. I shall be taking every opportunity to raise the issue with the United States, including at the G8 Environment Ministers meeting in Italy next month. I have also asked colleagues to do the same and, indeed, the Foreign Secretary raised the matter with Colin Powell when he met him last week. However, this is not just about the United States; we will, of course, continue to discuss the way forward with other countries.

Mr. Williams: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for that informative reply. The United States Administration asked for the resumption of the talks in Bonn to be postponed. What can we read into that? Are they dragging their feet, or does Colin Powell, the new Secretary of State, need more time to prepare the new Bush Administration's case on global warming?

Mr. Prescott: My interpretation of the events is that the United States could have attended the conference in May and refused to co-operate with its objectives. The fact that the Administration have asked for more time, are seriously considering the issue and are appointing new officials to negotiate on their behalf is a hopeful sign, and I am forever optimistic in such matters.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): In the Secretary of State's discussions on global warming, will he do his best to maintain the fuel duty differential between liquified petroleum gas and other fuels?

Mr. Prescott: Anything that encourages people to make a better environmental contribution, including the greater use of environmentally friendly fuels, is to be encouraged. Tax arrangements which are dealt with by the Chancellor, are also important. We are making headway in such matters.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Will my right hon. Friend consider early-day motion 232 on climate change, which has been signed by 122 Members and which welcomes the e-campaign T.5.20? Does he agree that a country with 5 per cent. of the world's population that produces 20 per cent. of the world's greenhouse emissions has a particular responsibility to get its policy right? Giving it a little more time is probably appropriate in this case.

Mr. Prescott: It is right to give everyone an opportunity to meet the objectives to which they signed up as part of the Kyoto agreement. Indeed, the recent UN conference in China on climate change revealed new and stronger evidence to show that global warming is continuing to increase and to have an effect on the environment, and that it is created by manmade activities. We are all beholden to take steps to reduce such activities.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): It is instructive that Labour Back Benchers wish to express their suspicions of a new American Administration who have been in office for fewer than three weeks, rather than performing the role of the House in holding our Government—in this case, the Deputy Prime Minister—to account. The right hon. Gentleman led the European negotiators at The Hague with such diplomatic finesse that, when the talks failed, he characteristically blamed everyone else and his colleague, the French Minister, said that

"he lost his nerve, he lost his cool".

and, for good measure, that he was "a male chauvinist pig." Can he assure the House that, in the interests of the country's reputation and the future of such vital negotiations, he will play no further personal role in those talks?

Mr. Prescott: A typical Opposition question. The hon. Gentleman has the facts wrong. I did participate in leading the negotiations at Kyoto because, at that time, Britain was one of the three parties involved in the presidency, and I therefore played a part. That was not the case at The Hague because the meeting was controlled by France, not Britain. However, I hope that I played a positive role by suggesting a way in which we could reach an agreement. I am grateful that the terms of the negotiations are still on the table for discussion. That is a step forward and I shall not be put off by silly, stupid remarks by the Opposition.

British Waterways

7. **Mr. Alan Meale** (Mansfield): If he will make a statement on improvements to British waterways. [148447]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): British Waterways has made tremendous strides in delivering the targets that we set it during my hon. Friend's period as waterways Minister, turning what had been a liability into an extremely important asset. We have significantly increased public investment in British Waterways. It expects to eliminate its safety-related backlog by 2004 instead of 2006. The document "Waterways for Tomorrow" reported on British Waterways' initiatives to work with the voluntary sector and to establish new public-private partnerships in telecommunications, property and water transfer.

Mr. Meale: I thank the Government for their continued commitment to British Waterways, and I pay particular tribute to the strong leadership of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. Is the Department any nearer to achieving a single navigational authority for all the waterways in Britain, which would help modernisation?

Mr. Meacher: I pay a warm and well-deserved tribute to my hon. Friend for his close interest in British Waterways and for the fact that, under his stewardship, the inland waterways were turned into the much more dynamic and successful enterprise that they are today. There has been a huge increase in funding—it has almost tripled since 1997—and a long history of under-investment has been reversed. "Waterways for Tomorrow", which the Deputy Prime Minister launched last June, considered several options, including the one to which my hon. Friend drew attention. That is still under discussion with the new, dynamic chairman and chief executive of British Waterways, and we hope to make an announcement before long.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Many of us have unexpectedly acquired waterways in our constituencies, as I have in Redbourn, because of flooding and burst mains, and the only improvement that we want is to return those waterways to roads. That is held up by a shortage of tankers. Will the Minister investigate the possibility of releasing tankers from the emergency services to supplement those provided by Thames Water and the county council?

Mr. Meacher: I think that that question goes rather wide of British Waterways. It is a pity that the right hon. Gentleman, who inherited this important asset, was unable to persuade his Government to end the huge under-investment that went on for 20 years. However, the point that the right hon. Gentleman made is sensible, and I shall investigate it and write to him.

Local Authority Housing Investment

8. **Ms Rosie Winterton** (Doncaster, Central): If he will make a statement on investment in local authority housing. [148448]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government inherited a £19 billion backlog of council house renovation and improvement work. We have committed ourselves to bringing all council housing in England up to a decent standard by 2010. The resources provided to authorities for housing investment have been increased from £750 million in 1997-98 to £2.4 billion next year.

Ms Winterton: Council tenants in Doncaster are already seeing the extra money that is being invested in local authority housing beginning to reverse the years of under-investment under the previous Government. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that he is aware not only of the amount of substandard housing in Doncaster but of the particular problems that we face, such as the need to improve former Coal Board housing? Will he assure me that he will consider those matters when reviewing the allocation of the major repairs allowance, so that housing in my constituency can become a right for all and not just a privilege for a few?

Mr. Raynsford: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments about the increases in capital spending. She will know that Doncaster is receiving £12.5 million in the current year and will receive £16.5 million next year. Those are substantial increases on the £5.5 million level inherited from the previous Government.

My hon. Friend is aware of the difficulties in her area and the need for a sustained programme of investment that brings together the resources of the local authority and all other bodies that are able to contribute. I am pleased to tell her that, only last Friday, I discussed with the leader of her local council and the cabinet member with responsibility for housing some of the specific issues affecting Doncaster and ways in which they can best proceed, with the Government's full support, to tackle those problems more effectively.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Local authority tenants in Sheffield are keen that additional investment be made in their homes and are considering questions relating to the future tenure of their housing. Will the right hon. Gentleman assist their deliberations by making clear any link that exists between future investment arrangements and future tenure arrangements? Are the Government entirely neutral on who owns the

housing, or is additional investment made available if housing is transferred from the local authority to other social housing providers?

Mr. Raynsford: We have made it clear to local authorities that they have four options to consider in relation to the future of their stock. Those include continuing to administer their housing through a housing revenue account managed by the local authority; the possibility of acting through an arm's-length management company, as set out in our proposals in the housing Green Paper, whereby ownership remains with the local authority but the housing is managed at arm's length; the private finance initiative, under which £600 million additional credits will be made available to allow private sector involvement, but with ownership remaining with the local authority; and large-scale voluntary transfer to a registered social landlord. Those are the four options; all have a different impact and we expect local authorities to analyse the financial implications for themselves and to conclude which is the best option for their area. The Government have no preference and are not pressing local authorities to pursue any one of the four options.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I put it to my right hon. Friend that, instead of being given four options, local authorities are being directed towards only one option: stock transfer. At the meeting last Friday, it was made plain to him by the leader of Barnsley council that the council has no money in its accounts for housing improvements because it has been transferred to the major repairs allowance or the housing revenue account. Arm's-length companies will be available to no more than half a dozen local authorities, so some authorities such as mine, which has already held a ballot in which stock transfer was rejected, are between the devil and the deep blue sea. They are being forced down one line by the Government and not being given money for repairs if they want to keep their council housing.

Mr. Raynsford: I am happy to tell my hon. Friend, as I told his colleague the leader of Barnsley council at that meeting, that Barnsley has benefited from one of the largest increases in local authority capital funding of any local authority in the country—it is well above the national average. We want to work with Barnsley council and other local authorities to ensure the best possible outcome. It is right that authorities consider a range of options. I know that Barnsley considered stock transfer but that, by a narrow majority, tenants voted against it. I am sure that Barnsley council, like other authorities, will continue to do its best to use the substantially increased resources that the Government have made available, and that it will choose the option that is best for the interests of its tenants and housing in its area.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does the Minister recall that, prior to the last election, his right hon. Friend the Prime Minister pledged:

"We need an emergency programme to reduce the number of empty properties, including those held by government departments"?

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the latest figures show 762,000-odd empty properties in England—seven empty houses or flats for every homeless household—and that the number of empty council housing units in England was 84,000, up 3,000 since 1997? As Ministers play their own private version of "Monopoly" with their personal property empires, will they spare an occasional thought for those in housing need?

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have introduced a series of measures to encourage empty properties being brought back into use. In particular, we have taken effective action to bring empty Government property back into use. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman of our success in that respect: when the Conservative party was last in power, the Ministry of Defence had 14,000 empty properties; that figure is now down to 10,700—far too many, but decreasing. Under Conservative stewardship, my Department, now the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, had more than 1,000 empty properties; last year, that figure was down to 241. The current Government are taking action to produce results and to reduce the number of empty properties in this country.

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): May I press my right hon. Friend on the issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) about local authority housing? It is important that those authorities that eschew large-scale voluntary transfer are not penalised. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that those authorities that do not go through the LSVT option will not be penalised either through rents or access to capital for improvements in their housing stock?

Mr. Raynsford: It is difficult to see how local authorities have been penalised in a year when they have received a 51 per cent. increase in their capital allocations. Next year, authorities across the country are due to receive a further 26 per cent. increase in capital allocations. The Government are increasing funding to local authorities and we want them to reach a sensible choice, bearing in mind the need to improve their stock and to use all available options. We have said that that is a matter for each local authority to decide, bearing in mind the resources available to them and the Government's commitment to increase funding.

Regional Government

9. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): If he will make a statement on his policy concerning regional government. [148449]

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): We remain committed to a move to directly elected regional government, where there is support as demonstrated in referendums. While no timetable has yet been drawn up, governance in the regions is already evolving through the work of the chambers, regional development agencies, Government offices and others.

Mr. Luff: The Secretary of State has helpfully reconfirmed the Government's position on regional government, as originally set out in the Labour party manifesto at the general election. That confirmed that

where regional government was introduced, a tier of local government would have to be abolished. I quote:

"Our plans will not mean adding a new tier of government to the existing English system."

Which tier of local government will the Government abolish? Is it to be county councils, as most of the right hon. Gentleman's right hon. and hon. Friends seem to be suggesting? If so, will he campaign for the abolition of county councils during the elections to those bodies in May?

Mr. Prescott: The sound of elections and county council elections is round the corner. As I have always said, I think both sides of the House are agreed that local government unitary authorities are the first tier of the local government structure. As for the second, regional tier, we shall put forward a list of options to the electorate that will be ready for the referendums for each region, and allow them to make a decision. That has always been our position, and it is the one that we shall be presenting to the electorate.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that probably the greatest feeling for regional government in England is in the northern region? Does he further appreciate that that feeling is strengthening, bearing in mind the relationship with devolved government across the Scottish border? With that in mind, will he consider the possibility that the northern region should again be reunited, and that a common region facing the Scottish border, including the north of Cumbria, should be involved in a new northern regional assembly?

Mr. Prescott: I find in my journeys around the country that there is a growing feeling for some form of regional government and that that is as strong in the north-west and Yorkshire and Humberside as in the northern area. There has been a long history of demands for regional government in the northern region, and I am supportive of that. We must ascertain exactly what that opinion is, and we will do that by referendum. There is the age-old argument in the north about whether the region should cover Cumbria; it is a judgment that must be arrived at later.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the primary purpose of regional government is not to take functions from local government but to give democratic accountability for regional activities, which are mainly undertaken now by central Government, to the regions? Is he able to tell us whether we might have a referendum within two years of the general election?

Mr. Prescott: I shall leave those comments to be made by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I have always believed in the regional government argument. It is important to recognise, first, that regional government should involve the decentralising of power and government functions from central Government to the regions. Secondly, we should not make the mistake of centralising in a region in the name of decentralisation. These are thoughts that we shall have in mind when we put the options to the electorate.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that we welcome his first reply on the subject this afternoon? Is he also aware of the assemblies' and RDAs' lack of democratic accountability? That accountability can come only from regional assemblies, so it should be a major priority for the Government after the next election.

Mr. Prescott: I certainly believe that it should be a priority. On the form of regional government, we have made it clear that people in the regions will make that decision, and we will draw up several alternatives for them to consider in the referendum.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): Does the Deputy Prime Minister think that it is a good use of taxpayers' money for RDAs to set up expensive new offices in Brussels?

Mr. Prescott: I believe that the RDAs need to be represented where they can make decisions and where European decisions clearly affect their regions. As for the judgment about whether or not such offices are expensive, I do not know which one the hon. Gentleman is referring to. However, I get very suspicious of any talk from the Opposition about figures, particularly in view of the fact that they said that they would save £200 million by scrapping regional chambers, when no such commitment has ever been given; that is a black hole in the hon. Gentleman's own finances.

Mr. Norman: Most people in this country believe that is for the Government to represent us in Brussels as one country, not a nation divided into regions, each with its hand out. Is it right for the West Midlands regional development agency to have an office of up to 12 people and a budget of £1 million? Does it make sense to have five other RDAs with their own offices, and three more planning to set up offices, at great expense to the taxpayer? Is that not another illustration of the dissipation of the effort created by the RDAs and the cost to the taxpayer of unaccountable regional bureaucracies?

Mr. Prescott: What I find a little difficult to accept about the hon. Gentleman's arguments is the fact that he makes great complaint about the English RDAs, but has nothing to say about Scotland and Wales, even though he is prepared to abolish RDAs in England, yet retain them as government for Scotland and Wales. As for the role and importance of the RDAs, we have found that the RDA played an important part in Birmingham in solving the problems of Rover and the motor car industry. RDAs are playing a part now in helping to develop regional economies.

The hon. Gentleman should make it clear to the House where he stands on those matters of regional government. On Sunday 29 January, he talked about regional government on "The Westminster Hour" and said:

"Well yes I think that, em, we're also pragmatic and we recognise that there's no fixed formula. Different solutions are right for different areas".

That is right; that is our position. Does the hon. Gentleman concur with that?

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): May I give my right hon. Friend a good reason for introducing

a north-west regional assembly? Such an assembly would enable us, finally, to have in place a mechanism for keeping the North West Development Agency under control.

Mr. Prescott: I think that there is a strong history behind that inquiry. My hon. Friend is right: development agencies should be accountable to representative bodies, whether directly or indirectly, whether elected or appointed. It is for the people of a region to make their decision, and the RDAs are but a tool for the development of the region to which they should be accountable.

Fuel Duty

10. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): What recent representations he has received from the British Road Federation about the level of fuel duty. [148450]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): The Government receive representations from a wide range of interested bodies, including the British Road Federation, regarding the level of fuel duty and transport policy. Those are considered carefully and help to inform the Chancellor's Budget judgment.

Mr. Bercow: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his informative, comprehensive and inspiring reply. Is it not a fact that, after nearly four years of Labour Government, Britain's petrol, although among the cheapest in the European Union before tax, is the most expensive after tax?

Mr. Hill: I do not think that the House is likely to forget that the major source of the increase in fuel prices in recent years resulted from the previous Government's introduction of the fuel duty escalator. If there is any responsibility for the situation in which the underlying rate of increase results largely from the increase in oil prices, it lies with the global price increase in oil and the activities of the previous Government.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend accept that, contrary to what the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said, the price of lead-free petrol in this country is virtually identical to that in France, whereas diesel is much cheaper on the continent? People may argue about prices, but do they want to pay the extremely expensive tolls that individuals have to pay in France to drive on the autoroutes?

Mr. Hill: My hon. Friend is right. In the sometimes blinkered discussions of these matters, the total impact of various imposts on fuel are not taken into account. Notwithstanding the protestations of the Opposition, the costs of motoring are lower now than they were 30 years ago, in 1970.

Mr. Jeffrey Donaldson (Lagan Valley): The Minister is aware that Northern Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom with a land frontier, and that the significant differentials in fuel duty between the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic have an extremely detrimental impact on the petrol retail industry and the road haulage industry in Northern Ireland. Will the Minister make representations to the Treasury to have the matter addressed?

Mr. Hill: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that insight into the situation in Northern Ireland. He is aware, of course, that ministerially I have no direct responsibility for the situation in Northern Ireland, but I undertake to convey his observations to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Contaminated Land

11. **Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): If he will make a statement on cleaning up contaminated land. [148451]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): We are committed to cleaning up the legacy of contaminated land left unremedied by the previous Government. We brought a new regulatory framework into force in April 2000. We have also made significant public funds available both for remedying contaminated land and for reclaiming derelict land.

Mr. Hendrick: Is my hon. Friend aware that low-level radioactive waste is being dumped at Clifton Marsh, on the outskirts of Preston, causing great concern to the residents of Preston and the Fylde? Can she give me some reassurance that the activities taking place there are safe, and are not a threat to public health or the environment?

Ms Hughes: I understand residents' concerns, in view of what has been in the newspapers. My hon. Friend knows that the Environment Agency is carrying out an investigation into those claims. The preliminary investigation has found nothing to suggest that radioactive materials significantly above the de minimis level allowed under the current legislation have been deposited. The agency is continuing to investigate and, if any further information emerges, it will be made available at the earliest opportunity. The EA undertakes regular monitoring, including checks on randomly selected skips, and the results are routinely published annually. To date, nothing unusual has been found, and regulatory conditions have not been found to have been breached. On that basis, I can give my hon. Friend the reassurance that he seeks.

Mr. Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Has the Minister considered the impact that a greenfield development tax would have on the amount of contaminated land that could be cleaned up?

Ms Hughes: The Government have brought in a range of measures to ensure that we make progress on cleaning up contaminated land. That includes bringing into force regulations laid by the previous Government, who took no action to implement them and refused to make available the resources that local authorities and other agencies need to progress those orders and to make sure that contaminated land is cleared. Actions speak louder than words, and we have taken the necessary action.

Neighbourhood Renewal

12. **Mr. Ivan Henderson** (Harwich): If he will make a statement on the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal. [148452]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong): The Government's action plan, "A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal", was published on 15 January and sets out our vision for narrowing the gap between poor neighbourhoods and the rest of the country. It aims to deliver economic prosperity, safe communities, high quality schools, decent housing and better health to the poorest parts of the country.

Mr. Henderson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, and welcome the introduction of the neighbourhood management programmes that are about to be introduced. They will cover areas in my constituency where there are pockets of deprivation, such as Jaywick, where the grasslands, greens and village areas desperately need help for their roads, poor housing, street lighting, health problems, law and order problems and education problems. Will my right hon. Friend consider seriously any proposal put forward by the local strategic partnership in that area for future bids that would reflect the aims of such programmes?

Ms Armstrong: My hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the tenacious way in which he has continued to put the case for the people of Jaywick. He will know that more than £6 million has been allotted to the neighbourhood in the past five years to enable it to seek improvements. It is eligible to apply for neighbourhood management but, as he knows, Jaywick needs the two councils to provide leadership and to recognise that they must pull agencies together to ensure progress. I hope that he will continue to work with them to ensure that that happens.

Empty Homes

13. **Sandra Gidley** (Romsey): What steps he is taking to bring empty homes back into use. [148453]

The Minister for Housing and Planning (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The urban and rural White Papers, which we published in November, and our housing policy statement, which we published in December, set out a series of proposals that we are pursuing to bring more empty homes back into use. Those proposals include new tax concessions, guidance for local authorities and owners, and increased funding for the Empty Homes Agency.

Sandra Gidley: According to the Empty Homes Agency, there are 87,400 empty homes in the south-east, which is under huge pressure for more house build. Given that that is the case, will the Government admit that although they have said much about the theory of using a sequential approach, involving the use of existing stocks before greenfield land is released for building, they are not doing anything to make that a reality? When will local authorities be given powers to make landlords return empty houses to the housing market? Will the Secretary of State impress upon the Chancellor the need to make repairs to existing buildings more affordable by equalising VAT on repairs and new build at a lower rate than at present?

Mr. Raynsford: The Government have done a great deal to change the emphasis and to focus on brownfield and inner-city development, rather than on allowing the profligate greenfield development that was so characteristic of the Conservative party when it was in power. The hon. Lady will be aware of the measures announced by the Government in respect of bringing empty properties back into use. Those measures have been welcomed by the Empty Homes Agency, which says:

> "We are pleased that senior Ministers are talking about tackling empty homes and the recent policy changes introduced by the Government on planning and new housing provision that encourage using existing empty homes first will make a difference."

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the successful empty housing scheme initiated by Southampton city council? The scheme is called "Opening up the Empties" and is a partnership initiative that encourages the return to use of empty private sector homes. Will he encourage other local authorities to follow Southampton's example and to undertake similar schemes?

Mr. Raynsford: I am happy to agree entirely with my hon. Friend that Southampton's approach to tackling empty properties has been exemplary. It was one of the pioneering authorities in terms of its empty homes strategy, and Councillor Paul Jenks and his colleagues in Southampton deserve every congratulation on what they have done. They have been trailblazers, and if other authorities followed their lead more effectively, further action would be taken in bringing empty properties back into use.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What will the Minister do about local authorities such as Liberal Democrat-controlled North Wiltshire district council? Some five years ago, it sold off all of its council houses for £90 million and has since spent some £50 million of that money on assorted schemes, but has not built one single house, until now, when it is spending £25 million on building a new headquarters for itself. North Wiltshire has problems with empty homes and housing, but what can we do about the Liberals there?

Mr. Raynsford: I have to say that I have no responsibility for the Liberal party, either here or in North Wiltshire. I am, however, responsible for housing policy. It is the Government's objective to ensure that all authorities create strategies to make best use of the housing in their areas. That should include bringing empty homes into use. Authorities must also meet the needs of their populations through partnership with the private sector and registered social landlords, and use the additional resources that the Government are making available to them. We regret it very much when individual authorities fail to show the enthusiasm that is necessary to tackle problems in their areas.

Health and Safety (Vinyl Chloride Monomer)

14. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): What action he is taking to protect workers from exposure to vinyl chloride monomer; and if he will make a statement. [148454]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The control of substances hazardous to health regulations require employers to prevent or control exposure of their employees to vinyl chloride monomer, and several approved codes of practice give practical guidance on the application of the regulations to vinyl chloride. The Health and Safety Commission will consult about proposals to introduce a more stringent exposure limit for vinyl chloride monomer before the European Union directive is introduced.

Mr. Barnes: Workers at the former Vinatex plant in my constituency were exposed to VCM, and many developed cancer. Recent research by the International Agency for Research on Cancer suggests that exposure to cancers through VCM is much wider than was previously believed. Will the Minister consider reinstating the angio-sarcoma register, which details such matters, and extending it to include the new information that the survey reveals?

Mr. Meacher: I would like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend for the way in which he has pursued issues that relate to exposure to chemicals in more than one case in his constituency, which I have visited.

Vinatex was a PVC manufacturer at Staveley until 1985. As my hon. Friend said, much research has been carried out, not least by the trade union safety team, into effects on the workers at the plant. It was published last September and showed a higher incidence of respiratory problems than expected, as well as other conditions.

The Health and Safety Executive has established a national register of angio-sarcoma cases to document more accurately the incidence of that rare cancer and to evaluate its possible occupational associations more generally. I want that work to be completed and I am keen to follow it up by taking the necessary action to protect workers better in future.

Speaker's Statement

3.32 pm

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about Adjournment debates. In Westminster Hall on Tuesday mornings this Session, there have been three one-hour debates followed by three half-hour debates. The Modernisation Committee's report, which was approved by the House on 20 November last year, allows a measure of flexibility. In the light of experience, I have decided that, from Tuesday 27 February, the three one-hour debates should be replaced by two one-and-a-half-hour debates.

There is a further point about Adjournment debates in Westminster Hall and the Chamber. I find an increasing tendency for hon. Members who apply for debates to be selective about the day of the week on which they want to hold them. That complicates the administration of the ballot and can lead to unfairness for those who make no such stipulations. In future, my office will give priority to applications from hon. Members that contain no date restrictions. In addition, any hon. Member who withdraws from an allocated Adjournment debate will not be permitted to re-enter the ballot for a period of four weeks.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have given you, as well as the relevant Department, notice of my point of order.

Today, the Government published their much-trailed White Paper on industrial competitiveness. First, is it right that such an important subject should be launched by written parliamentary answer at 8.30 this morning rather than by oral statement, which would allow hon. Members to scrutinise its content?

Secondly, the relevant documents were not available until ten past 12 this afternoon, after the press conference that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry called to present his view.

Thirdly, the entire contents of the White Paper were reported in this morning's newspapers. The reports contained accurate quotes from the text of the document. Is not it a clear abuse, and contempt of the House, for the Government again to leak in detail their policy proposals to the press when denying hon. Members the opportunity to see the documents or to cross-examine the Government on them?

We look to you, Mr. Speaker, to stand up for the rights of the House against a Government who are determined to avoid critical scrutiny of their policy proposals. I ask you to do that in this instance.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me respond to the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). I am grateful to him for giving me notice of his point of order. He has raised a number of issues.

It is, as he knows, for Ministers to decide whether they make announcements to Parliament by means of an oral statement or a written answer. I have no comment to make on the Secretary of State's decision in that regard.

I understand that the answer was available at 8.30 this morning, and that copies were placed in the Library and the Vote Office. Copies of the White Paper should have been in the Vote Office from 11 o'clock, but there was a delay in their delivery. I am sure that the Secretary of State would wish to establish how that delay occurred, and to ensure that it does not happen again.

I take very seriously indeed the right hon. Gentleman's concern that the content of the White Paper appeared in the press this morning. It seems to me that there is a close correspondence between the White Paper and the press articles. I think, therefore, that it would be reasonable for me to ask the Secretary of State to undertake an investigation into how this occurred, and to report the results to the House.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): On a point of order arising from your original statement, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that some Members belong to organisations such as the Council of Europe and the Western European Union. When applying for Adjournment debates, they normally inform you of the dates on which they do not expect to be in the House. They do so in order not to show disrespect to the House by having to refuse a particular date, rather than to seek privilege. From what you have said, it seems possible that hon. Members who are also members of such bodies might, to a degree, be placed at a disadvantage.

Mr. Speaker: It seems to me that Thursdays and Fridays are the unpopular days for Adjournment debates.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any request from the Secretary of State for Scotland, or from one of her Ministers, to come to the House to make a statement about her involvement and that of her Department in the cancellation of the Taoiseach's visit to Scotland last weekend, and about the subsequent resignation of her Parliamentary Private Secretary? The right hon. Lady has spent part of today making pronouncements away from the House about her role, or lack of it, in the matter, but has suggested that questions in the House could be answered by anyone, not necessarily from her own Department.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The answer to that is no. The hon. Gentleman applied for a private notice question on this matter, which I refused. I had hoped that that would be the end of it so far as I was concerned.

Mr. Skinner: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not know about you, but in the course of the past few weeks, we have had Tories getting up and saying that they want statements, and you have had to reply to them. Sometimes you have had to do a bit of research to provide an authoritative answer. We know that the Tories are changing their policies on everything, and yesterday they demanded that a Minister should not make a statement to the House. I know that you have to respond to these idiots, Mr. Speaker. One day they want a statement, the next day they do not. Today, they want one again. Where the hell are we going?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman uses such terms against the Opposition.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): He used to be Dennis Skinner.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) always comes up with points of order and tries to give me advice, for which I am always grateful.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Further to your statement on Adjournment debates, almost all of which I heartily welcome, may I ask whether your restriction on the priority in ballots will apply when Members are concerned about their Fridays for the simple reason that many of them fill up their Fridays will constituency engagements, including constituency surgeries? Those of us who regularly apply for Adjournment debates know only at very short notice whether we have been successful, and, if we have not, it could be too late to do useful work for our constituents on the Fridays in question.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman will know by now that it is entirely up to him if he wishes to attend to his constituents in his constituency. If he wishes to apply for an Adjournment debate, which I take to be of benefit to at least one of his constituents, he must make a judgment. It is all a question of judgment.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will know that the whole House awaits, with fitting concern and apprehension, the report of the inquiry into the Hinduja affair. You will also know that there has been some speculation about the Cabinet Secretary's involvement, and that he has felt it necessary to write to a newspaper today on the subject.

The whole House wishes to safeguard and protect the independence and integrity of the civil service, including that gentleman's. He says that there is a note of his meeting with the Hindujas. Would you, Mr. Speaker—as our champion, and the personification of all that is good and noble about the House—ask the Prime Minister to ensure that a copy of that note is placed in the Library immediately, to avoid any further speculation about the Cabinet Secretary's involvement in these affairs?

Mr. Speaker: In spite of the hon. Gentleman's kind remarks, the answer is no.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the Adjournment debates in Westminster Hall that took over an hour each were largely tied to Select Committee reports. Such debates have been increasingly used as a means of bringing a wide debate on various Select Committee reports to the Floor of the House. Further to points that have been made this afternoon, may we now take it that if there are to be more half-hour debates on Members' particular interests in future, we shall have the opportunity to debate more Select Committee reports in the Chamber?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. Lady misunderstood. Instead of three separate hour-long debates, we shall now have two debates lasting an hour and a half. That is my explanation.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I am grateful for your ruling in relation to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Can you tell us within what time scale he will have to carry out his investigation, and whether, when he reports back to the House, he will do so by means of an oral statement or by some other means?

Will you make it clear to those who might be less familiar with our procedures, Mr. Speaker, that there is a big difference between what happened yesterday, when the Government insisted on making a statement on a Green Paper in Opposition time, and what happened today, when the Government refused to make a statement on a White Paper in Government time?

Mr. Speaker: I think that we dealt with the second point yesterday. I would expect the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to conduct an inquiry and reach a conclusion within a reasonable time.

BILL PRESENTED

Climate Change

Mr. Don Foster, supported by Mr. Tom Brake, Ms Joan Walley, Mr. David Chaytor and Mr. Simon Thomas, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to draw up and implement polices to alleviate climate change; to require the setting of targets for the achievement of those policies; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 9 March, and to be printed [Bill 44].

Rural Community Public Transport

3.43 pm

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to delegate further the provisions of rural public transport to voluntary organisations, district, town and parish councils; and to encourage and promote the use of such transport.

Many Members who are present today represent rural constituencies. They will be aware, as I am, of the difficulties faced by many people who live and work in the country. We are seeing an unprecedented decline in our local services: post offices, village shops, garages, youth clubs, community centres, the local doctor, the village pub and the local primary school. Many villages no longer have any of those services, and many villagers often have to make a 20-mile round trip to find them.

As local services have declined, transport has become more important. For many of my constituents, the car is an absolute necessity; it cannot remotely be described as a luxury. Indeed, for many families in which the husband and wife both work or there are small children, two cars are often essential.

As the Government have piled on fuel taxes, however, the cost of running a car has become prohibitively expensive. It is a necessity that many people can no longer afford. Some 20 per cent. of households in Norfolk do not have a car—or, if they do, it is only at the expense of something else, which seriously affects their quality of life. For many people—especially the young, the disabled, families on low incomes and those who are retired on fixed incomes—a car is simply too expensive. It is primarily with those people in mind that I am introducing this Bill. It is simply no good for the Government to continue to tax motorists without providing an alternative.

I do not believe, however, that the Government can produce a national blueprint for rural transport. The man in Whitehall invariably does not know best. It is time that the Government—who have taken centralisation, micro-management and bureaucracy to new heights—let go and left decision making to people who know the local situation and the needs of local people.

A good example of central Government getting it wrong was the original terms of the grant for rural bus services. County councils were not able to use the grant for existing bus routes. Consequently, sub-optimal routes were opened, leading to the frequent spectacle of large subsidised buses travelling half empty. The purpose of this Bill is to force the Government to decentralise decision making to the local communities that need and will use public transport. It is also designed to ensure that Government action supports voluntary organisations, not replaces them.

Last summer, I commissioned four students—Emily Hill, Kat Colley, Adam Rumley and Amy Weight—from Fakenham college, an excellent sixth form college in north Norfolk, to do a survey of public transport from the point of view of the young and to produce some recommendations. Their survey revealed that 102 of 135 students between 14 and 18 thought that their extra-curricular, out-of-school-hours activities were severely restricted by inadequate public transport. Forty-nine students revealed that there was no regular bus service through their village, and 75 stated that no bus route went where they wanted to go at a time when they wanted to go there.

The truth is that young people without access to a car living in places such as north Norfolk are effectively marooned. They cannot go to the shops in the main town, Norwich, or to the leisure centre, the cinema or even the bowling alley in Fakenham. Other people suffer, too. School leavers find it difficult to get to work or to training courses. Wages are often very low in the country, and even with a regular job it is very expensive to run a car. There are not many jobs left in our villages, and the recession in agriculture is making them even harder to find.

Older people, mothers with young children and disabled people are literally stranded, unable to reach market towns. A report commissioned last year by the Countryside Agency showed that in villages with a population of fewer than 1,000, 31 per cent. of people thought that public transport was "very bad". The truth is that public transport is too limited in scope; timetables are inconvenient and infrequent; bus stops are often too far away and have no shelter; the service is not reliable; the service is slow because of the circuitous routes required; and it is expensive, especially for students.

I accept that there is no magic wand to wave. Students at Fakenham college and I have reached the same conclusion: we should invest in local community transport that is flexible and customer oriented—such as the dial-a-ride flexi-minibus scheme in North Walsham, in north Norfolk; the dial-a-medic-ride scheme, which provides door-to-door transport to the doctor's surgery; and the Age Concern minibuses in Fakenham and Sheringham. The Sheringham service is being expanded to serve various other towns in north Norfolk and is providing a service for young people, too.

In future, the North Walsham dial-a-ride service will target young people who want to go to Cromer and Sheringham on a Friday or Saturday night. That is what people want—a service that is driven by demand and has no fixed timetable and no fixed route. It cannot be provided on a county or a national basis; it has to be provided on a very local basis. Many of those schemes are run by volunteers and by charities that often need a few thousand pounds to run the bus, to fund a part-time driver, to advertise for volunteer drivers and to maintain the vehicle. It would make an enormous difference to such schemes if they were eligible for a rebate on fuel duty. I was encouraged by the proposal in the rural White Paper to set up a parish fund to support small-scale transport projects and to minimise bureaucracy. I have a horrible feeling that, in practice, the bidding procedure will be complicated and the bureaucratic checks a nightmare. We shall see.

The Government put integrated transport high on their agenda when they came to power. They have not delivered. Public transport has got worse, not better. Community transport determined and funded at the local level is a commonsense way forward. It will deliver flexibility, accessibility, convenience and good value.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. David Prior, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Keith Simpson, Mr. David Ruffley, Mr. Richard Spring, Mr. Christopher Fraser, Mr. Desmond Swayne, Mr. Patrick McLoughlin, Mr. John Whittingdale and Mr. Tim Collins.

RURAL COMMUNITY PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr. David Prior accordingly presented a Bill to delegate further the provisions of rural public transport to voluntary organisations, district, town and parish councils; and to encourage and promote the use of such transport: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 6 April, and to be printed [Bill 46]

Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

3.51 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 22nd January:

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting.

2. Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at quarter past Eight o'clock.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock.

4. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Consideration of Lords Amendments and further messages from the Lords

5. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments; or

(b) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords,

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

The motion proposes that the remaining stages of the Bill be completed in the House today. It is supplemental to the programme motion approved for the Committee stage that finished, as planned, on 8 February.

For most of the time in Committee we had a constructive debate. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and to my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, North (Mrs. Adams), who chaired the Committee, and to the Committee's members. We had a very constructive debate about the detail of the Bill, and that debate improved the Bill. The debate in Standing Committee finished on time, with no guillotines imposed, and in fact the Government offered to run longer on one evening than was required. We had constructive discussions and I hope that we can have them again for the rest of today. We have plenty of time between now and 8.15 to conclude the debate.

I commend the motion to the House and hope that we can get on with the debate.

3.52 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Hon. Members will be familiar with the Government's proposal, which is a device for curtailing debate. However, this motion is an especially bad example, as connoisseurs of such matters among my hon. Friends will agree. This is the mother of Parliaments, and it might be useful if I explained to visitors how the device works and why they should appalled at the way in which the Government want to get their laws and run.

There has been no formal agreement between parties on the decision to complete the Bill's Report stage by 8.15 this evening. We were presented with a fait accompli, and the original deadline was earlier. I cannot believe that a major Bill, the subject of a Labour election manifesto pledge, is to be done and dusted by 9 o'clock tonight so that a second Bill can be considered before 10 pm. That beggars belief, and I hope that visitors to the House will be appalled.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): My hon. Friend is setting out cogently the appalling behaviour of the Government on this Bill, as on so many others. However, there is no time limit on the second Bill to be considered today. Therefore, does she agree that, however much the Government may intend to force things through on a rushed timetable, they may find that things work out very differently?

Mrs. Spelman: I do not think that I need add anything to what my hon. Friend has said. Perhaps his intentions and those of some of my other right hon. and hon. Friends will now be clear.

It was quite unnecessary for the Government to curtail this debate, not least because I believe that the Bill that follows is, on the whole, uncontroversial. However, the haste with which it has been introduced may give my right hon. and hon. Friends a different belief as to its controversial nature.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that many of the amendments that have been tabled, particularly on Friday, show that the Government have been caught by their own great rush. In effect, some 24 hours after denying that they were going to make changes, the Government have tabled amendments. Surely a bit more time would allow the Minister to get her Bill into some sort of order.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He served on the Standing Committee and was particularly affected by the haste with which the Bill was considered. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work. His knowledge of the internet and the way in which the internet service providers are likely to be affected by the Bill was invaluable. We shall come back to that tonight. I think that all right hon. and hon. Members would benefit from hearing what my hon. Friend has to say on the way new technology will be affected, but of course there is a risk. Curtailing the debate on Report by 8.15 means that we may not even reach that important part of the Bill. That is just one of the problems imposed by the guillotine.

I thought that it might be helpful to right hon. and hon. Members who did not serve on the Standing Committee, those who read *Hansard*, and visitors listening to the debate if I explained the background to the programme motion. Second Reading took place just over three weeks ago, on 22 January. We had only one week before this important Bill, with substantial implications for many groups in the economy and society, went into Committee. The Committee had to finish its consideration of the Bill by 8 February.

The Minister was kind enough to say that the Opposition's role in Committee had on the whole been constructive and helpful. Of course, we set out to be constructive. However, we had to hurry through some parts of the Bill in Committee and there were casualties, notably new clause 5. It is unfortunate that the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) is not in the Chamber, as he tabled new clause 5 for debate in Committee. As we began to run tight on time on the last agreed Committee sitting, the hon. Gentleman received an undertaking that his new clause would be brought back on Report. I was privy to the discussions that would make that possible, and the intention on both sides of the Committee was that the hon. Gentleman should have the opportunity to bring back his important new clause.

The new clause proposed establishing a new regulatory authority, recommended by the Royal College of Physicians. That recommendation came originally from the Select Committee on Health, no less, and enjoys cross-party support. So it is unfortunate that the unseemly haste with which we had to deal with the Bill in Committee has led to the removal of the opportunity for the hon. Member for Rother Valley to debate his new clause. I should certainly have liked the opportunity to speak on that important new clause, but that, unfortunately, is not to be today.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I echo my hon. Friend's tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), who is a truly outstanding technology anorak.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) agree that it would be particularly unfortunate if, as a consequence of the Government's truncation of debate on Report, four Government amendments in the later groups were not even reached?

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend exactly describes the position. We have no flexibility in this matter; it is clear that the Commons will not be able to complete its deliberations before the Bill has to go to another place. No doubt my hon. Friend's close reading of *Hansard* led to his deliberate joke about my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce). For the benefit of hon. Members who did not attend the Standing Committee, the reference to my hon. Friend as an anorak was in no way derogatory—quite the contrary. My hon. Friend brought an anorak bearing the Silk Cut logo to a meeting of the Standing Committee, in order to make the important point that the logos of well-known brands of tobacco are frequently displayed on items of clothing such as anoraks. As the subtlety of that joke might have been lost, I hope that my sharing it with the House has ensured that hon. Members do not miss its full nuances and that they realise that no derogatory intention attaches to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I declare an interest.

Does my hon. Friend agree that, although the Government think that programming this measure is clever because, in their view, getting legislation through fast is what it is all about, they might end up with quick but not better legislation? Our role as Back Benchers is to scrutinise legislation, but the Government are preventing us from doing so.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I do not agree with him that the Government

[Mrs. Spelman]

are being clever; it is arrogant to try to race a piece of legislation through the House just because they have a large majority. The Government are simply having their own way.

It is important to point out that the mechanics of opposition cannot be effective if the normal tools that the official Opposition need to do our job are not at our disposal. For example, the Committee stage of the Bill ended at 5 o'clock last Thursday; amendments for Report had to be tabled by 2.30 on Friday, but *Hansard* was not available in time for us to check exactly what the Government had agreed to reconsider during Report.

Mr. Hawkins: My hon. Friend may not have considered a further point that arises from the Government's appalling use of this new programming arrangement. In the past, as my hon. Friend and other hon. Members know, those of us serving on Bill Standing Committees were normally able to get into the meat of the Bill on Report and debate it as soon as Question Time finished, or after discussion of a 10-minute Bill, such as the excellent one introduced today by my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior). Under the current arrangements, we spend the whole of the first three-quarters of an hour discussing the evils of programming, and those of us who want to criticise a bad Bill that is unready for the statute book are unable to do so. We can raise only issues on programming. That is yet another negation of democracy by this appalling Government.

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. Connoisseurs of debates on programme motions will realise that it must be patently obvious to the Government that such debates are not a good use of parliamentary time. However, we should make it clear to occasional visitors to the House that, almost daily, the Opposition have to fight the same issue over and over again. We have to spend 45 minutes of a restricted period fighting for freedoms that are part of the democracy of this country—the ability properly to scrutinise legislation and to ensure that the best possible job is done—*[Interruption.]* We have been restricted in so doing. As I pointed out during the debate on the programme motion that followed Second Reading, I sincerely hope that the Leader of the House will review the effectiveness of the Government's decision to change parliamentary procedure in that way—it is seriously flawed.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend may not heard the observation made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) from a sedentary position—that we were not obliged to spend 45 minutes debating the timetable motion, but that we chose to do so. Does my hon. Friend agree that, if we did not do so, right hon. and hon. Labour Members would be the first to cite that as proof that we had no legitimate objections to the truncation of debate—when in fact we do, and they are numerous?

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend makes the point very well. Lest he should be disturbed by sedentary interventions from Labour Members, I must warn him that we must be prepared for quite a few of them during the debate. That was certainly my experience in the Standing Committee, and that feature of our debates in Committee is well recorded in *Hansard*.

It is also important that, whereas by convention, a decent period is allowed to elapse between the end of a Bill's consideration in Committee and its Report and Third Reading, Opposition Members have, in effect, had one weekend. That is, frankly, next to useless in terms of contacting the business community, which will be seriously affected by the Bill. Weekends are, to all intents and purposes, dead time for business, and with so little time to talk to those who will be directly affected, it has not been easy for the Opposition to prepare themselves for the debates on Report.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Did my hon. Friend share my experience—that members of the Standing Committee regularly received representations from organisations outside the House a day or two after we had discussed the relevant matters, so that those organisations have not had the chance to get their points of view across and we have not had the opportunity to consider them?

Mrs. Spelman: My hon. Friend makes a practical point, not unrelated to the disruption to some of the distribution services caused by the disintegration of our transport system—so much for the Government's integrated transport strategy. An impact of the disintegration of their transport strategy is that we can no longer rely on the post arriving on time. I certainly found myself similarly badly affected by the late arrival of important documents that would have supported our views at different stages of the Bill's progress.

In practical terms, when we arrived back from our constituencies yesterday, no fewer than 11 starred amendments had been tabled under the signature of the Secretary of State for Health. If any further proof were required of the disadvantages of rushing the Bill, that is clear evidence that the Government are rushing their own business. Many of those starred amendments address genuine issues of importance raised in Committee, so they were of great significance to us in preparing our response on Report; but virtually no time was left for us properly to consider their importance.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The fact that those amendments are starred will mean that interested external groups will not be able to comment on them, so any anxiety that they express will have to be addressed in the other place. That is profoundly unsatisfactory.

Mrs. Spelman: My right hon. and learned Friend should be aware of the danger of assuming that there might be time in another place to scrutinise the Bill properly. I understand that, of the two health Bills that were considered simultaneously in Committee, the Health and Social Care Bill, which will be considered in the Chamber tomorrow, will take precedence in another place, thus placing this Bill in a risky position if the Government go to the country early, which we understand is becoming increasingly possible.

Without in any way wishing to criticise the good offices of the House and the work of the Clerks, I wanted to draw your attention, Mr. Speaker, to the fact that the selection

of amendments was not known until after the vote at 7 o'clock yesterday evening. That certainly makes the work of the Opposition extremely difficult. By that time, all the businesses that might have wished to communicate with us about the choice of matters to be discussed today had all gone home, as regular business hours were over.

I should like to stress that in the rush, not surprisingly, some typographical mistakes have been made. I draw hon. Members' attention to the fact that amendment No. 13 should refer to clause 2(4), but it has unfortunately slipped through with a typographical error. That is what happens when we have to rush through legislation in this way.

There has been little chance properly to consult the people and organisations who will be affected. I was in the Library at 7.30 this morning because that was the only way I could catch up on the work and with the business community, which keeps different hours from the House's. That is not a good way to operate. It makes a mockery of the empty words about modernising the workings of the House and of the Government's attempts to introduce a family-friendly policy and transparent government.

The brutal truth is that the Government, who have a huge majority, want their Bill now, for their convenience, because of the imminent general election. They want to be able to tick the box of an election pledge and say that it was done, irrespective of whether the Bill is correct, has the right tools to be effective or deals justly with the people affected. They have not considered whether Labour Members might have something to say on the matter, perhaps to improve or enhance the Bill's effectiveness. They are simply impatient and want their ill-prepared and ill-thought-out Bill now—but unfortunately, it will not be properly scrutinised by the Chamber.

A report that was mentioned for the first time on "Newsnight" last night highlights the fact that adult smoking is rising for the first time in 30 years, according to Department of Health figures. The BBC News Online service, which also carried the story, says that that increase is thought to be a result of the high number of teenagers who took up smoking in the early 1990s. In light of that fact, it is important that we undertake proper scrutiny. We were at pains to point out on Second Reading that we strongly suspect that one of the main factors fuelling the increase in smoking—and we share the Government's interest in trying to reduce it—is the flood of illegally imported tobacco to this country. The Bill will do nothing about that. We seriously doubt its effectiveness unless the illegally imported tobacco floodgates are closed.

Another disturbing report is on students who are paid £25 an hour to smoke a brand of cigarettes in a pub, cafe or cinema. That is not advertising in the strictest sense—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady's comments have nothing to do with the programme motion.

Mrs. Spelman: I am happy to return to the programme motion; I was merely explaining that the debate's curtailment and the terms of reference that the Government have chosen to constrain this important subject mean that the Bill will miss the mark and we will not have time to get down to the real issues. The Government will get their way and imperfect legislation will be passed. We have been deprived of the tools and time to do a far better job.

4.13 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): The motion is not a programming motion; it is a guillotine. The programme motions for Committees can properly be described as such, but this motion has nothing to do with Committees. It provides a guillotine to deal with Report and Third Reading, and a guillotine motion is usually moved by the Leader of the House. It is not left—I do not mean to be unkind—to a junior Minister. It is wrong that she should face such a problem.

I am in favour of the Bill. I am also in favour of the modernisation of procedure, but the Government are making a mockery of the Modernisation Committee's intentions. They have also tabled a motion that means that debate can continue until any hour—perhaps 2, 3 or 4 in the morning—on a matter that is not of such importance. There is thus no reason why they should have limited the time that might be needed to deal with the host of amendments that have been tabled.

How will the Under-Secretary ensure that the Government amendments are carried? Most guillotine motions state that Government amendments will be taken at the end of the timed proceedings, but I see nothing in this motion that will allow that to happen. Presumably if the proceedings carry on until the time limit, the Government amendments will fall. Is that the case? If so, surely it is wrong. Not only are we right to say that the Bill will not be properly debated, but there will not be enough time for Government amendments to be debated and decided on. That makes a mockery of the procedure for Report stage and Third Reading.

Why are the Government doing this? I have the answer: it is intended to allow Labour Back Benchers to leave at 10 o'clock. That does not permit the proper scrutiny of legislation, and those of us who have been in this place for some time condemn absolutely the way in which the Government are trying to cut short proper debate on amendments on Report. I hope that we can ensure that it does not happen again. When those who are in favour of a Bill have to get up and complain that the Government's arrangements for debating that Bill are nonsense, there is something very wrong with the procedure in the House.

I am very sorry that the Under-Secretary has to sit there and take this criticism, which ought to be directed at the Chief Whip or the Leader of the House. It was they who decided on this procedure, not the poor Under-Secretary, so I hope that she will forgive me. None the less, she is the face of the Government on the Front Bench today and she must take this criticism.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I do not know whether my right hon. Friend realises that another precedent is being set today, but this is a Department of Trade and Industry Bill, not a Department of Health Bill, and it does not deal with issues on which the Under-Secretary is an expert. She has been hung out to dry by the Government, which is a shame for her future career.

Sir Peter Emery: I am very sorry for that. The hon. Lady is a very pretty thing to hang out to dry, and I do not mind being sexist in saying so. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. She and the duty Whip should acknowledge that the Government's attempts at modernisation—I am a member of the Modernisation Committee who has tried to assist in that process—

[Sir Peter Emery]

are backfiring because of their inefficiency and maladministration, and we should condemn that absolutely.

4.18 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am afraid that this is not the first time that I have had to speak on a programme motion, nor will it be the last. I have spoken on six or seven such motions since the beginning of the Session, and my purpose is to oppose them whenever I have the opportunity. I do not conceal from you, Mr. Speaker, the fact that some of what I shall say I have said before. The problem is that if we do not repeat our objections, right hon. and hon. Members may lose sight of the evil associated with these motions.

Let us be clear: this is a wholly arbitrary motion. The Report stage is to conclude at 8.15 and Third Reading is to conclude at 9 o'clock. There has been no discussion about that between Members who represent different parties; it is an arbitrary decision by the Government. They are determining the amount of time that is to be spent on this motion. That in itself is sufficient condemnation.

Let me make a point, which I have probably made four or five times before, about respect for legislation. A political society is based on a somewhat fragile compromise, one element of which is the belief on the part of the electorate that their elected representatives have properly scrutinised a Bill—or, to put it differently, have had the opportunity properly to scrutinise a Bill. Once a process is established that prevents that from happening, the implicit bargain that supports the legitimacy of what we do is destroyed. With these programme motions, we are undermining respect for democracy, because we are disenabling ourselves from scrutinising Bills properly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) made the point, rightly, that several of the amendments have been brought late to the House's attention. That has certain consequences, the first of which is that those outside the House who have an interest in the Bill do not have an opportunity to express their views to right hon. and hon. Members or to the Government. That is bad enough in itself, but it means that if those views are heard favourably by the Government or anyone else, the resulting amendments will have to be made in the other place. However, if amendments are made in the other place and we want to change them—as we, the elected Chamber, are entitled to do—we may well not have the opportunity to do so because the amendments from the other place will come to this Chamber on another timetable motion and, lo and behold, we shall find ourselves deprived of an opportunity to consider them. That is to make a mockery of the processes of a democracy.

Sir Peter Emery: The Government made it clear when introducing these procedures that they would ensure that all amendments and all parts of a Bill could be debated. I do not know whether that was done in Committee, but when a host of new amendments is introduced on Report and proper time is not given, the Government are falling down on the undertaking that they gave when they introduced the system.

Mr. Hogg: I am bound to say that the fact that the Government are falling down on their undertakings causes me no surprise. When they start to adhere to undertakings, I shall be surprised. My right hon. Friend makes an important point. He is right to say that new amendments will not be properly debated. If he followed my argument, as I know he did, about amendments being made in the other place and coming back to the House on a timetable, he will realise that they may never be debated at all by the House. By any standard, that is a disgrace.

From time to time, Ministers tell the House that their new clauses and amendments are but a reflection of discussions in Committee. They often say that and I have heard it many times. However, that is to miss the point, which is that Report stage is the first and only occasion on which the Chamber as a whole has an opportunity to scrutinise the detail of any part of a Bill. If the Report stage is truncated, it prevents those right hon. and hon. Members who did not serve on the Standing Committee from making a constructive contribution to the Bill.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will my right hon. and learned Friend address his remarks to the Government amendment that would increase the penalties under the Bill from a maximum of three months' imprisonment to a maximum of two years' imprisonment? That amendment was tabled—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is trying to debate the Bill, but we are debating a programme motion.

Mr. Hogg: I shall not, of course, address the merits of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), but it is relevant to the programme motion to state that a great extension in the penal powers contained in the Bill is likely to be passed by the House without discussion, and that cannot be right.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): So that everyone outside the House understands what is happening, I put the same question to the right hon. and learned Gentleman as I did the other week. Has he ever voted in favour of a guillotine? The answer is yes or no. As a Minister, has he ever had to preside over a guillotine from within his Department—again, yes or no?

Mr. Hogg: The answer is that I have voted for guillotines. I was a Minister for 13 years, so I know all about the conduct of Bills. Of course I have voted for guillotines.

I remind the hon. Gentleman that when the Conservative Government were dealing with the consideration of Bills in Committee, our practice was not to impose a timetable motion until at least 100 hours had passed. We never programmed in advance. I do not remember as a Minister, although I may have done so, seeking to programme consideration on Report when there was no evidence that Members were seeking artificially to extend debate.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. and learned Friend has an admirable memory. Does he recall the occasion upon

which my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) made precisely the same point? He told the House that, if as a Minister he had approached the Patronage Secretary to seek agreement on a speedy conclusion of business before 100 hours of consideration had taken place in Committee, he would have been sent away with a flea in his ear.

Mr. Hogg: If I had been the Minister responsible for the Bill in question, I would not have done that. I had too high a respect for the proprieties of Parliament. I remember consideration of the Firearms (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, which went right through the night. The hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) may remember the occasion. There were so many Divisions that Members were asked, when Divisions were called, to rise in their places. I believe that there were 57 Divisions. We never tried to guillotine that debate or to subject it to artificial constraint. We put up with the consequences.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: There is another question that demands a similar answer—yes or no. Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman ever vote for a motion on a guillotine following fewer than 100 hours of debate on a Bill?

Mr. Hogg: I cannot give a categorical answer. I was a Minister for 13 years, and I do not want to deceive the House. However, I can say with certainty that it was the Conservative Government's practice to allow consideration of 100 hours or more in Committee. I am not excluding the possibility that there might occasionally have been slightly fewer hours than that. However, in broad terms, 100 hours was a fair benchmark.

Programme motions are now being tabled in advance when there is no evidence that the debate will be artificially extended.

Mr. Evans: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that many people will wonder when the Government say, "We do not have the time"? We are about to go into yet another five-day break, a so-called half term, when we would be prepared to scrutinise legislation. The half term follows one of the lengthiest summer recesses that we have ever had. We have ample time to scrutinise legislation. There is nothing sacrosanct about the 10 pm cut-off. Many of us are prepared to go beyond 10 pm, if necessary, to improve legislation.

Mr. Hogg: I agree with that. My hon. Friend makes some important points. I am not in favour of legislating late into the night, but in the context of this place, I think that it is tolerable and proper to legislate between 10 pm and midnight. Thereafter, it is undesirable.

A problem that has arisen is that the volume of legislation that the Government are seeking to put through Parliament cramps the scrutiny of Bills. It is not a sign of parliamentary virility to pass Bills; usually, the fewer Bills the better. Parliamentarians would do well not to remove the checks and balances within the constitution that reduce the ability of government to legislate. We should stand by the checks and balances, and not dismantle them.

I wish to make one more substantive point.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: Keep it going.

Mr. Hogg: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, I shall give way. Does he?

Mr. Campbell-Savours *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hogg: Very well, I shall continue.

A Bill's Report stage is an important occasion on which Members can come to the House and, in the context of a group of amendments, say that a certain concern is troubling them. They can articulate their constituents' anxieties, and say that they have discovered problems of which the House should be aware. The effect of a guillotine—which is what the motion is—prevents Members from coming to the House for that purpose. Indeed, one explanation for the empty Government Benches is that the Government Whips have made it plain to Government Members that contributions will not be welcome. That is a denial of democracy.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): We can debate the pros and cons of programme motions for a long time to come. I suspect that when the Tories have a majority in the House of Commons, whenever that may be, there will not be much change from what is happening now. However, we shall see in due course.

Did the right hon. and learned Gentleman not put his finger on the issue when he said that he did not like too much legislation? I suspect that the reason why he is protesting now has less to do with the programme motion—I can understand opposition to that—than with the fact that the content of what we are to debate does not meet with his approval. By contrast, Government Members want to get such measures through as quickly as possible.

Mr. Hogg: I shall make two points in reply. First, when we get back into power—which we shall—my hon. Friends will find that if such programme motions are introduced, I shall speak against them as often and vigorously as I do now. Secondly, I am not against the Bill. I am flattered that the hon. Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) is seeking to listen to me. Broadly speaking, I am in favour of the Bill. I know that my hon. Friends wish to speak in this debate, so I shall sit down. However, I am strongly against the motion.

4.32 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): This is a pitiful and damnable motion and I am mightily relieved that Her Majesty's official Opposition intend to oppose it. I do not mind vouchsafing that, as a shadow Home Office Minister, I am not obliged to vote for this ghastly measure. Indeed, it is unfortunate that I do not have the opportunity or entitlement, apparently, as a member of the Conservative Front Bench, to vote against it.

However, I was heartened by what my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said on the subject. I am bound to reiterate the eloquent point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford

[Mr. John Bercow]

and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) a few moments ago: the Government have a regrettable tendency to behave as though detailed consideration in Committee suffices, and to believe that, as a consequence of that consideration by fewer than 25 Members, there is no need to detain the House long on Report and Third Reading.

That is a novel and, if I may so, obnoxious constitutional doctrine, which is certainly not acceptable to me. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who either have strong views about the principle of the Bill that they wish to develop on Third Reading, or want to table or speak to amendments and new clauses on particular details, should have every opportunity to do so.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is becoming itchy, so I shall give way.

Mr. Taylor: In his earlier comments, the hon. Gentleman seemed to suggest that he feels unable to vote against the programme motion. Surely such a well known pillar of integrity as himself is not selling his independence for the mess of pottage that is office in the next Conservative Government, which will be elected in about 2035?

Mr. Bercow: That is a nice try but, unfortunately, the hon. Gentleman misheard and got it wrong, which is not uncommon in the House. Let me make it clear beyond peradventure that I certainly intend to vote against this ghastly, risible, damnable programme motion. I was referring to the Bill itself a few moments ago.

Mr. Winnick *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: No, I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman, as that is invariably a fruitless expenditure of time. He is right only very occasionally, and almost always by accident.

I have two final points to make as I approach my conclusion. First, some of us, at least on the Opposition Benches, strongly subscribe to the doctrine of the American commentator, Walter Lipman, that in a free society, the state does not administer the affairs of men—and women, he ought to have said—it administers justice among men, and women, who conduct their own affairs. The Bill flies in the face of that doctrine. It is precisely because it is a nannying, molly-coddling, interfering, bureaucratic, bossy measure that we should have adequate time fully to debate it.

Secondly, to be obliged to debate 50 new clauses and amendments with an average allocation of four minutes for each is unacceptable. It is characteristic of the arrogance, disdain and contempt with which the Government treat the House. We should rightly vote against the motion.

(It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [7 November 2000].)*

The House divided: Ayes 290, Noes 172.

Division No. 117] **[4.35 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Clelland and
Mr. Kevin Hughes.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick

Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. James Gray and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 22nd January:

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting.

2. Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at quarter past Eight o'clock.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock.

4. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Consideration of Lords Amendments and further messages from the Lords

5. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments; or

(b) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords,

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

Orders of the Day

Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 4

PROHIBITION OR RESTRICTION OF USE OF SYMBOL, NAME OR EMBLEM

'The Secretary of State may by regulations make provisions prohibiting or restricting the use of a symbol, name or emblem used to promote a tobacco product, to promote a non-tobacco product or service except where the business producing the non-tobacco product or service is totally unconnected financially with the business producing the tobacco product and where the primary purpose of which is not to promote a tobacco product.'.—*[Mrs. Spelman.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.51 pm

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 51, in clause 11, page 5, leave out lines 24 to 28.

Government amendment No. 46.

Mrs. Spelman: We now have a rather limited opportunity for hon. Members who did not serve on the Standing Committee to debate the Bill. It was quite a small Committee—we discussed earlier how many people had had a chance to have an input—so this is the big opportunity for other hon. Members to contribute to the debate.

This is an important new clause, and I am glad that it has survived the culling of several of the important new clauses that we attempted to introduce. Indeed, it was the only one to survive. We are pleased that it has been selected, because it covers an important point.

Under the Bill, the Government are choosing that our nation will go it alone with a ban on tobacco advertising in Europe. We shall be going out on a limb by introducing such a ban. Companies that have hitherto been able to produce goods other than tobacco products—such as clothes, shoes, umbrellas, leather goods, perfumes and other cosmetics—bearing a symbol, emblem or logo similar to one connected with a tobacco product, will find that that is now illegal. That represents an important change in commercial practice, and it is right that we should take the time to debate its impact and workability, and to ask whether the drafting of the Bill is fair to those companies.

If I could characterise the Bill generally, I would say that it meant rough justice for the companies that will have to work with it. As it stands, it is an example of the rough justice dimension of the plan to ban tobacco advertising. The Bill will catch companies with household names, such as Alfred Dunhill, which has diversified substantially into a range of non-tobacco products, with which I am sure hon. Members are familiar. It will also catch companies such as Davidoff, which produces a range of products including cosmetics, luggage, eye-wear, coffee, comestibles and cigars. It began as a tobacconist, but has diversified into those other areas.

More worryingly, the Bill will catch companies such as Worldwide Brands International, which has diversified into a range of products that includes clothing, shoes and luggage, but not tobacco accessories. There is nothing in their palette of products that is a tobacco product, by any definition. Such a company, which is completely independent of the tobacco industry, will be caught by the Bill because its products bear an emblem that arguably resembles the logo or emblem borne by a tobacco product. I make no excuse for giving this example again, as I feel that the company is one of those to which rough justice will be meted out.

When the company started, it used the camel logo, with which I am sure Members are familiar, along with the yellow writing associated with the Camel brand of cigarettes. Even at that stage, nothing in the company's range—which included luggage, clothes, shoes and other fashion items—could possibly be described as a tobacco product. However, the company—which is based in both Germany and the United Kingdom—foresaw difficulties with the proposed European directive.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): What would happen if such an organisation, based in France or Germany, advertised in one of the international newspapers that are now printed in different centres? If it advertised in a newspaper circulating in both Paris and London, what might be the impact on the newspaper circulating in London?

Mrs. Spelman: We shall discuss in detail the predicament of companies operating in more than one market when we reach the next group of amendments.

As I said at the outset, a general problem with the Bill is that the United Kingdom is going out on a limb, and as a result a large number of diverse companies will be placed at a competitive disadvantage. We tried to make the Government aware of that in Committee. As my hon. Friend has pointed out, companies might advertise in more than one market. We tabled an amendment that would remove the competitive disadvantage and make companies free to compete in a global market, and my hon. Friend will note from what the Government say on the next group of amendments that they have conceded in that regard.

I want to concentrate on the brand-sharing problem, however, because I do not think that we have been given a satisfactory answer. I have given the example of Worldwide Brands International, but there are others. When the company learned of the proposed directive banning tobacco advertising, its reaction was similar to that of the Government, who have chosen to go it alone: it made an important investment. It made a conscious decision to change its logo—to change the name from Camel to Camel Active, and to replace the familiar yellow writing that we associate with the brand of cigarettes with a black and white script in a completely different style. It is difficult to illustrate this without useful equipment such as overhead projectors, to which I fear the "mother of all Parliaments" cannot stretch, even in the 21st century.

A great deal of subjectivity is attached to the whole question of whether the company's activities would now be banned. The Department has given it to understand that they would, and that its investment in the change of logo will have been in vain.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Why would the company continue to use the name Camel? Is it because it just happened to be there at the time, or was there some other motive?

Mrs. Spelman: I cannot answer that question, because I do not sit on the board of the company that made the decision, but, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, it is becoming very difficult to find a name that is unique, especially with the advent of the dotcom company revolution. That will make it even more difficult for the provision to work in practice.

The company has appealed to the Government for some guidance, or some amendments to the Bill. In fact—so that companies whose products have nothing whatsoever to do with tobacco, and whose primary purpose is not to promote tobacco, could be more justly treated—the company was encouraged by the Department itself to provide its own amendments. It has made the necessary investment to change its logo from one that much more closely resembles tobacco product logos—but it is still caught by the Bill's provisions.

5 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am listening intently to the development of my hon. Friend's argument. She will be aware that, on regulations and statutory instruments, I am a procedural anorak. Can she therefore tell me whether the regulations that would flow from new clause 4 would be subject to the negative or the affirmative procedure?

Mrs. Spelman: I am sorry to inform my hon. Friend that, although the principal statutory instruments that will flow from the Bill will be subject to the affirmative procedure, interestingly, an exception, and special arrangements, have been made for the sponsorship agreements—for Formula 1. Perhaps that will encourage him to stay in the Chamber until we debate that matter, if there is sufficient time to do so. The group of amendments on sponsorship is rather far down the list of amendments selected for debate.

Mr. Bercow: I know that my hon. Friend will agree that we would not want to be remiss by failing to ensure that members of the public who may be listening to the debate are aware of the meaning of the negative and the affirmative procedure. Will she therefore confirm that the Government's intention in using that procedure seems to be to avoid debate on the Floor of the House, for which the affirmative procedure provides? Is that not to enable them to save their own face?

Mrs. Spelman: There is a great deal of face saving in the Bill, which kicks decisions on many difficult issues into the long grass. Those issues will be subject to regulations that we have not seen, and will not be able to see while debating those issues. Even now, on Report, we cannot properly anticipate many of the difficulties and controversies surrounding the issues that will be dealt

[Mrs. Spelman]

with by regulation. That is a fundamental weakness in the way in which the Bill is constructed. The Bill is effectively an empty box, and we are being asked to sign up as supporters of its contents without knowing what they are.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): I am sure that my hon. Friend did not mean to mislead the House. Does she remember that the Minister told us that the Government would not introduce regulations under various parts of the Bill that provide for regulation? Therefore, in some cases people will have to guess what they might be doing wrong—for which they might subsequently be caught by regulation if a future Government decided to introduce such regulation.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend, with whom I spent many hours in Committee. Perhaps I could give hon. Members a flavour of the way in which the regulations will work. Although the power to make regulations has, in some cases, been provided in the Bill, a warning has been given that if everyone behaves and complies with the spirit of the Bill, it will not be necessary to make those regulations. The provision will hang over those who have to operate under the Bill as an incentive to get it right first time. If they do not, they risk a rap on the knuckles, or perhaps being taken to court, so that the meaning of the regulations can be clarified. That is a very strange way of regulating businesses that, until now, have been able to advertise legally. They will suddenly discover that some of the things that they have been doing, quite legally, have become illegal. The threat of regulation will hang over such companies if they get it wrong. The Bill places business in a very difficult position.

I want to return to questions about brand sharing that were not answered adequately in Committee, and I hope that the Minister will take this opportunity to answer a very important question. The UK has decided to introduce a ban on tobacco advertising ahead of other European Union member states. Legal professionals advised the Commission and other interested parties when the intention at a European level was to proceed to a directive regarding the ban on tobacco advertising. Does the Minister agree that their comments might have some relevance today? The conclusions reached about brand sharing at the time are relevant to what the UK is about to do unilaterally.

The Advocate-General's opinion is important in this respect. The Advocate-General held that the restrictions then proposed on

"brand diversification advertising violated the right to freedom of speech, as guaranteed by Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights".

Does the Minister think that the Bill as drafted is in contravention of the same article? We did not get an answer to that in Committee, yet it would be relevant to our debate this evening. I, for one, would like to know the answer.

The Advocate-General also held that

"the Community legislator had not presented any evidence to suggest a link between brand diversification advertising, and overall tobacco consumption and that there were therefore no reasonable grounds to justify the restrictions on freedom of speech provided for in the Directive".

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend has made an important and salutary point, but is she referring to the Advocate-General in the European Court, or to the Advocate-General for Scotland, the hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark)?

Mrs. Spelman: I am referring to the Advocate-General of the European Court of Justice.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): I have been listening closely, but will the hon. Lady confirm that she is saying that if the makers of Silk Cut, a brand-named cigarette in the United Kingdom, decided to sell trousers, they could erect, at every football ground in the country, huge signs with the words "Silk Cut" on them? Is not the presumption in the defence of the new clause being offered by the hon. Lady, that the words would not be identified with cigarettes because they were being used in relation to trousers? Does that not appear to the hon. Lady somewhat nonsensical? Would not anyone seeing a sign that says "Silk Cut" think of cigarettes rather than trousers?

Mrs. Spelman: With respect, if he reads the new clause, the hon. Gentleman will see that it covers non-tobacco products or services from companies that are

"totally unconnected financially with the business producing the tobacco product".

That is an important distinction.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I shall put the question another way. For the sake of argument, let us say that the manufacturer of Clarks shoes has no connection with any tobacco company, in this country or any other. Under the new clause, would it be acceptable for that company to call a range of shoes the "Silk Cut" range?

Mrs. Spelman: Common sense tells me that people wanting to buy shoes would be far more attracted by the good reputation of Clarks as a manufacturer than by any name chosen for a particular style of shoe.

Mr. Barron: The hon. Lady is avoiding the issue.

Mrs. Spelman: I am not; it is Labour Members who are avoiding an issue that is uncomfortable for them. The Government have chosen to go ahead with a ban on tobacco advertising, but at one time there was a Europe-wide attempt to introduce a directive with the same objective. The view of legal professionals at a European level was that banning advertising through brand sharing represented a contravention of article 10 of the European convention on human rights. It is legitimate for the Opposition to ask the Government, who intend to go down that road, whether they are satisfied with the procedure, although their opinion on that issue is different from that of the Advocate-General in Europe.

We did not get an answer from the Minister in Committee, and it is important to come back to the question today. Worldwide Brands International is, quite legitimately, asking me, as a representative of the Opposition, to put that question to the Government, as it cannot get an adequate reply. Of course the issue is important to such a company; it may wish to go to the European Court for a ruling on whether this piece of British legislation, which will affect it significantly, represents a contravention of article 10 of the European convention on human rights.

It stands to reason that if the Advocate-General of the European Court of Justice was giving that advice not so long ago, the issue has already been considered at a high level. That is a good reason for bringing the question to the debate. Of course we do not want to pass legislation that is promptly found to contravene the European convention on human rights.

Things are particularly difficult for our legislature at present, as we have incorporated the convention into British law only very recently. This issue has to be worked through. I should have thought, however, that the Government would have anticipated the problem, which has already arisen at a European level, and that they would be ready to answer the question today. That is why it is important to return to the point, which was debated in Committee. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members understand our rationale in coming back to it, because we need to find the answer.

I find it difficult to understand why there is such strong opposition to legitimate diversification by companies that have nothing to do with the tobacco industry. Why do we want to make it so difficult for companies to diversify? Surely, with our shared public health agenda of trying to reduce the prevalence of smoking—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle) gives me rather a contemptuous look, but I assure her that we share the Government's desire for a reduction in smoking. I do not know how many times I have to say that to get my point across. Perhaps this will be the last time this evening.

It is surely desirable for tobacco companies to produce other products if possible. I confidently predict that a consequence of depriving companies of the opportunity of brand sharing will be to weaken their competitiveness. I am confident that the legislation will lead to the ascendancy of foreign brands of tobacco coming into this country. That is already a feature of the flow of illegally imported tobacco.

I referred in the programme motion debate to students being offered £25 to promote tobacco brands on university campuses. The brand of tobacco in question was, in fact, foreign. That is the tip of the iceberg. We will see foreign brands coming into this country, and we will have shackled our own tobacco companies so that they have no way out.

5.15 pm

Mr. Atkinson: On the impact of illegally imported tobacco and tobacco products, is it not true that although the most popular rolling tobacco in this country is Drum, it is not legally available anywhere in this country? If a legitimate business—unconnected with tobacco—was also called Drum, what would happen to it? Such a business could be caught by the measure.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I am not the ideal person to answer it—that is for the Government. However, as the Minister is engaged in another conversation at present, she will be unable to answer my hon. Friend's question, unless someone can give her a note of it.

My hon. Friend's point is important. There will be many more such examples. Surely we should encourage tobacco companies to diversify—possibly by making a new name for themselves in completely different markets.

Through amendment No. 46, the Government are trying to come some way towards meeting the Opposition on the matter. However, that amendment falls far short of the assurances that we seek from them. It reads like wishful thinking. It says that the Government "may" make an exception for companies as regards brand sharing. That will not be good enough for companies such as I have described. Those companies have already made a significant investment in changing their names and symbols, only to be told that that will not protect them.

The amendment does not offer sufficient assurances to such companies. They would prefer provisions such as our new clause, which would redress the balance by moving away from the rough justice that would be meted out under the Government's brand-sharing proposals and their rather weak effort to provide scope for exceptions, if they are so minded. There is no clear statement in the Bill of the circumstances in which the Government might be prepared to grant such exemptions. That will be subject, once again, to regulation. Yet again, a controversial aspect of the Bill is being kicked off into the long grass. The matter will be subject to regulations. When? We do not know—at some point in the future.

Meanwhile, the harsh reality is that a company such as Worldwide Brands International has to carry on its business. Will it be guilty of an offence? Will it have to go to court to prove that it has made an effort to alter its logo, and that the new logo is no longer similar to the original logo associated with tobacco products? Will such a company have to go to all that expense while the Government make up their mind whether to make an exception for it?

The amendment is far too vague. It offers insufficient reassurance to companies that have made a real effort to comply with the original European directive. They have followed to the letter the advice of the Advocate General; they believed that such advice might logically apply if a member state decided to go it alone down the road originally intended for the directive. Instead, however, those companies have been left confused. It is that confusion and lack of clarity that our new clause attempts to address. That is why I commend it to my hon. Friends.

The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper): I begin by responding to some of the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). She referred

[Yvette Cooper]

to some of the broader issues that arise on brand sharing—a matter on which we held a detailed discussion in Standing Committee.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The detailed discussion consisted of exchanges between the hon. Lady and my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that lasted less than 15 minutes.

Yvette Cooper: I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government offered more time for debate in Committee, and if the Opposition had wanted to, they could have taken up that offer. The point that he makes about the time that was available in Committee is, frankly, inappropriate.

If brands are distinct, they will not be covered by the regulations on brand sharing. We have made it clear that our intention is not to catch all products that share the same name, and we are certainly very sympathetic to the need to support business diversification. If the intention is not to promote a tobacco product, the firm involved should have no problem with distinct branding. We have declared our intention to consult in detail on the regulations, because this a complex subject and the companies involved will want time to make representations. That is important.

The wording of new clause 4 would create all kinds of problems. It would exclude from the scope of the regulations on brand sharing arrangements in which no financial link existed between the brand company and the tobacco company, and in which the primary purpose of the new branded goods was not to promote a tobacco product. A company could easily argue that its primary purpose was not to promote a tobacco product; it would argue that its primary purpose was to promote a product—trousers, boots, or whatever—but its secondary or alternative purpose might include promoting tobacco products. It would certainly be inappropriate if the Bill were to state that a company would be covered by the provisions on brand sharing only if its primary purpose was to promote tobacco products.

Another problem with new clause 4 is that the Opposition insist that the companies must be "totally unconnected financially", but it is not clear what that phrase means. For example, would a wholly owned subsidiary be included? Would it include arrangements in which no corporate links existed between companies but directors from, for example, BAT were shared or sat on the board of another company in a non-executive capacity? Would it include a publicly quoted company with a tobacco company as a major shareholder?

I ask all those questions because of the evidence that has emerged, especially in litigation in the United States, from tobacco companies about their attempts to use brand sharing as an alternative way to promote tobacco products and, where necessary, to try to create different legal and perhaps corporate separation between the companies, but where the aim is still to promote tobacco products. For example, a document from RJ Reynolds that emerged during the US litigation states:

"In the context of a total advertising ban on direct and indirect advertising as of January 1993, communication continuity is undoubtedly 'The' issue to be solved during the plan period. The only remaining tool is logo license activities provided they are marketed by a company financially and legally distinct from a tobacco company".

In another document, RJR states:

"In order to fulfil its mission, logo licence will be operated as diversification business in line with the respective brand positioning statement. This will be achieved a) through a separate legal entity, b) with consumer relevant products/services/events, c) owning registrations of international trademarks in pertinent categories d) being profitable within an economically reasonable period and"—

this is critical—

"e) attracting the cigarette brand's target group."

There is plenty of evidence to show that brand sharing has been used abroad and in this country to promote tobacco products. I am extremely concerned that new clause 4 and the consequential amendment—amendment No. 51—could introduce a major loophole in the ban on tobacco advertising and allow considerable advertising to continue through indirect means.

The hon. Member for Meriden referred to the European convention on human rights. We have made it clear that the Bill is compatible with the convention. The Advocate General did not consider the Bill or evidence on brand sharing when he pronounced on the European directive. He did not make a decision on a point of principle and concluded that there was sufficient evidence on direct advertising to justify the directive, which he did not think was in conflict with article 10. There is enough evidence, especially on children's familiarity with brand sharing products and the links between brands, for it to be clear that the Bill is also compatible with the convention.

Government amendment No. 46 will clarify the Bill so that firms that comply with, and trade their products under, brand sharing regulations do not get caught by any of the Bill's other provisions, such as those in clause 2. That is not the intention of the regulations. If a company's products—whatever they might be—are acceptable under the regulations, the amendment ensures that they will not unintentionally be affected by the provisions on advertising. It will make the arrangements easier for businesses.

We have set out our intention to consult on the regulations. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made it clear on Second Reading that we want to do that as soon as possible and to begin the process during the Bill's passage through Parliament. We also want to consult our European partners because European issues, too, are relevant. We will also discuss the appropriate time scales for the introduction of the regulations.

Mr. Bruce: Has the hon. Lady sent draft regulations for consultation—and if not, why not?

Yvette Cooper: The draft regulations have not been published for consultation, but they will be produced at the earliest possible opportunity, as we have made clear several times.

There are plenty examples of business diversification. For example, Philip Morris owns Miller beer. Those are distinct brands and it is clear that there is no brand sharing. We are keen to promote brand sharing, but we also want to ban tobacco advertising and prevent companies from using brand sharing as a way round the ban.

The regulations will be subject to detailed consultation. We have made it clear that we do not intend to cause problems for brands that are distinct from tobacco brands. I urge the House to accept Government amendment No. 46 and reject new clause 4 and amendment No. 51.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I apologise if I cover ground that was dealt with by the Committee, but I was fortunate enough not to have to serve on it.

The Minister says, "Trust us. We will get this right and send out some regulations", and we have had to accept a debate on Report that is truncated and disgracefully short; but brand sharing is a key problem for the industry to face, and the regulations have not even been written. The House is having to decide crucial issues when we know nothing about the Government's proposals.

Mr. Bruce: Surely the point is that no one has been able to produce a sensible response to the problem of brand sharing. The Government have not provided draft regulations because that is an almost impossible task, but the House is being asked to agree the Bill tonight.

5.30 pm

Mr. Atkinson: My hon. Friend makes my point for me. The problem is that a key piece of the Bill is missing, yet we are asked to nod it through tonight on the basis that the Government have said, "Trust us, we don't want to stop companies brand sharing."

The Bill is to be enforced by the weights and measures authorities. Are we to trust the same people who prosecuted a market trader in Sunderland for selling goods in pounds and ounces? Hon. Members have raised several problems related to brand sharing. I am concerned about the illegal rolling tobacco, Drum, which is available in this country. What would happen if a perfectly legal company in this country had the same name? Would the weights and measures people arrest its proprietors? A European brand of cigarettes, called Olympia or Olympic—I cannot remember which—is available in this country. What would happen if a business in this country shared that name? Those will be concerns for large companies, and we are making decisions without even knowing what the regulations will say.

Earlier, I mentioned to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) a point about newspapers and other publications that are printed simultaneously in different countries. The *International Herald Tribune* is printed in a number of centres in Europe at the same time, and the *Financial Times* is printed simultaneously in Frankfurt and London. A newspaper's editorial office in Paris might insert an advertisement for a brand of Camel boot or the "Silk Cut" trousers to which the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours) referred. Pages are sent from one country to another, and there may be no editorial interference in the printing process in this country. Presumably, then, international newspapers that sell copies in the United Kingdom will have to refuse all such advertisements. A French newspaper might have refuse advertisements from a French business.

Mr. Bercow: This is a thorny area. Would it not be helpful if the Under-Secretary were to indicate, if she has not already done so, that she intends to provide a minimum of three months for consultation on the regulations? In the light of the likely burden that the regulations, be they desirable or undesirable, will impose on businesses, especially small businesses, does my hon. Friend agree that there should be a minimum of three months' notice of the requirement to implement the regulations?

Mr. Atkinson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and I would welcome a reply from the Under-Secretary. A minimum of three months' notice would be extremely helpful.

I want to pursue the question of publications. It is very easy to buy foreign language magazines in this country. I think of French and German magazines that are printed abroad and shipped here, which will of course carry tobacco advertisements. I did not attend the Committee, but from a brief reading of the Bill I can see nothing that would protect those companies. A German company could be prosecuted in this country because it sold a magazine containing a cigarette advert in the UK.

Does that mean that special UK editions of those magazines would have to be printed, which would hardly be economic, or would they have to be withdrawn from sale in this country? That question demonstrates the idiocy of proceeding with the Bill without the consent of fellow members of the European Union, who are moving towards a ban on tobacco advertising. It would be helpful if the ban were imposed Europe wide, instead of the Government going it alone.

I hope that by the end of the debate this difficult issue will have been clarified. Even if the Minister for Public Health will not produce the regulations or give us any idea of their contents, perhaps she will address our concerns when she winds up.

Mr. Ian Bruce: In Committee, I was prevented from making the speech that I am about to make because the Opposition were trying to help the Government to get the Bill through Committee in the limited time available in a way that allowed the maximum discussion of items on which we had to make a decision. The issue that we are debating, brand sharing, is important because it might affect companies that have nothing to do with tobacco. We can all argue about whether we want to reduce tobacco consumption—although everyone on the Committee was in favour of that—but no one intends to damage companies that have never been involved in tobacco.

Throughout the Committee proceedings, I trailed the fact that I intended to speak about the brand that is in front of you, Mr. Deputy Speaker: the portcullis. It appears on my cufflinks, and Members of Parliament are proud of the fact that it appears on our letterhead. You might not realise this, but in the House of Commons bars and the Gift Shop it is possible to buy House of Commons branded cigarettes, which carry the portcullis logo. Cigarettes are not the only product that the House of Commons sells: we sell water, teddy bears and whisky and we provide services through our Banqueting Department. The House of Commons is engaged in a commercial business, and I suppose that we should all declare an interest in that respect. We might all be prosecuted when the Bill is passed.

I meant to begin my speech by declaring an interest: my wife and I are beneficial owners of a few shares in Imperial Tobacco. We never bought the shares, but the

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

demerger of a company in which we had bought shares resulted in our becoming the owners of the Imperial Tobacco shares.

The example I give, however silly it might appear, illustrates the fact that people brand share. The Houses of Parliament or House of Commons brand is a brand share. Were I advising the House authorities, I should immediately tell them that they must stop selling cigarettes carrying the House of Commons brand; either that, or Members of Parliament should stop using the portcullis or even the name of this place to ensure that we do not break the law as it will be when the Bill is passed.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: My hon. Friend raises an interesting question of parliamentary sovereignty. Would parliamentary sovereignty apply and thus enable us to ignore the legislation and continue to sell the cigarettes?

Mr. Bruce: When my hon. Friend and I became Members of Parliament, parliamentary sovereignty existed, but new Labour does not care about such things. The current Government continually undermine the rights and privileges of the House of Commons—*[Interruption.]* Does the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) wish to intervene? He is always chuntering—oh, he has risen to his feet, just to show that he is here. I give way to him.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The hon. Gentleman refers, tangentially, to the loss of parliamentary sovereignty in terms that suggest that most of that loss has occurred since 1997. However, I do not believe that Labour was in government when the Maastricht treaty was signed. Will he confirm that?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. It would be helpful if the hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) returned to the new clause that is the subject of our debate.

Mr. Bruce: I had not left that subject, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and, as you rightly say, I could not possibly respond to that intervention. I was foolish and over-generous to give way to the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire.

In tabling the new clause, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) is attempting to help the Government not to fall into a gaping hole. One might say that it does not matter if House of Commons branded cigarettes cease to be. I should prefer that we did not have such cigarettes—indeed, under the previous Government, the Refreshment Department announced that it had decided not to have the cigarettes any more and that it would phase them out by selling whatever stocks it held. There must have been about 10 years of stock because packets are still being sold. It may be nice to have them, but why do we not set an example and say that we shall not share our brands with tobacco? [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I am glad that I have some support for that.

I hope that the House will listen to what I have to say about brand sharing. We are all aware of Imperial Tobacco. The word "imperial" is a brand share with many other companies. For example, there is Imperial Chemical Industries. There must be thousands of companies that have "imperial" in their names. Imperial mints is a generic term.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): There is the Imperial war museum.

Mr. Bruce: It shares a name with tobacco. Once we have seen the regulations, will we be able to attach "imperial" to any product, company or anything else, given that that is brand sharing? The Minister does not have an answer, but perhaps she will surprise us later.

What about Marlboro? The Marlboro cafe in my constituency serves some of the best fish and chips in the country. I do not know why it is called the Marlboro cafe, but it is. It is advertising the well known name of a tobacco product. Is the cafe to change its name? Is it to be prosecuted? I need to know.

There is Embassy, and hundreds if not thousands of companies use that name at the beginning of their—

Mr. Taylor: So what?

Mr. Bruce: If the hon. Gentleman owned Embassy Cars, which I think is a company in my constituency, he would be concerned. He would have to ensure that all his advertisements were changed. He would have to ensure that they referred to cars and not to the tobacco company. That sharing of a brand name has nothing to do with the ownership or the promotion of tobacco. That was never thought about. That is an example of what we must be worried about.

There are other examples. Dunhill is a brand of lighters as well as cigarettes. It might be said that brand sharing is taking place, but I think that Dunhill—

Mr. Luff: Watches and aftershave.

Mr. Bruce: I wish that I had asked my hon. Friend to write my speech in advance. If he had done so, I would not have to keep referring to him. I know that there are many products with the name Dunhill. They may originally have been attached to tobacco, or they may have been completely independent, in common with the examples that I have already given.

What about Lambert and Butler? Will it be necessary for people to change their name by deed poll if it is either Lambert or Butler, especially if someone wants to start a business? I suspect that there are a few Rothmans floating around. Superking is a nice brand name. An enormous number of products use "super" and "king" in their names. There is St. Bruno rolling tobacco. Are we not to have Bruno Brookes on the radio any more? Will the boxer no longer be able to fight?

There is Golden Virginia—*[Interruption.]* Members laugh, but I am giving examples of people who will have to ask, "Is this brand sharing?" The Government and the Minister have not given us an inkling of what the regulations will provide. What is the point? The Government are trying to ensure that, come the general election, they can say that they have done the business and introduced an Act. If they have not published the draft regulations by then, they certainly will have not done the business.

What will happen if the Bill succeeds in stopping advertising? The tobacco industry often wants to launch new products, sometimes ones that are less lethal than others currently on the market. We should necessarily encourage that, but what will a company do when it names its product? It will almost certainly use a generic name—a household word—associated with other products that already share the brand. Why should a British company be attacked by a tobacco company—with the tobacco company, in effect, stealing a generic name that it cannot patent or copyright—and be caught by the Bill when it has never had anything to do with the tobacco industry?

5.45 pm

Brand sharing is about trying to link qualities that people associate with the word "king", "golden" or "Golden Virginia" with the quality of the product that a company is trying to sell. Its product may kill people more quickly, but it is trying to shift that perception towards something that we automatically think is good. The Minister said that that was brand sharing. She cannot therefore ask Parliament, sight unseen, to pass the Government amendment without accepting the amendments that my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden has tabled, or explaining how companies unrelated to tobacco activities will not be affected by the regulations.

Parliament has waited for the Government to introduce something that they said they were going to introduce four years ago. The European Union introduced regulations that were found to be illegal. I do not believe that the Government have done their homework and got this right. We should not accept the Bill without new clause 4.

Mr. Barron: I rise, not to speak too long on the matter, but to say that there is a bit of history behind it which Opposition Members seem to have forgotten. I know that they have been told before that brand sharing is one way in which tobacco companies have got around tobacco advertising Bills. On Second Reading, I mentioned what happened when the Italian Government introduced a ban on tobacco advertising. There were brand names on children's toys and all sorts of things were advertised on television, so it was clear what the ban was designed for.

In view of my criticism of the Conservative party over the years, I should not be surprised at the fact that not only was it addicted to tobacco companies for a long time, but it is still addicted to them. I should have thought that it would take up one of the cessation programmes that the Government have been making available for the past four years to try to get people off their unhealthy addictions.

Mr. Bruce: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Barron: In a few minutes; I just want to get on to some of the surrounding issues.

The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) seemed to think that the Government do not want tobacco companies to diversify. Of course, we do; that is exactly it. However, by presenting her publication at the Dispatch Box, the hon. Lady was trying to defend a company that came into being when tobacco advertising bans started to appear around the world. She must ask herself whether a brand like Camel, which has been advertised across the world, would allow somebody to come along, take its copyright and use that word to sell another product. It is not believable that there was not, and is not, a connection between that publication, which sells clothing, and Camel's advertising and organisation.

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) ought to ask whether the Marlboro cafe in his constituency, the Marlboro Classics shop in Covent Garden and Marlboro coffee are connected with Marlboro tobacco and Philip Morris. They are connected, and were brought into being to brand-stretch and brand share because of public health decisions that were taken to stop the promotion of tobacco products around the world. When the hon. Member for Meriden says from the Dispatch Box that the Government's decision today will mean that Britain is the first country to ban tobacco advertising, after previous attempts resulted in losing cases in the European Court and defeat by the tobacco companies, she is wrong. Many countries have banned tobacco advertising for many years.

I draw the attention of my hon. Friend the Minister to that fact that, when I tried to promote a Bill not dissimilar to this under the private Members' Bill procedure back in 1994, there was one company that stood out. One could honestly say that it was using a name that was now on a tobacco product, but which had not initially been associated with the promotion of tobacco. That firm was Alfred Dunhill. I do not believe that it is a front for a tobacco company to get round a ban on tobacco advertising.

I shall be interested to see what regulations are drawn up. They are necessary, whatever the Opposition may say. The reason for sports sponsorship in the UK is that the advertising of cigarettes on television was banned in 1965. That is why tobacco firms started to sponsor cricket and Formula 1. They do it throughout the world.

My hon. Friend the Minister quoted documents arising from the litigation of RJ Reynolds, an American tobacco company, in the United States. The documents show what such companies do when they brand share or brand-stretch: they promote tobacco products. That is what Marlboro Classics is about, and in my view, the same applies to the Camel company. I hope that the Government will come down hard on that. It makes no sense to ban tobacco advertising if the companies are allowed to spend their hundreds of millions in other ways to promote tobacco in this country or any other.

Yvette Cooper: I shall respond briefly to the points raised. We will be happy to have a considerable period of consultation on the regulations. We are sympathetic to appropriate transitional periods for the implementation of the regulations, as we have demonstrated with regard to other aspects of the Bill.

International publications are dealt with in clause 4(1)(c). Publications whose principal market is not the UK are excluded. The intention of the Bill and the brand-sharing regulations is to prevent the promotion of tobacco products. That will be the test. It is not our intention to prevent diversification, or to catch companies or products just because they bear the same name.

New clause 4 would introduce a substantial loophole. That is why we are opposing both it and amendment No. 51.

Mr. Bruce: The hon. Lady cannot get away with saying that the regulations will protect firms that have

[Mr. Bruce]

nothing to do with tobacco. Can she describe to the House how the regulations will be phrased?

Yvette Cooper: We will publish the regulations for full consultation. We have made clear in this debate and in Committee our intention with regard to brand sharing, and the clear intention of the Bill to prevent the promotion of tobacco products.

Mrs. Spelman: I hate to inform the House that we have got to exactly the point that we reached in Committee. We did not run out of time on the brand-sharing clause, but we could not usefully proceed in Committee. The Government said that they would undertake a huge consultation exercise, and we cannot get a clear idea of what will be in the regulations until that consultation has taken place. That seems to be putting the cart before the horse.

The consultation exercise should surely occur before the draft regulations are issued. We would be in a far better position to decide whether they would be excessively punitive if we knew what was in the regulations. The Minister said in Committee:

"We certainly recognise the need for proper and thorough consultation. We are also keen to consult with the European Commission on its proposals. We recognise that this is a complex area and we are keen to have a thorough and effective consultation process"—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 6 February 2001; c. 152.]

We cannot accept the vague commitment in the Government amendment, when the consultation exercise has still to take place. That is why we sought through our new clause to clarify the situation. It is a feature of the Bill that so much is being left to subsequent regulations, and this is a particularly bad example of that. Companies will be put in an impossible position.

Mr. Bruce: Will my hon. Friend make it clear that we totally reject the remarks of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron)? Under our Government, tobacco consumption was falling, whereas under this Government, it is going up. We are attempting to help this miserable Government to do something sensible, for a change.

Mrs. Spelman: I should have tried at the beginning, as we have tried so many times, to make it clear to the hon. Member for Rother Valley that it is not our purpose to take up the cause of tobacco companies, as he continually implies. As my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said on Second Reading, we have no love for tobacco companies. I hope that, having been present in Committee, the hon. Member for Rother Valley will recognise how carefully we have striven to uphold the public health agenda throughout the debate. We have not departed from that.

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: No. I am rather tired of accusations being made about a position that we do not defend.

I shall comment on some of the specific points made by the Minister. She said that the Bill was compatible with the European convention on human rights. It seems that companies such as Worldwide Brands International will have no alternative but to slug it out in the courts. It will be one lawyer's opinion against another. If the Advocate-General was willing to put on record his view that the brand-sharing advertising restriction was not compatible with article 10 of the convention, it is perfectly legitimate for the company to pursue the matter in the courts, to see whose legal opinion will win the day. I am not qualified to give advice, but it seemed a rather sweeping statement to say that the Bill was indeed compatible.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way, and I do not want to interrupt her train of thought. When the Minister replied in double-quick time and covered some of the points that I had raised about newspapers and publications, she did not deal with the point that some of the foreign publications are printed in the UK. According to the Bill, a publication is exempt if it is printed outside the UK and its principal market is not the UK, but what happens if it is printed in the UK, even if its principal market is not the United Kingdom? I was hoping that the Minister would answer that.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that he will make all those important points again on the next group of amendments.

The Minister asked how I would define a company that was totally unconnected with a tobacco company. I am a health spokesman, not a DTI spokesman. The issues of company law and the Minister's questions to me demonstrate the extent to which the Bill is wide of being a health Bill. It deals with international competition and the way in which companies are structured.

Surely the Minister understands the spirit behind our new clause, which was intended to take on board the point made by the hon. Member for Rother Valley. Of course we do not want to create a massive loophole through which tobacco promotion is allowed to accelerate, or to fuel the prevalence of smoking. That is the spirit of our new clause. If the hon. Gentleman needs yet more proof—

Mr. Barron: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Spelman: No, I am not prepared to give way. The hon. Gentleman simply will not believe our party's stance. He refuses to believe that we share the public health agenda and the aim of reducing smoking. I have grown weary of telling him that in different ways on different occasions. I am sure that the House does not want to hear it again.

We shall press our new clause because the Government amendment will not provide assurances to the companies that will have to work with the Bill. The promises of regulations in the future, which are to be preceded by a massive exercise in consultation, are a further reason why we consider it important to bring clarity to the debate on brand sharing and advertising, for the sake of all those who will have to work with the Bill. We have heard no clarification from the Minister today, and we find it difficult to accept that the Government amendment would be adequate.

Our new clause would be a great deal more successful in bringing clarity to the Bill concerning the exception that could be made for a brand-sharing arrangement by a company that has carried out its business legitimately up

to now and whose primary purpose is not to promote tobacco. That is why I commend our new clause to the House.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Would the Serjeant at Arms investigate the delay in the Lobby?

The House having divided: Ayes 122, Noes 345.

Division No. 118] **[6 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. James Gray.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Body, Sir Richard
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*

Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Paisley, Rev Ian
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thompson, William
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. David Clelland.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1

MEANING OF "TOBACCO ADVERTISEMENT" AND "TOBACCO PRODUCT"

Mrs. Spelman: I beg to move amendment No. 2, in page 1, line 6, after second "advertisement", insert "including product placement".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 1, in page 1, line 8, after "so", insert—

'but does not include an advertisement where the purpose is to reduce the prevalence of smoking, notwithstanding that it may depict a tobacco product.'.

Government amendments Nos. 40 and 41.

Amendment No. 3, in clause 4, page 2, line 23, at end insert—

'or

(e) if it is contained in a tender for a contract to publish a magazine in an overseas market.'.

Amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 23, at end insert—

'or

(f) if it is or is contained in an item of intrinsic value more than 30 years old.'.

Government amendment No. 42.

Amendment No. 32, in clause 8, page 4, line 15, leave out subsection (4).

Government amendments Nos. 43, 44 and 47.

Mrs. Spelman: I commiserate with you on your sore throat, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In an amazing role reversal, perhaps you would like to catch the eye of my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who may be able to help you with what sounds like a nasty sore throat.

The group of amendments is so large that I am tempted to characterise it as the whole world and his wife with the kitchen sink thrown in. I hope that hon. Members will bear with me as I present our amendments, which are diverse and cover different subjects. Some raise new points; others deal with points that arose from consideration in Committee. They need to be examined on Report.

Amendment No. 2 would incorporate for the first time in the Bill the phrase "product placement". We discussed the definition of "advertisement" in Committee, but we were unsuccessful in obtaining a clear definition from the Government. That weakness will make it difficult for those who must work with the Bill to know what constitutes an advertisement. We successfully drew out from the Minister a few examples that would not be regarded as advertisements. It was helpful to know that tobacco packaging is not regarded as an advertisement. However, the matter was left unclear.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I know that my hon. Friend is trying to pass on to hon. Members the advice that we received from the Minister that a packet did not constitute an advertisement. However, that does not appear in the Bill.

Mrs. Spelman: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. He is right that we are trying to convey to hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee, and might not have had a chance to read *Hansard* closely, some of the problems to which we are reverting on Report. Some clarification that was given in Committee is not incorporated in the Bill, and that will make it difficult for people to work with the measure.

One important concept missing from the Bill is product placement, which is a widely used method of advertising. We share the Government's concern to reduce the prevalence of smoking and we believe that product placement is a potent form of advertising. It might be helpful if I tried to define product placement, in case hon. Members are unfamiliar with the concept. I would define it as deliberately placing a product in view for the purpose of promoting it. Perhaps hon. Members can think of television programmes or films in which a tobacco product has been clearly placed in view and left there for a considerable time so that the brand is etched on our memory. If one consults avid watchers of soap operas—not that I am one—they are even able to identify the brand of cigarette smoked by the stars in the cast. That is a potent example of product placement.

In Committee, we touched on the question of product placement and stressed to the Government that it was a potent form of advertising to the young in particular, many of whom are avid watchers of television soap operas. I always do my level best to dissuade my children from watching such programmes, for a variety of reasons to do with the values that they sometimes impart. It is a matter of concern that young people watch television programmes or films in which their role models—the stars of the programmes or films—are party to product placement in which a tobacco product is placed in clear view.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Is my hon. Friend confident that she, or whoever she envisages carrying out the task, could distinguish between what she categorises as product placement and the incidental or accidental portrayal of a product? Is she confident that she could draw that line of distinction?

Mrs. Spelman: That is very difficult to do precisely. I shall come in due course to the regulations governing broadcasting, some of which leave such decisions to the editor, saying that such placements may be made if they are editorially justified. I hope that my right hon. Friend would agree that an editor's judgment can become very subjective on those questions, and that it is difficult to say objectively what is editorially justified and what is not.

I want to draw to the House's attention a recent piece of research published in volume 357 of *The Lancet*, on 6 January 2001. The research undertook a survey of a 10-year sample of contemporary films, examining the increasing role and importance of product placement in them. It established that more than 85 per cent. of the films contained tobacco use. Tobacco brands appeared in 28 per cent. of the films, and brand appearances were as common in films suitable for adolescent audiences as they were in films for adult audiences. That is, 32 per cent. of films for adolescent audiences and 35 per cent. of films for adult audiences contained such appearances. If we are concerned to protect young people, we should be concerned about that.

Tobacco brands were also present in 20 per cent. of the films rated suitable for children. That gives me, as a parent, cause for disquiet. The research stated that brand placement in films had become a preferred method for companies to raise brand awareness and develop favourable associations with their products in an international audience. I fear that there will be an increasing amount of product placement when other conventional forms of advertising are banned by the Bill. Undoubtedly, a great deal of effort will be made in that direction by those wishing to promote tobacco.

Mr. David Taylor: The main thrust of the Opposition's attitude to tobacco advertising is that it serves only to encourage switching between brands. Is it not, however, the case that, in instances of product placement—of which the hon. Lady is rightly critical—a viewer is very rarely able to determine the brand of cigarette being smoked? I hate to echo the comments of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), but he made a fair point. One really cannot determine the brand from the way in which tobacco products are placed in entertainment programmes.

Mrs. Spelman: The hon. Gentleman may yet find that more emphasis will be placed on raising brand awareness through this method. There may be more attempts at raising brand awareness, rather than simply presenting a familiar star or television character smoking. It is undoubtedly the goal of a company to increase its market share and, as other forms of advertising are made unavailable to it, it will seek out the remaining opportunities.

[Mrs. Spelman]

The point of the new clause is to introduce the words "product placement" into the Bill. We are concerned that the existing constraints are not sufficiently effective. We should be deeply concerned that the research published in *The Lancet* showed that as many as 85 per cent. of films in the past 10 years showed tobacco use, and that tobacco brands appeared in one third of the films surveyed.

When we debated the issue in Committee, we raised with the Minister the problem that many of the most successful blockbuster films in this country emanate from Hollywood and are produced under codes, laws and conventions beyond the jurisdiction of this House. Some of the most blatant examples of product placement relate to American-sourced films. Nothing that could be done as a result of the Bill would curtail what is shown in an American film, unless the Government have plans for some sort of censorship over when the product placement occurs. An example of a brand being shown could involve the stars of a film having a long conversation while standing in front of a billboard advertising, say, Marlboro cigarettes. Under the Bill, it would remain possible for tobacco companies to promote a particular brand in that way.

Reading the research on films, I was concerned to discover the kind of money that goes into the effort to place products. For example, in the film "Mr. Destiny", Walt Disney studios charged advertisers $20,000 for showing a product, $40,000 for showing a product and having an actor mention the product's name, and $60,000 for showing an actor using the product. Those are very substantial sums.

Our purpose in tabling the new clause is to signal to those having to work with the existing arrangements for product placement that we are aware that there may be a major loophole in this area, and that the present constraints are not effective enough. I mentioned American films being shown here and the fact that they are one of the most powerful tools for the promotion of tobacco products. They are particularly effective among young people, among whom the rising prevalence of smoking is causing great concern.

One could not discuss the amendment without examining the rules already in place, which brings me to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). For his and other hon. Members' benefit, it is worth mentioning what the rules are concerning product placement in programmes.

6.30 pm

According to the rules,

"Where their use is clearly justified editorially, products or services may be acquired at no, or less than, full cost. Provision of the article must not be conditional on any specific agreement as to the manner of its appearance in the programme."

The onus therefore rests entirely with the editor.

The notes accompanying the rules state:

"No undue prominence may be given in any programme to a commercial product or service. In particular, any reference to such a product or service must be limited to what can clearly be justified by the editorial requirements of the programme itself."

Again, all the onus is on the editor.

I suggest to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst that the problem lies with the extent of the editorial subjectivity involved. Under the current rules, product placement is clearly possible in programmes produced and shown in this country. We ought to have some control over it, but the rules are clearly insufficient to prevent the youth of today from telling us which brand of cigarettes their favourite film stars or television actors smoke.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: May I explore the issue of product placement as it relates to a later part of the Bill? My hon. Friend mentioned films made in the United States and distributed in this country. The Bill mentions only printed journalism; would the distributor of those films, or indeed someone who copied videos of them for commercial purposes, be subject to prosecution under my hon. Friend's proposals?

Mrs. Spelman: We discussed in Committee whether the proposal would result in thought police dashing around this country's cinemas deleting parts of films that featured blatant product placement. I seem to recall—the Minister may confirm this—that responsibility for adhering to a set of British guidelines on product placement rests with the distributor; but in practical terms it would be impossible to implement such censorship. We are talking about what are effectively foreign-produced, imported films, and a degree of international co-operation is clearly desirable.

The research in *The Lancet*, which in fact emanates from academics in the United States, has produced a proper analysis of the films concerned, most of which are American-based. It demonstrates that whatever legislation exists in the United States to control product placement is not particularly effective either. This is a classic example of the difficulty of taking effective unilateral action in an international market.

It is ridiculous to try to ban conventional tobacco advertising while leaving an enormous loophole in relation to product placement. It is plain that existing regulations do not work adequately in the context of a British-produced product over which we have some jurisdiction, and our purpose was to draw attention to the problem. I hope that the faith of the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) will be restored to some extent by the knowledge that we share a public health agenda in wishing to reduce smoking, especially in the vulnerable group who start smoking young and subsequently find it difficult to stop—if, indeed, they want to stop.

Amendment No. 1 deals with a different subject, but again I hope that all Members will appreciate—in the context of a health Bill—that we share the objective of reducing smoking. That is clearly desirable in public health terms. Ours is a probing amendment, intended to ensure that the Bill does not inadvertently catch an advertisement that is actually designed to reduce the prevalence of smoking.

I ask hon. Members to imagine a large poster, pitched at trying to deter under-age smokers, depicting a young person stubbing out a cigarette. The accompanying slogan would read, perhaps, "Stub it out—don't stub your life out." Such a poster, depicting someone using a tobacco product, would be in a sense attractive, and in a sense

pitched at young people; but its hard message would also be directed at young people, whom it would attempt to deter from smoking.

We must not risk catching anti-smoking health education posters in the ban on tobacco advertising. The amendment is intended to make it possible to continue with hard-hitting health education measures that may well require classical forms of advertising. As the Bill stands, it will close the door on such measures.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Might not the amendment provide a loophole for manufacturers of low-tar cigarettes, enabling them to claim that their products were beneficial in health terms?

Mrs. Spelman: The amendment was not designed to create any sort of loophole. No amendments were tabled by Liberal Democrats in Committee, but it would have been helpful if the hon. Lady had tabled even one. Indeed, the whole question of low-tar products could have been raised in a series of amendments.

As someone who served in Committee on the Health and Social Care Bill, the hon. Lady presumably knows that no distinction is made between high, low and middle-tar products; the aim is to impose a blanket ban on tobacco advertising. Our probing amendment is intended to ensure that good health education campaigns are not caught by the legislation. I wish members of other parties would begin to believe that we have a health agenda, rather than being doubting Thomases.

Mr. David Taylor: Does not the amendment introduce an oxymoron? If it were accepted, clause 1 would state that "tobacco advertisement" meant an advertisement whose effect was to promote a tobacco product

"but does not include an advertisement where the purpose is to reduce the prevalence of smoking".

Is that logically consistent?

Mrs. Spelman: I am not sure about the oxymoron. As the hon. Gentleman will note from the debate on the programme motion, we shall be jolly lucky if there are no oxymorons, given the speed at which the Bill zipped from Committee to Report. As it is, there is a typographical error in amendment No. 13, although there was certainly no intention of producing any grammatical or typographical mistakes.

As I have said, ours is a probing amendment, intended simply to ensure that we do not close opportunities for good, justified health education campaigns. It is quite possible that a health education poster might depict a tobacco product as part of a hard-hitting message about the health risks of taking up smoking, or continuing to smoke. I am sure that the Minister has an answer; I do not think it necessary to see more in the amendment than I have explained. Health education campaigns were successfully used by the previous Conservative Government to reduce the prevalence of smoking. We want to make it possible to continue such campaigns, which have been shown to work. That is the simple purpose of amendment No. 1.

Government amendments Nos. 40 and 41 enable us to debate a subject—the position of printers and publishers of written material—which, as my hon. Friends have said, is very important to Conservative Members. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who, with his experience in the printing industry, was the first to point out that the Bill might well place British printers in a very difficult position and at a competitive disadvantage. Our amendments seek to restore the position of British printers and publishers, to free them to tender in international markets for publications that, although directed principally at an overseas market, may be sold partly in the United Kingdom.

As originally drafted, the Bill would have placed British printing companies at a competitive disadvantage. I am therefore very pleased that the Government have conceded on the issue, so that publications printed in the United Kingdom whose main market is abroad will be able to compete equally with overseas publishers.

Mr. Ian Bruce: The Government are trying to address that issue, but not the issue of in-flight magazines, which we raised in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said that he had taken an Air France flight that had an in-flight magazine containing tobacco advertisements. Although one would not think that that magazine would be caught by the provision, the plane was owned not by a French company but by a British one flying for Air France. The Government amendments in this group would not deal with that. The Bill would stop that British company flying for Air France because of those tobacco advertisements in the in-flight magazine. Is that not ridiculous?

Mrs. Spelman: I hope that, for the benefit of members of the Committee and other hon. Members in the Chamber, the Minister will address the issue of the predicament faced by United Kingdom airlines that have code-sharing arrangements. That issue is similar to the one that my hon. Friend has just described. When we purchase a ticket with a United Kingdom airline, we expect to be flying with that UK carrier, although the plane may be supplied by a continental carrier. However, will stewardesses on a Finnair flight returning to a Scandinavian country as a British Airways flight, for example, have to rush through the plane ripping out the in-flight magazines? It will be quite difficult practically for airlines to comply with those provisions.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: The provisions will also work in reverse. United Kingdom airlines operating out of United Kingdom airports—Newcastle airport provides a very good example—provide services for foreign airlines. Where do those airlines stand?

Mrs. Spelman: We are now beginning to discuss the reality of how the provisions will work. Government amendment No. 41 accepts our attempt to accord the United Kingdom print industry a more level playing field in tendering for publications that are destined for overseas markets and may contain tobacco advertisements, although some copies may be sold in the United Kingdom. However, United Kingdom airlines will still be at a competitive disadvantage if, unlike other airlines bringing passengers to and from this country, they cannot have an in-flight magazine. That issue has yet to be resolved.

It will be interesting to hear whether the Minister has any thoughts on how to deal with that competitive disadvantage. I emphasise that the problem is especially

[Mrs. Spelman]

acute for United Kingdom airlines that have code-sharing arrangements. The Government will have to revisit that issue.

6.45 pm

The Government have made another related concession in amendment No. 40. The UK print industry would have been placed in a considerable predicament if the Government had decided not to leave out clause 2(3). That provision would have made it an offence for someone to publish or distribute a tobacco advertisement or

"something else which is accompanied by a separate entity, containing, or being, a tobacco advertisement."

The removal of the provision may provide some practical help to British printers and distributors, who, unlike their overseas competitors, would have to comply with the provision.

Although our amendment No. 3 is eclipsed by the Government's concessions on the United Kingdom print industry, in Committee we identified another quirky problem. I must give credit for that where it is due. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire was driving through his constituency when, passing a local antique shop, he was struck by the fact that the Bill's provisions would cover historical tobacco advertising signs. If hon. Members cannot picture the type of sign to which I am referring, they are the old enamel ones that promoted products such as Players or Senior Service cigarettes.

Those signs are now collectors items and are very sought after, and they might be placed outside an antique shop not to promote tobacco, but because they are desirable and have increased in value. Such museum-piece tobacco advertisements are also found occasionally in pubs. Fashion has it that such signs evoke nostalgia, as they cause some people to think back to when it was perhaps customary to smoke a pipe or to roll one's own cigarettes, using old tobacco brands that have now gone by the board. However, some of those brands are still being sold. One sometimes sees mirrors bearing the Marlboro logo, or Marlboro posters from the 1950s depicting scenes from the wild west. Pubs, restaurants and similar places of refreshment often display those items to enhance their ambience. The items are really curios and novelties.

It is unreasonable to try to ban those historical tobacco advertisements as their primary purpose is no longer to increase the market share of the erstwhile companies that promoted those brands. In our amendment No. 7, we seek to protect little antique shops that wish to display such enamel signs as part of their legitimate attempt to make a living from the sale of nostalgia and memorabilia, which many of us seek to procure as an investment or for sentimental reasons.

The other Government amendments in this group deal with points that we made in Committee. Government amendment No. 42, however, seems to provide that a proprietor would be guilty of an offence simply by displaying the price of tobacco products on a website or in a place where those products are sold. I ask the Minister to clarify that point. That would apply if such displays were not compliant with regulations that set out what is and what is not legitimate. In Standing Committee, the Minister was asked whether, in due course, it would be possible for airlines selling duty-free cigarettes to display anywhere a list of prices for those products. Price is of the essence in the purchase of duty-free cigarettes, and the Minister acknowledged that a price list would have to be displayed. However, Government amendment No. 42 seems to be quite severe, as it appears to make it an offence to display the prices of cigarettes in a place where they are sold. Once again, we will have to wait for a proper definition of what constitutes a display.

The Bill contains no definition of what constitutes a compliant display and what does not. That is another example of how we are not a great deal further on than we were in Standing Committee. That leaves us disquieted.

Mr. Ian Bruce: We were told in Standing Committee that the Government had no intention of introducing any regulations to tell firms what they could or could not display. The matter has been left mute, as it were. It might be that a future Government, thinking that a product was being displayed incorrectly, would bring in some regulations. Is not that ridiculous?

Mrs. Spelman: Absolutely. The problem with Government amendment No. 42 is that it clarifies nothing. The absence of the regulations means that someone will have to get the judgment wrong and be dragged to court charged with an offence before what constitutes a compliant display is clarified for everyone else.

It is legitimate to ask whether it is allowable to stack packets of cigarettes on the trolley being rolled down a plane's central aisle. Must the air hostess have the price list in her pocket to comply with Government amendment No. 42? It is an important question about the practical working of the Bill, and we need an answer.

Government amendment No. 43 is a concession from Standing Committee that we value. The Bill states that giving away coupons of a nominal value could constitute an advertisement, and that the tobacco companies involved could be caught. In Standing Committee, we pointed out that the term "nominal sum" was ill-defined. It is feasible for a nominal sum to be quite substantial—for example, for a coupon or voucher to be worth £10 off the value of 200 cigarettes. We are pleased that the Government have conceded that the term "substantial discount" is better. However, the process seems rather long winded, as now we need a definition of the term "substantial discount".

Mr. Forth: I am glad that my hon. Friend said that, as I was surprised to hear that she was unhappy about the term "nominal" yet more content with the term "substantial". If I were to catch your eye later, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would try to develop that theme and say that the word "substantial" is not much more helpful than "nominal". Would my hon. Friend say that Government amendment No. 43 takes us much further forward?

Mrs. Spelman: The weakness of the word "nominal", which we tried to get changed in Standing Committee, stems from the fact that coupons can have quite a substantial value. One weakness of the Bill is that neither term is clearly defined. A further weakness is that we must wait an unspecified length of time before we get a regulation that gives guidance to companies about what is in order and what is not.

I touched on the issues affecting Government amendment No. 47 when I spoke to amendment No. 2 on product placement. The Bill attempts to assure us that the Broadcasting Acts of 1990 and 1996 cover tobacco advertising by the broadcast services. However, are those Acts effective? I hope that I showed earlier that it is clear that they are not sufficiently effective. A great deal of product placement goes on in the material broadcast by those services, despite the existence of the rules referred to in Government amendment No. 47. The Government should look again at the option preferred by the Opposition, which is to include the key phrase "product placement" in the Bill.

Mr. Barron: I shall speak briefly to amendment No. 2. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) made a good job of saying exactly how product placement appears in different forms in the media. Earlier in the debate, I said that cigarette advertising was removed from television in 1965, but that the presence of brand names on television was preserved through the sponsorship of nationally televised sports such as cricket, Formula 1 and so on. Advertising and promotion are effectively the same thing. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will agree that we cannot simply ban something without looking at what happens afterwards.

In Committee, we discussed the advertising agency memorandum about the television news coverage given to the launch of a new Jordan racing car. The memo said that coverage on "News at Ten" and the "Nine O'clock News" was worth £180,000 of television advertising. Taking into account the coverage on Sky, Channel 4 and Channel 5, the total coverage was said to be worth £250,000 of advertising on the national network. It is clear that advertising agencies and the tobacco companies that paid them wanted products to get covered in news items. Product placement is therefore very important.

Another example involves Sylvester Stallone, whose contract required that his films promoted a particular American tobacco product. The poster advertising tobacco products often plays a prominent role in scenes in Hollywood movies. Some people argue that it is relevant to the film, but I tend to disagree.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will consider how product placement can spread further in the media. Does she believe that Government amendment No. 47 would cover that possibility? That is especially important with television under British jurisdiction.

There is no question, as the hon. Member for Meriden said, but that young people look up to role models on television who use tobacco products. They recognise that a role model smokes a particular brand. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) said that when tobacco products appear on soap operas, often we cannot tell the brand. He should watch soaps a bit more regularly, because we can. Therefore, I think that amendment No. 2 has some merit, and I hope that the Minister will comment on it.

7 pm

Mr. Atkinson: Now that I have read the Bill a little more thoroughly, I appreciate why the Minister did not answer what I said about publishers and publications, because they are better debated on this second group of amendments. Having looked at the Government's amendments, I can see what they are trying to do, but I still have concerns about how the Bill will operate with regard to publishers and printers.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) has dealt with printers who print a newspaper or magazine for export. However, I still do not understand how satellite printing of international publications will be affected. I have no idea whether publications such as the *International Herald Tribune*, *USA Today* and the *Financial Times* carry tobacco advertising—I suspect that they do not. Even so, what is the position? What is the principal market? Is the United Kingdom the principal market of *USA Today*, which is printed here as well as in other centres in Europe? If *USA Today* decided to carry cigarette and tobacco advertisements, would it be prosecuted?

A more likely scenario would involve magazines printed here by satellite. Technology has made satellite printing increasingly popular. It saves moving large quantities of heavy newsprint around the world, so more magazines will be using that process.

I do not know whether right hon. and hon. Members read *Hello!*, but it is actually a Spanish magazine, with an English edition that circulates outside England, largely in Scandinavian countries whose readers have a good command of English. How do we define whether the UK is a principal market of the English language version of *Hello!* magazine? Would that be determined on the basis of circulation or revenue?

Mr. Ian Bruce: Is it not a worry for us, as British parliamentarians, that we will be setting up a competitive advantage for publishers in other countries? They can sell into the UK market simply by saying that their main market is still over there. The editions that they produce will not be printed here, thereby losing jobs and revenue. Such magazines would be greatly subsidised because the tobacco industry, as we have been told, will find ways of spending its promotional budget on subsidising them.

Mr. Atkinson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his comments. Although I mentioned newspapers and magazines with a large circulation, such as *Hello!*, I think that the problem will lie with the specialist magazines with smaller circulations, such as 4x4 cross-country vehicle specialist magazines. There are a number of such titles. They feature the Camel trophy and other motor sports events, which may or may not be covered by the Bill. It would be simple for such magazines to print abroad and supply copies to the UK.

Such magazines are international; they circulate in other parts of Europe and the United States. It would be easy to move their base from the UK to Europe. The situation would be ludicrous: one 4x4 magazine on the newsagent's shelf would be stuffed full of advertisements for cigarettes and tobacco, while another, printed in the UK, did not carry such advertisements. That would give the magazine printed outside England a serious competitive advantage. We need to explore that possibility further, because I would hate to see yet more confusion attached to the Bill.

[Mr. Atkinson]

Product placement in films is an extremely complex matter. We have talked about films made in the United States and distributed here, and films made on video in the United States and copied here. Then, of course, there are the old classic films. Will we have to stop showing Humphrey Bogart because a packet of Lucky Strike is in the background? There are still some fascinating alleyways to explore tonight.

Mr. Andrew Hunter (Basingstoke): I listened with great interest to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) speaking to amendment No. 2. I am glad that she described it as a probing amendment, as I could not fully support it. Indeed, I have grave reservations about it. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who, if I heard him correctly, suggested that it would be almost impossible to distinguish between product placement and what, for convenience, one could call a necessary theatrical prop. To make the distinction by means of regulations would be well nigh impossible.

I hold the view that there is nothing particularly wrong with product placement. I am not prepared to join the witch hunt. I believe that the Bill is fundamentally flawed because there is nothing essentially wrong with the existing voluntary code and the necessary measures taken to control smuggling.

Hidden in this large group of amendments is amendment No. 32, in the names of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and myself. I was not a member of the Standing Committee, which I regret, but I have studied its proceedings in the *Official Report*. The Minister introduced a new clause in Committee that said that there should be regulations governing the display of tobacco products at the point of sale or elsewhere—regulations quite separate from those governing advertising at the point of sale or elsewhere. Previously, it had been envisaged that there would be a single set of regulations governing both advertising and the display of products at the point of sale or elsewhere.

My instinctive reaction was that this was regulation gone mad. Regulation gone mad is also well exemplified in clause 8(4), which amendment No. 32 seeks to leave out. Subsection (4) demands that the regulations that govern displays

"must make provision for a display which also amounts to an advertisement to be treated for the purpose of offences under this Act—

(a) as an advertisement and not as a display, or

(b) as a display and not as an advertisement."

It would be fascinating to analyse precisely what that subsection means. I suspect that it is simply that a display must be deemed either a display, which is subject to one set of regulations, or an advertisement, which is subject to another set of regulations.

The problem that we encounter, which has already been referred to, is that on Second Reading, throughout the Committee stage, and today, the Minister has consistently and constantly rebuffed suggestions to amend the definition in clause 1 so as to make it clear what counts as a tobacco advertisement. Subsection (4), which I argue should be deleted, refers to a display that "amounts to an advertisement". That begs the question: what precisely is an advertisement? Is there a difference between an advertisement and something that "amounts to an advertisement"? That subsection highlights the need for a clearer and much more explicit definition.

In Committee, the Minister made a point that took me unawares. She said that the Government accepted that there were reasons for permitting a certain amount of advertising at points of sale, to communicate price or product availability. That seems to undermine the Government's whole argument. However, if a display of tobacco products is a tobacco advertisement as defined by clause 1—an advertisement whose purpose or effect is

"to promote a tobacco product"—

such a display is already banned under clause 2. There is thus no need to provide in clause 8(4) for regulation that has already been provided in clause 2.

The subsection poses a series of questions. Our amendment asks whether there is really a difference in kind between display and advertisement. Can that difference be expressed or defined in practicable or credible regulations? I am not remotely convinced that those questions can be answered positively. That is why it would be far wiser to leave out subsection (4).

Mr. Forth: I support and echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter), but I shall concentrate on some of the other amendments in the group. I share the reservations expressed by my hon. Friends about the concept of product placement. We can all recognise the phenomenon when we see it—or think we see it. That is one thing; it is quite another to provide a sufficiently viable framework within which to try to make such a distinction regularly and systematically and then to deal with it. The concept is difficult to define, and thus a difficult basis on which to implement measures successfully.

The problem is exacerbated because, as one of my hon. Friends pointed out, it commonly arises in old media presentations—be they films or whatever—rather than as a deliberate and subtle attempt, in the modern context, to promote a product. To try to use such a concept as has been suggested would require a much better working definition than has been offered thus far.

Amendment No. 1 is crucial. Were this ill begotten Bill ever to reach the statute book, we would risk losing the great expenditure and effort that has been put into warning people of the dangers of smoking. One of the paradoxes of our time is that the suppliers of tobacco products are obliged—although in many cases they do it voluntarily—to put health warnings about their product on its packaging.

A further paradox of our time is that the industry itself spends a great deal on issuing health warnings. If we are to go ahead with this ill conceived scheme, surely we must try to ensure—as far as we can—that when advertisements for the product are removed, proper health warnings are not eliminated at the same time. Although tobacco is a legal product and I believe that people should be absolutely free to use it, I accept that it is a proper responsibility of Government to warn people of the fact that it may endanger their health. However, having been properly informed of the dangers, adults should then be allowed to make up their own minds whether to use a substance—be it tobacco or alcohol.

7.15 pm

Mr. David Taylor: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that although adults may be exercising their own free will—as he describes it—they may also be unable to overcome the addictive effects of nicotine that have been so carefully implanted in them through a succession of earlier appeals to smoke? Many teenagers take up smoking. Fewer than 50 per cent. of those who start to smoke by the age of 15 have given up smoking by the age of 60.

Mr. Forth: That question introduces an element that I suspect you would not want me to pursue too far, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Gentleman makes a contentious assertion; he obviously believes it, but it might not be borne out. In any case, the argument would also apply to alcohol, to which many people, sadly, are addicted.

In connection with amendment No. 1, I want to make the point that we must not endanger any capability or willingness on the part of the manufacturers and promoters of the products to provide appropriate warnings. That, rightly, is the aim of the amendment. It is important to ensure that we do not jeopardise that.

Several of the amendments deal with the provisions under clause 4, with which we seem to be getting into the most awful difficulty. Although one can understand the motivation behind the clause, I doubt whether its provisions can be effectively implemented. Subsection (1)(c) refers to the "principal market" and the United Kingdom. As we have already seen—and as the Members who had the privilege, pleasure and honour of serving on the Standing Committee must have discovered over and over again—the Bill is shot through with vague concepts that are either ill defined or undefined, yet are crucial to the thrust and meaning of the measure. Subsection (1) illustrates that. The term "principal market" will be of no help or guidance whatever to those who will be given the responsibility of implementing the Bill should it ever become an Act.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) pointed out, the matter is complicated by the fact that, when one is dealing with the world of modern publication, it is not viable, satisfactory or deliverable to talk about one market as opposed to another, given the extent to which people, products, publications and information flow freely across international boundaries. That is one of the ironic effects of our membership both of the European Union and of the European Economic Area. It is thus even more difficult to define properly and adequately where one market begins and another ends. I submit that the term "principal market" with reference to the United Kingdom is extremely difficult to define. The fact that direct reference is made to that concept makes the provision of dubious value.

Subsection (d) refers to "a United Kingdom airline". Even that concept is difficult to define. Is Cathay Pacific a United Kingdom airline? Some years ago, a trick question asked, "What is the second biggest British airline?" Few people correctly answered that it was Cathay Pacific. The airline was, in essence, British-owned, even though it mainly operated in the far east. I mention that example only to illustrate the difficulty of giving an adequate definition of a phrase as apparently simple as "a United Kingdom airline", as used in the measure. That aspect of the Bill is far from adequate, and the amendments do not help at all.

A similar problem, which arose when my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) moved the amendment, will arise later when we discuss nominal sums and substantial discounts. There is a genuine effort to improve the Bill and make it more accurate, but it falls far short of what is desirable.

I suspect that the Minister will say, "Don't worry about that, folks—it will all be made clear in regulations." That is the classic answer that Ministers give when presenting such a Bill, but I am not sure whether it is good enough in this case. Much of the Bill's thrust and its likely effectiveness depend on the viability and practicability of the regulations, rather than on the Bill itself, but even at this relatively late stage, we are no more able to judge whether it is likely to be effective. We are completely in the dark about how the Government will tackle the underpinning regulations, on which so much will depend. I find it very unsatisfactory that I am still unable to make that judgment.

I hope that the Minister will explain amendment No. 47—the final amendment in the group—because, coming new to the Bill, as I did not have the privilege of serving on the Standing Committee, I am intrigued as to how such a change can be suggested. The suggestion is that we should change the wording in clause 12(2) from

"This Act does not apply in relation to a tobacco advertisement"

to

"This Act does not apply in relation to anything included in a service".

At this stage, to move from the phrase "a tobacco advertisement" to the word "anything" involves a rather large leap of either faith or imagination.

I hope that the Minister can tell us how, now that the Bill has managed to reach this stage in its proceedings, she still has to ask us to approve an amendment that produces such a difference in meaning and direction. That is even more important because we are talking about an exemption, using the words,

"This Act does not apply in relation to".

I can understand that that might be relevant to a tobacco advertisement, but it is remarkable to state:

"This Act does not apply in relation to anything included in a service to which any of subsections (3) to (6) apply."

We need to hear a very comprehensive explanation from the Minister as to how she and the Government have got themselves into the position of having to make such a change at this stage.

All in all, the position is very unsatisfactory indeed. Notwithstanding the Standing Committee's mighty labours, and the huge accumulated brainpower and concentrated effort of its members during many sittings, the Bill is still pathetically inadequate, so I leave the House, including the hon. Members who did not serve on the Committee, to judge the quality of its work. The fact that the Government have tabled so many poor quality amendments is a sad indictment of them.

Mr. Taylor: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the logical, honest and consistent approach, bearing in mind his comments so far, would be to vote against Third Reading?

Mr. Forth: Yes, and I intend to do so. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me that little trailer for

[Mr. Forth]

what I fully intend to do—although the Minister has an opportunity to use her eloquence and powers of persuasion to make me change my mind. However, at the moment, not only do I disagree with the Bill's thrust and principle—which, of course, we are not now debating—but I have, I hope, shown that I believe the Bill to be so flawed that even if I agreed with its main purpose, I would feel unable to support it. The Minister now has an opportunity to persuade us all—and good luck to her.

Yvette Cooper: I shall try to deal with each amendment in this group and respond, in turn, to the points that hon. Members have made. On amendment No. 2, moved by the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), we are sympathetic to her intention on product placement, although I was interested in the fact that many Conservative Back Benchers are perhaps not quite so sympathetic to it. The amendment is not necessary and, as worded, would not be helpful. I shall clarify the Government's view on product placement and how it will be covered by the Bill.

If product placement occurs in this country in the form of an agreement to promote a tobacco product, perhaps through a film or television programme, it will constitute a sponsorship agreement. If that were done through television, it would be covered by the Broadcasting Acts. If it were done through film, it would constitute a sponsorship agreement and be covered by the provisions on such agreements. Of course, if such product placement occurs abroad, we cannot prosecute the parties to the sponsorship agreement; we do not have extra-territorial jurisdiction in this respect.

What will happen if a film that includes an overt placement of a tobacco product, which is clearly promoted by a tobacco company, is distributed in this country? I make it clear that our intention is not to prevent films from showing smoking. We do not intend the Bill to cover films, or other kinds of theatrical expression, that show smoking as part of their artistic freedom of expression. We may not like the fact that a film or theatrical production glamorises or appears to promote smoking, but if smoking is part of the artistic freedom of expression, we have to be careful what we rule out, even though we disagree with it.

Under the Bill, we want to rule out advertisements that promote tobacco products in the course of a business; we do not want to restrict freedom of expression. In fact, I would defend the right of artists to smoke on television or in films. The Government should not censor such matters. However, if something is a tobacco advertisement and if it promotes a tobacco product in the course of a business—for example, if a Marlboro advert is strung out for three quarters of hour—it will be covered by the Bill, even if it is produced in another country, so distributors will need to consider their liability. They will, of course, have to have a defence if they did not know, or could not have foreseen, that that would be the effect, but distribution will be covered by the Bill.

Amendment No. 1 would exempt from the definition of an advertisement those advertisements that depict tobacco products where the purpose is to reduce the prevalence of smoking. If the purpose of an advertisement is to reduce the prevalence of smoking, it will not come under the definition of an advertisement the effect of which is to promote a tobacco product. Such an advertisement will not be covered by the Bill, unless it is so useless and bad that its effect is to promote a tobacco product and smoking. If an advertisement is that bad, it should be withdrawn; it should be not put up on our billboards. There is no intention to prevent health education or health information advertisements, and they will not be covered by the Bill, so amendment No. 1 is unnecessary.

Mr. Ian Bruce: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way because I am sure that she wants health messages to be effective. Is she aware of the excellent work of the life education caravan movement, which encourages youngsters to be aware of their bodies and how they can be harmed? It has advised us that telling people not to smoke encourages them to do just that. It is necessary to have a completely different approach to the problem. If an advertisement for non-smoking encourages people to experiment with smoking, it will be covered by the Bill.

7.30 pm

Yvette Cooper: I would be extremely interested to see research to support the idea that such health information campaigns are counter-productive, although I have to admit that I have seen advertisements from other countries to encourage people to drink less that probably had the reverse effect. Advertisements to promote tobacco products are covered by the Bill; advertisements to help people to give up smoking or to prevent them from starting are not. A great deal of evidence would be needed to show that such advertisements had the opposite effect, and if that were the case, they should not be distributed.

On Government amendment No. 40, we reconsidered the issue of separate entities and inserts. Let me clarify our approach. We are not saying that separate entities are permissible and that it is acceptable to include inserts that advertise tobacco. We decided that clause 2(3) was unnecessary because inserts, such as those in our Sunday newspapers, that include tobacco advertisements count as published inserts and whoever has published them is responsible for them. If an insert is published with the magazine, the magazine publisher is liable. If it is tucked in by someone else at a later stage, the person who published the insert is responsible and whoever tucked it in is likely to be covered by the provisions on distribution. No matter how we look at it, those who are responsible for publishing or distributing the advertisement are likely to be caught by the Bill.

On Government amendment No. 41, we decided to reconsider the issue of United Kingdom printers. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) said that they should not be prevented from working on foreign publications that contain tobacco advertisements if those publications would qualify for exclusion. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) also raised that matter. It would cause concern if clause 4(1)(c) permitted a publication to be produced, but the Bill's provisions caught the printer who was working on it. The amendment clarifies the situation.

Mr. David Taylor: Is my hon. Friend convinced that the clause, as amended, provides an adequate definition of the principal market as it relates to the United Kingdom?

Yvette Cooper: The concept of the principal market is an important part of the Bill. We do not want companies

whose principal market is not the UK to be covered by the Bill if the publication is also circulated here. We have not provided a specific quantification of what "principal market" might mean because it will vary in different circumstances. For example, the definition of an appropriate market share to determine whether the UK is a principal market will be different if a product has five or only two markets. If the biggest market for a publication is the UK, that will count as the principal market.

Mr. Forth: The Minister seems to be suggesting that if there were four or five markets of broadly equal size, which is not impossible, the principal market could be 20 or 25 per cent. Is that what she imagines principal to mean in such circumstances?

Yvette Cooper: The assessment would need to be made on individual cases, depending on the circumstances involved. There would probably be a different test for those publications that have several markets rather than just two. It would be wrong to provide a quantification of a market share that might be difficult to apply in different market circumstances.

Amendment No. 3 would create an additional exclusion for advertisements so that no offence would be committed in relation to a tobacco advertisement if it is contained in a tender for a contract to publish a magazine for an overseas market. The hon. Member for Meriden accepted that the amendment is covered by amendment No. 41, and we do not think that it is needed. Any communication that is in a sealed tender for a bid or which is part of an attempt to get a contract to publish a magazine in an overseas market would not need to become a tobacco advertisement that reached the public.

Amendment No. 7 raises an interesting matter. Again, we have some sympathy with its aim. We do not want historic tobacco advertisements or items of historic branding value to be caught by the new measures. Each case would need to be judged on its merits, but the Bill is not intended to prevent museums from displaying historic posters or items, or antique shops from displaying old plaques or memorabilia of obsolete brands. Those would obviously not be promoting tobacco products, in the same way as artistic representation on film or stage would not be regarded as promoting tobacco products. An historic object that is offered for sale would not be regarded as an advertisement to promote tobacco products.

The amendment would, however, create a loophole. We could not accept an exemption that allowed Marlboro, for example, to wheel out all its advertisements from the 1960s to promote its cigarettes today; nor would we want tobacco companies to decide to resurrect obsolete brands simply because they happened to have advertisements that were more than 30 years old and exempt from the Bill.

Mr. Ian Bruce: In Committee, I asked whether buildings with old advertisements that were no longer being promoted by a tobacco company were caught by the Bill. As the hon. Lady has had a few days to think about that, will she say whether they will be exempted, or will shops with outside billboards have to take action?

Yvette Cooper: It would depend on whether an historic item that did not promote a tobacco product was being offered for sale or whether an advertisement that had been erected to promote a tobacco product had not been removed. It would not be acceptable to allow advertisements to continue to be left in place simply because someone put them up a couple of years ago and no one had got round to taking them down. It would not be acceptable to exempt them. A billboard that continued to hold an old advertisement because no one had replaced it would be covered by the Bill.

Mr. Hunter: The old Gallaher building in Belfast, which is now used for a different purpose, contains the name "Gallaher" as part of the brickwork. What is the Government's view on that complicated issue?

Yvette Cooper: It would be hard to argue that the purpose and effect of that brickwork was to promote a tobacco product and that it should be covered by the Bill. It is not intended to include historic features such as that.

Government amendment No. 42 ensures consistency between subsections (1) and (2) of clause 8, and I shall clarify the Government's intention. We have said that we do not want to have to draw up regulations on displays. We are relaxed about the way in which products and prices are ordinarily displayed, and we do not intend to restrict that. It is perfectly legitimate to have a certain amount of advertising at point of sale and for products to be displayed, with prices, so that they can be sold, because after all, tobacco is a legal product. Our only purpose in providing powers to draw up regulations is to deal with possible abuses, because we want to prevent tobacco companies from finding innovative forms of advertising that get round the Bill.

Amendment No. 32, which would remove what is, in effect, a trumping provision for the two sets of regulations on display and advertising at point of sale, would create difficulties. If we find that we do not need to introduce regulations on displays, we will not need subsection (4). We would like not to have to introduce those regulations, but if we decide that we need to do so, we will need clear definitions so that we know whether displays count as advertisements, and which regulations should therefore apply to them. We will need to set out links between the two sets of regulations.

Government amendments Nos. 43 and 44 respond to the debate in Committee about the concept of a "nominal sum", and to concern that the definition may not be broad enough to cover all the abuses that we might be concerned about. The hon. Member for Meriden sought to replace the concept of "nominal sum" with that of "market value", and I explained to her in Committee why we could not accept her amendment and how it would affect competitive practices.

Amendment No. 43 will, however, add the words,

"or at a substantial discount".

That might refer to products that are sold, for example, at a discount of two thirds of the ordinary price, but which might not be included within the term "nominal sum". We will have to consult on the interpretation of the term "substantial discount". We would also have to consult if we wanted to introduce regulations. This is another area in which we hope not to need regulations, but we have included the power to make them in case of future abuses.

Government amendment No. 47 makes it clear that the Bill does not apply to anything included in a service regulated under the Broadcasting Acts. That does not apply

[Yvette Cooper]

to tobacco advertisements or to provisions on sponsorship and brand sharing. We want to avoid overlap between the two areas of legislation to make implementation simpler.

A question was asked about the responsibility of airlines. The airline providing the services would be responsible for any advertising, so the test would be whether it was a UK airline. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) asked about international publications. I dealt with that when I talked about principal markets.

I propose that the House reject amendment No. 2, and accept the Government amendments.

7.45 pm

Mrs. Spelman: Just before you arrived, Madam Deputy Speaker, I described this group of amendments as involving the whole world, his wife and the kitchen sink. Unfortunately, we have added a few more categories as a result of debating these diverse amendments. Regrettably, I am none the wiser for my probing amendments, except perhaps on the last point about airline code sharing. The Minister was helpful and clear on that point, and as her remarks will be reported in *Hansard* they will provide guidance to UK airlines and their code-sharing partners, which I am sure they will find helpful.

The Government's description of their amendments has left me considerably more confused. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) for his remarks, but we have been left completely in the dark about the definition of a principal market. That has not inspired confidence in Government amendment No. 40.

Amendment No. 2 is a probing amendment, and the debate on it has been useful because we have learned that the Government understand our disquiet about the possibility of product placement increasingly being used as an advertising vehicle when conventional forms of advertising are banned by the Bill. However, I was further disquieted when the Minister defined "product placement" as a sponsorship agreement. We are going round and round in circles because the Bill does not clearly define "sponsorship agreement".

The lateness of the hour and the fact that we have to curtail the Report stage in less than half an hour means that it is increasingly unlikely that we will get to the amendments on sponsorship agreement. *[Interruption.]* The Government imposed the deadline. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) have tabled an important amendment in that group which seeks to make it clear that a sponsorship agreement is one in which a party to the agreement makes a contribution, in the course of business, towards a public event or activity. I am uneasy about the Government's interpretation of product placement as a sponsorship agreement, which has a weak definition in the Bill that we will probably not now be able to debate. The increasing confusion about those terms demonstrates that the correct course of action is to withdraw the amendment but to register the fact that we are left more confused by the debate. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 2

PROHIBITION OF TOBACCO ADVERTISING

Amendment made: No. 40, in page 1, line 18, leave out subsection (3).—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Mrs. Spelman: I beg to move amendment No. 12, in page 1, line 21, leave out "includes" and insert—

'shall, to the extent set out in regulations made by the Secretary of State after consultation with representatives of those involved in the electronic publication and transmission of material, include'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 34, in page 1, line 21, leave out "includes" and insert "does not include".

No. 35, in page 1, line 23, at end insert—

'unless the person is aware on first transmission of its contents or has had a notice from an enforcement authority giving reasonable time to have the contents removed.'.

No. 36, in clause 4, page 2, line 26, leave out—

'place or on a website'

and insert—

'real place or a virtual place via electronic transmission'.

No. 15, in page 4, line 1, leave out Clause 7.

No. 33, in clause 13, page 6, line 17, at end add—

'(2A) An internet service provider shall investigate complaints from an enforcement authority on payment of a fee to cover administrative costs.'

No. 13, in clause 18, page 9, line 36, after "section", insert "1(4)".

No. 22, in clause 20, page 10, line 13, at end insert—

'"internet service provider" means a person who provides access to the internet,'.

No. 23, in page 10, line 18, at end insert—

'"website" means a location on the internet accessed by an address at which information is made available,'.

Mrs. Spelman: The amendments form a large group, but they are more focused than the previous group, in that their central point of reference is the new information technology, and the position of internet service providers and those who provide the means of transmission of information, all of whom will be affected by the Bill.

After discussing the position of ISPs in Standing Committee, we felt that several loose ends were left. We tried to secure from the Minister a duty to consult representatives of those involved in electronic publication and transmission of material, because we felt uneasy about agreeing to clauses that referred to those industries when we were not well qualified to comment on the full implications for them of the Bill's implementation. Perhaps the only member of the Committee who was better qualified than the rest was my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce); in due course, I shall give him a good opportunity to speak to the amendments, in recognition of the fact that he understands the issues better than the rest of us.

The issues are complex. Getting the legislation right is made more difficult by the fact that it deals with a sector that is constantly moving—the technology is still emerging and remains comparatively new to all of us. It is difficult to understand the way in which those involved

in electronic publication and transmission of material will be caught by provisions relating to tobacco advertising. I suspect that they have yet to analyse the full implications of the Bill. We felt that it was important that consultation with those parties should have taken place well before our scrutiny of the Bill, so that we might all better understand the way in which they would be affected, and have a better idea of what would be in the regulations which the Secretary of State is to draw up to govern the responsibilities to be borne by the new e-commerce industry in terms of overseeing opportunities to advertise tobacco products.

The huge attraction of the differential between taxation of tobacco products by the countries of continental Europe and by the United Kingdom means that tobacco products are increasingly advertised on the internet. Currently, it is legitimate for those living in the UK to secure their supplies of duty-free cigarettes over the internet, and that trade is likely to increase. That is why we are anxious to protect ISPs, which cannot reasonably be expected to know the minutiae of the postings on their myriad advertising points, which include bulletin boards; they are not always in a position to know precisely at any given time who has hacked into their provision to post advertising. Amendment No. 12 is designed to ensure that, before any draft regulations are imposed on that emerging industry, a proper process of consultation takes place on how to make them practicable, and several of the other amendments address those practicalities.

After Committee, we were left with profound doubts about whether the Bill was the right place for an attempt to regulate the e-commerce industry. Perhaps that industry's responsibility for advertising transmitted through that new medium of communication should be part of a completely separate Bill, and would more correctly be dealt with by the Department of Trade and Industry in the context of the industry's competitiveness. The last thing we want is to burden a fledgling industry with an irksome set of regulations that will make it difficult for it to compete in the emerging market.

That becomes even more apparent when we consider how companies that are responsible for the means of transmission might be caught up by the Bill. The Committee debated whether, not ISPs, but the companies that provide hardware, might be caught by the offences defined in the Bill, even if they were unaware that they had provided the conduit for tobacco advertising. We remain extremely concerned: the Bill embodies a stab at dealing with the possibility of tobacco advertising through new and less conventional means—but that stab deals clumsily with a new technology whose full implications it is difficult for us to envisage now.

It will be good if my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset now speaks specifically to the amendments that he tabled, which might make the Bill more practical and workable in relation to those involved in electronic publication and transmission.

Mr. Ian Bruce: At the end of Committee stage, my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) asked me to try to get my head round the problems that clearly confronted internet service providers and others involved in computing, and to come up with better ways of dealing with those issues.

The problem goes to the heart of the mission that the Prime Minister set for his whole Government, which is to make the United Kingdom the best place in which to do e-business. I am afraid that, in its present form, the Bill will make the UK the worst place to do e-business. It will lay additional loads on our ISPs even if they carry no tobacco advertising, with the result that those who intend to set up as ISPs will find it easier to set up elsewhere, because the great defence offered is that as long as the internet service provision business is set up elsewhere, it can carry as much tobacco advertising as it wants, and when that advertising arrives in the United Kingdom, it will not be covered by the legislation.

I shall explain my amendments as briefly as I can, and hope that the Minister has time to respond in the short time available. Amendments Nos. 34 and 35 are aimed at the prohibition set out in clause 2. Subsection (4) states:

> Distributing a tobacco advertisement includes transmitting it in electronic form, participating in doing so, and providing the means of transmission.

That might catch a company such as BT, if such an advertisement is sent across its lines; or the Conservative party, if someone goes from its website to another website that happens to carry tobacco advertising.

The defence comes later in the Bill. Clause 5(5) states:

> "In relation to a tobacco advertisement which is published or caused to be published by electronic means by an internet service provider, it is a defence for him, if charged with an offence under section 2(1), to prove that h was unaware that what he published or caused to be published was, or contained, a tobacco advertisement."

Basically, the clause says that it is an offence to do it, but there is a defence if the person did not know about it.

8 pm

I have tried, in the amendments which I have tabled, to deal with the matter more straightforwardly and to say that distributing a tobacco advertisement does not include transmitting it in electronic form, participating in doing so or providing the means of transmission, unless the person is aware on first transmission of its contents or has had notice from an enforcement authority, having been given reasonable time to have the contents removed.

I am saying, via the amendments, that if someone is knowingly involved in publishing the advertisement because he knew that something was promoting tobacco, that is an offence. That is what the Government are trying to do. However, if an authorised authority—I use those words carefully because they are defined in the Bill as meaning a weights and measures authority—comes to the website and says, "You are publishing an advertisement; please get it off," that is the way the matter is dealt with. If the advertisement is not taken off, an offence has been committed.

Under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, when the police go to an internet service provider and say, "You have got something that we want to have information about because someone is distributing pornography"—or whatever it is that they are investigating—it would be right, in terms of amendment No. 33, to pay a sensible administration fee for the matter to be checked out and for someone to do the necessary work. The amendment reads:

> "An internet service provider shall investigate complaints from an enforcement authority"—

that is, a weights and measures authority in the United Kingdom—

> "on payment of a fee to cover administrative costs."

[Mr. Ian Bruce]

That is fair to internet service providers.

I understand that there is a meeting tomorrow with the Minister or her officials and internet service providers. I am saying, "Don't put an enormous load on internet service providers. Don't leave them worrying about what they might do inadvertently and then find that they do not have a sufficient defence. Say carefully to a provider that if he sets up a deal with a tobacco company of any description, or some other person who is providing tobacco advertising, he is culpable and can be prosecuted." The individual, however, may have been an innocent party to all that.

We should remember that an internet service provider has not been clearly defined. The term includes virtually anyone who is doing anything over the internet. The worldwide web is an internet service provider. Many people are involved in the process of getting information on to someone's computer. They are involved as internet service providers.

Through amendment No. 36, I criticise the Government for using the term "website". If one so criticises the Government in that context, it is only fair to try to work out something better. I admit that I did so after consideration of the Bill had been completed in Committee, when the other members of the Committee had scooted off home. I was at my computer trying to work out the right way to deal with the matter.

Clause 4(2) reads:

"The appropriate Minister may provide in regulations that no offence is committed under Section 2 in relation to a tobacco advertisement which . . . is in a place"—

that is, where tobacco is being sold—

"or on a website where tobacco products are offered for sale".

That means that someone goes to a shop and receives some information through an advertisement. This might come within the regulations. The individual will buy the tobacco on the basis of the information that he is given. We all understand that.

In the virtual world, how is that done? The Minister has gone for the snappy title of website. Perhaps that is on the basis that everyone knows what a website is—it is difficult to define things that are virtual. Someone who accesses a website and obtains a tobacco advertisement is not on a website in the terms that we are discussing. He has not physically gone on to the website. He has downloaded the advertisement to his computer. He has gone to a place where there is an authorised distributor of the advertisement because it is a place that sells tobacco. The advertisement that appears on his computer is legal from the Minister's point of view, but not within the terms of the Bill. That is because it is not still on the website. The website is elsewhere and the information has found its way to the individual's computer.

I suggested that if the information were downloaded on to a large billboard, the situation would be exactly the same. In trying to help the Government, I am saying with some difficulty that if we talk of a real place or a virtual place via electronic transmission where tobacco products are offered for sale, we are coming within the ambit of what the Government are trying to do. In other words, the place where it is legal to see the advertisements is the place where the individual has transmitted them.

I admit that the entire problem has not been covered. For example, the boyfriend of one of my daughters creates advertisements. It would be legal for an advertisement that he had created to sell a tobacco product at a point of sale on the website. Unfortunately, while he is producing it, he would probably be acting illegally. It is only when the information is on the website that it becomes a legal advertisement.

The Government are trying to say that it is legal to have an advertisement when someone is buying tobacco on a website, and it is legal for that advertisement to be created in the United Kingdom, but that is not what the Bill provides. I urge the Minister to consider what we are attempting to do, so as to assist her. I ask her particularly to bear in mind what the poor old internet service provider will find if there is an unlimited number of people who can contact him. He will hear, "I was searching the web the other day and I came across an advertisement which was not selling tobacco. I know that the advertisement is illegal and you must take it off." The individual is asked, "Where were you?" He says, "I clicked on this and on that, and I am not quite sure how I really got there."

That is searching the web; we often end up where we do not expect to be. Websites are often designed to try to ensure that information that has not been requested gets on to computers. The arrival of naked ladies on a computer screen is often completely accidental. I accept that many people are doing their very best to get naked ladies on their screen. If someone goes into a search engine, he might discover that someone has downloaded information because he is trying to sell a porn site. In future, people will be trying to sell tobacco. People will ask for information and receive instead information about the selling of tobacco.

It has been difficult to cram all these ideas into a short period. I hope that I have given the Minister some time in which to respond. The amendments are intended to be helpful and to ensure that the United Kingdom becomes the best place in the world to do the sort of business that we are discussing.

Yvette Cooper: I shall deal with the amendments in turn.

Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 would remove electronic distribution from the Bill and leave it to regulations. That is not the right approach; one principle of the Bill is to provide media neutrality, so that it applies to all media. Defences are then tailored, as appropriate, to different media, which is a sensible approach. The amendments would single out electronic distribution for special treatment, but not electronic publishing. There is therefore a lack of consistency. We said in Committee several times that the Government were sympathetic to the position of internet service providers and we will discuss with them the enforcement of the Bill. However, it would be wrong to write them, or others involved in electronic methods of communication, out of the script altogether.

I accept the intention behind amendments Nos. 34 and 35. In fact, they tend simply to rejig the provisions in the Bill. The intention of the Bill, and the purpose behind it, is to introduce a comprehensive ban and then introduce

appropriately targeted defences. The amendments would try to rejig that by building in the defences even before introducing the comprehensive ban.

Mr. Ian Bruce: Will the Minister give way?

Yvette Cooper: Not now, because I have limited time. I will give way if I have time when I have made these points in response.

Electronic distributors already have the defences, under clause 5(6), of being unaware, of being unable to prevent further distribution, or of not carrying on business in the United Kingdom. The amendments add nothing to those defences, but add the sense of someone who could tell ISPs about a tobacco advertisement authoritatively. We discussed that in Committee, when I made it clear that the Government are happy to work with ISPs to develop a workable system. However, we see no reason to introduce a bureaucracy to do so in the Bill, and believe that we can get a voluntary arrangement that would be effective in that area.

I accept the intention behind amendment No. 36, but I do not think that it adds anything to the Bill or improves it. The term "website" is currently understood to mean a location on the worldwide web, identified by a web address. There is a legitimate concern about what happens in five years' time if the idea of a website becomes redundant because technology has moved on. We have included clause 7 in the Bill so that we can keep up with the technology. The amendment would not add anything to the Bill, and we would still have to rely on clause 7 to keep up.

We cannot accept amendment No. 15, which would remove clause 7 and our order-making power to amend the Bill to take account of developments in technology. That power is not open-ended and does not allow us to change any provision on a whim. It is a narrow and specific power, allowing us to change only provisions relating to publishing or distributing by electronic means so as to react to developments in technology. We would not use that power lightly, but given the pace of technological development in that area, it is extremely important to have it, so that the Bill's intention is not rendered pointless by the rapid pace of technology.

Amendment No. 33 would allow particular businesses or private individuals to charge public authorities for obeying the law of the land. That is not appropriate and we do not undertake such action in other areas of the law. We are aware that ISPs have legitimate concerns.

Mr. Bruce: The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which has just been passed by the House, does precisely that for precisely those people who are targeted by the provision.

Yvette Cooper: We have said that we recognise that the ISPs have legitimate concerns, in that they should have, first, appropriate defences, especially those regarding the fact that they were not aware. Additionally, they should have additional defences as compared with print distributors and publishers. There should also be an effective system of implementing the Bill that does not put additional burdens or pressures on ISPs beyond what is necessary to implement the Bill sensibly.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) is right to say that my officials are meeting ISPs. We are keen to work with them to set up a voluntary system, which works in other areas. Amendments Nos. 22 and 23 raise issues concerning ISPs similar to those which a previous amendment raised about websites. Again, it is not necessary to provide further definitions in that area, for which we have a normal understanding of the wording. Furthermore, if that definition becomes obsolete because of changes in technology, we will have power, under clause 7, to amend it to respond to developments in technology in future. I therefore propose that we reject all the amendments in this group.

Mrs. Spelman: To make it clear, in seeking to point out to the House—

It being a quarter past Eight o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [7 November and this day].*

Amendment negatived.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 4

ADVERTISING: EXCLUSIONS

Amendment made: No. 41, in page 2, line 19, leave out—

'which is printed outside the United Kingdom and'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 8

DISPLAYS

Amendment made: No. 42, in page 4, line 4, leave out—

'tobacco products or causes them to be displayed'

and insert—

'or causes to be displayed tobacco products or their prices'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 9

PROHIBITION OF FREE DISTRIBUTIONS

Amendments made: No. 43, in page 4, line 42, after "sum", insert—

'or at a substantial discount'.

No. 44, in page 4, line 43, at end insert—

'( ) If regulations under subsection (6) provide for this section to apply to making products or coupons available at a substantial discount, the regulations must provide for the meaning of "substantial discount".'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 10

PROHIBITION OF SPONSORSHIP

Amendment made: No. 48, in page 5, line 7, after "which", insert—

', in the course of a business,'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Amendment made: No. 45, in page 5, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under this section to prove that he did not know and had no reason to suspect that the contribution referred to in subsection (2) was made in the course of a business.'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 11

BRANDSHARING

Amendment made: No. 46, in page 5, line 36, at end insert—

'( ) If regulations under this section provide for a prohibition or restriction to be subject to an exception, the regulations may also make such provision as the Secretary of State considers appropriate for a corresponding exception to have effect for the purposes of offences under section 2, 3, 8, 9 or 10.'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 12

TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING

Amendment made: No. 47, in page 5, line 41, leave out "a tobacco advertisement" and insert "anything".—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Clause 16

PENALTIES

Amendment made: No. 49, in page 9, line 3, leave out "three" and insert "six".—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Amendment made: No. 50, in page 9, line 4, at end insert—

'; or

(b) on conviction on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 2 years, or a fine, or both.'.—*[Yvette Cooper.]*

Order for Third Reading read.

8.16 pm

Yvette Cooper: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Bill has been extensively debated in Committee and also today, and I believe that it has been improved by our discussions. It is a ground-breaking measure, which introduces a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. It is ground-breaking also because it makes specific provision to address advertising on the internet. It is right that much of the time that we have spent today and in Committee has been on issues concerning the internet, which is an area of rapidly developing and changing technology.

As a result of debates in Committee, we have clarified the distinction between advertising and display—for example, the distinction between individual choice and operations undertaken in the course of business—and improved enforcement.

Many of the amendments tabled by the Opposition demonstrated conflicting points of view. Some appeared to tighten the Bill, such as those that proposed changes concerning product placement and products being offered at less than market value. Others sought to create huge gaping loopholes in the Bill, such as those concerning brand sharing, which we discussed earlier today.

It is important to recognise the overall significance of the Bill, which would ban tobacco advertising and sponsorship in this country. Smoking kills 120,000 people each year. That fact, shocking as it might be, cannot be repeated too often. One in two smokers will die from the habit. It is in that context that we are introducing the ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship.

People have a right to choose to smoke, but smoking is addictive, and they also have a right not to be pressurised by manipulative, seductive advertising into starting to smoke. They have a right not to be bombarded with advertisements and pressurised not to give up smoking. Some of the most insidious advertising of all is targeted at those who are trying to give up, possibly at the time of year when they are trying hardest. For example, when they have made a new year's resolution to stop, advertising might undermine their resolve and intention to give up.

Seventy per cent. of smokers say that they want to give up. Given the huge health impact of smoking and the health inequalities caused by smoking, it is right that we provide such people with every support that we can, through the NHS and through Parliament, when they want to give up smoking.

I strongly believe that people have a right to smoke, but I do not accept that tobacco companies have a right to spend £100 million of the profits that they gain from selling a deadly product on hooking new smokers. In a country that cares about preventing ill health, tackling health inequalities, and particularly protecting the health of children, we cannot ignore the effect of tobacco advertising.

In the end, children are at the heart of the Bill. The evidence shows that the most heavily advertised brands are those most likely to be smoked by children. Research in the US found that children as young as three were familiar with Joe Camel, and that children as young as six were as familiar with Joe Camel as they were with Mickey Mouse, and knew that the camel was associated with cigarettes. That is the kind of advertising that we should be concerned about.

A voluntary ban was not enough. It simply restricted advertising in a narrow area close to schools. What about the advertising that is not near schools? What about the advertising in the streets, in shopping centres and through brand sharing? What about the promotion through sponsorship of sports and public events? Those are some of the forms of advertising that the Bill will make unlawful. It is right that we should do that. The Bill will not stop artistic licence. It will not take away the right of journalists to applaud smoking, so long as they are not being sponsored to do so. It is about preventing big companies from using their size and their riches to promote products to people whose lives are at stake.

The Smee report, commissioned by Department of Health Ministers in 1992, set out the evidence of the impact of an advertising ban. After examining the evidence from Norway, Finland, Canada and New Zealand, it found that

"in each case the banning of advertising was followed by a fall in smoking on a scale which cannot reasonably be attributed to other factors."

The World Bank's recent report, "Curbing the Epidemic", stated:

"A recent study of 22 high-income countries based on data from 1970 to 1992 concluded that comprehensive bans on cigarette advertising and promotion can reduce smoking, but more limited partial bans have little or no effect."

That is an important factor behind the Bill that we have presented and taken through the House.

The evidence is that banning tobacco advertising does reduce consumption, but only if the ban is comprehensive. That is important and explains why the Bill introduces an almost complete ban on tobacco advertising and promotion, with very limited, targeted exceptions. We know that only if we introduce a comprehensive ban will we make a real impact on smoking.

The Bill is part of a broader strategy to tackle smoking. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) raised concerns earlier about tobacco smoking being on the increase. In fact, the figures show that tobacco smoking increased between 1994 and 1996, but fell between 1996 and 1998. We await the recent figures with interest, but it is a matter of grave concern to us that the figures also show, and have shown since 1992, that smoking among young people is on the rise. That is exactly why we are introducing a ban on tobacco advertising.

The Government felt that the measures that were in place when we took office were not sufficient. Smoking had been on the increase, and something more needed to be done. That is why we are extending the most wide-scale publicly funded provision of smoking cessation services in Europe, and we are proud to do so.

Smoking is a fundamental cause of health inequalities in this country. That is why we are tackling smoking, providing people with support when they want to give up smoking, and preventing the tobacco companies from abusing their position by making it more difficult for people to give up an addictive product.

The Bill has been extensively debated. The main Opposition party did not support it on Second Reading, but I hope that it will do so now. Given the impact that the Bill could have on public health, and given that the Opposition have stated many times that they would like to see the prevalence of smoking fall, I hope that they will support the Bill on Third Reading. That will be the test of their commitment to reducing smoking and improving public health. I call on them to join us in the Lobby tonight in support of a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, which will ultimately narrow health inequalities and protect our children's health into the future.

8.24 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I should like to begin by thanking my hon. Friends the Members for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) for the tremendous work that they put into examining the Bill in the time allowed by the programme motion.

As the Minister for Public Health said, the Bill has a simple and oft-repeated aim. The Opposition share that aim, which is to reduce smoking. No one doubts that smoking is bad and damages health. As far as I know, nobody has tried during the passage of the Bill to argue the converse and to suggest that smoking is not a bad thing. However, the Opposition have argued that an evidence-based approach must be brought to the debate. If doctors involved in treating the consequences of smoking have to practise evidence-based medicine, surely it is a useful discipline for the House to practise evidence-based policy. In other words, we must consider whether the Bill will work and achieve the aims that it sets out to achieve.

It is also necessary for the debate to be properly balanced and fully informed. The Minister said that smoking was a cause of health inequality, but it is not only the consumption of tobacco that produces inequalities. As she would be the first to admit, people who consume tobacco are far less likely to present early during any episode of illness, especially when they are on low incomes. That contributes as much to poor outcomes as tobacco usage and explains why smokers in middle-class areas have better survival rates than those in low-income areas. Wider issues such as those must be taken into account.

The first question is whether the Bill will work. Secondly, however, we must ask under what circumstances, if any, it is appropriate to ban the advertising of a legal product. That question is especially important when, as hon. Members on both sides of the House must candidly admit, the Government raise so much revenue from that product. Although health Ministers complain regularly about the tactics used by tobacco companies to raise consumption at particular times of year, I do not see the Treasury giving the money back. Health Ministers always pray for a reduction in tobacco consumption, but I have often suspected, in debates about the willingness—or otherwise—of Governments to reduce the consumption of tobacco, that the same number of Treasury officials are praying that smokers will not give up and will continue to provide money for the Government's coffers.

On Second Reading, the Opposition argued that a coherent strategy was required, but that the Government had not produced one. We also argued that the introduction of a ban would be merely window dressing if the price of tobacco products was falling and consumption was rising because they were available to more people. We said that the Government's failure to tackle smuggling effectively put more people at risk—especially those in the groups mentioned by the Minister. As all hon. Members can tell from anecdotal constituency evidence, it is increasingly easy for young people to gain access to tobacco, perhaps because it is available in pub car parks or because it has been smuggled and is cheap and readily available to them.

Despite those factors, and the Government's argument about the big impact of advertising, the explanatory notes to the Bill state that the eventual aim of the Bill is to reduce consumption by only 2.5 per cent. That is important in terms of decreased morbidity and mortality, but most people outside the House will not regard it as a dramatic reduction.

A number of practical difficulties have been mentioned—

Mr. Forth: I should like to ask my question now, as I sense that my hon. Friend is about comment—no doubt

[Mr. Forth]

briefly—on the detail of the Bill. Does he accept that the Bill must be revised through the addition of a sunset clause, a review requirement or another such provision? Surely we cannot walk blindly into introducing the Bill, assert that it is a good thing and leave it at that. Given all the uncertainties that he has already mentioned, what will my hon. Friend do about that, if it is not already too late?

Dr. Fox: My right hon. Friend will know from the selection list that we could not debate the concept of a time limit in respect of this legislation today. However, if evidence exists to show that such a ban works, there is nothing to fear from a time-limiting clause. If the measure does not work when it is enacted, it will be hard to argue for its continued existence. We shall attempt to introduce a time limit on the Bill in another place so that it becomes genuinely evidence based. Those who consider such issues rationally will regard that as fair and acceptable.

I want to consider some of the Bill's practical difficulties. I am grateful for the Minister's willingness in Committee to acknowledge some of the shortcomings in the original drafting and accept the spirit of many Opposition amendments in tabling Government amendments. The Government made welcome concessions on brand sharing; on offences, through Government amendments Nos. 40, 41 and 43; on electronic transmissions; and on sponsorship agreements. They will improve a measure that was not initially well drafted. Irrespective of hon. Members' feelings about the purpose of the Bill, it is in the interests of all legislators to ensure that the quality of Bills is as good as possible. However, practical difficulties remain. If we had more time, we might have been able to explore them more fully. They may yet make implementing the Bill impossible.

It is worth pointing out, in a difficult argument about restrictions on advertising a legal product, that the previous Government restricted tobacco advertising. The code of conduct that was introduced in 1994 set stringent limitations on such advertising. Governments in this country have not taken an absolute position; we are considering the extent to which we should make such a restriction.

The United Kingdom did well for many years in reducing tobacco consumption and smoking prevalence through a combination of price mechanism, education and restrictions, if not a ban, on tobacco advertising. There was a consensus on that in the House of Commons and in the country. The United Kingdom had a good record. We are considering the appropriate balance between the three policy components, and whether the Bill has achieved that.

We must also consider the requirements for a proper anti-smoking policy. As we said on Second Reading, we must re-examine our education policy. To convey an effective health message, it must be aimed at the right age group and sustained for long enough to make a difference. Too often, Ministers interfere politically and reject the advice of those who understand the matter better. We have thus failed to address the appropriate health message to the right client group. We have missed a trick, and we need to reconsider our education policy as part of an anti-smoking strategy.

An advertising ban will not remove one of the greatest influences on young people: the example set by parents and peer groups. Those matters must be tackled. We must ensure that parents do not set youngsters a bad example by smoking, which only encourages them to believe that it is acceptable. We must also ensure that we diminish the influence of peer groups as much as possible. That task is rendered even more difficult when role models smoke. Earlier, the example was given of supermodels smoking on the catwalk, and the concept, especially for young girls, of a link between tobacco and being slim. That is a dangerous idea. As a society, we must consider how to tackle such matters.

The Minister mentioned what she perceived to be the success of advertising restrictions in other countries. We must ask about the other policies that were in place at the same time. No one would argue that simply banning advertising is a sufficient anti-smoking strategy. The Government will have their way because of their numerical superiority in Parliament and, over time, they will be able to make their case. We shall be able to judge the measure's effectiveness against whether tobacco consumption decreases in the real world.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): My hon. Friend will know that a number of Conservative Members are very much in favour of a limitation on tobacco advertising because of the dangers that it can present to health. Does he, however, accept that the Bill had an opportunity to make two provisions that it does not make? The first is to increase the medical warning on a packet of cigarettes so that it occupies a much larger percentage of the display, as has been done in Australia; the second is to deal with the problem of passive smoking for those with lung diseases, for whom it is a considerable problem.

Dr. Fox: I should declare an interest in relation to my right hon. Friend's second point. As an asthma sufferer, I find it a perpetual source of irritation to have to inhale other people's tobacco smoke. However, that matter does not come within the scope of the Bill, and I am sure that you would quickly rule me out of order if I were to go down that route, Madam Deputy Speaker.

My right hon. Friend is right to say that the Bill has missed opportunities to consider wider issues that might have formed part of a fuller, more comprehensive anti-smoking strategy. However, he will be aware that, for every Conservative Member who might wish to go along with a ban on advertising, there will be another who believes that such a ban constitutes an unacceptable infringement of civil liberties.

As I was saying, we shall have the proof of the pudding later, when we determine whether the Government have been successful in achieving a reduction in smoking. The Bill is merely window dressing, and the Government are failing to take a broader grip on the problems of smuggling and reduced pricing that are pushing up—and will continue to push up—tobacco consumption.

Many hon. Members have strong reservations about restricting freedom, and I understand why they would wish to vote against the Bill on that basis. However, I have seen enough damage in coronary care units and respiratory units to understand the tragedy that tobacco consumption can produce. The Opposition do not intend to divide the House on the Bill tonight. We shall, however, seek to amend it in another place to introduce a time limit to weigh the benefits of retaining the legislation

against the evidence that is produced. We all hope that tobacco consumption can be reduced, but we are less than confident that the Bill is the vehicle to produce that result.

8.38 pm

John Robertson: I served on the Standing Committee, and I should like to have an input to the debate. As one who is new to this game, so to speak, I found the Standing Committee very educational. For example, Opposition Members wanted clarification about the word "advertising". They must have asked for that about 10 times and, even though my hon. Friend the Minister told them on several occasions that the definition was in clause 1, they proceeded to ask on several further occasions why it was not also included in other parts of the Bill, thus wasting time.

Earlier this evening, the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) mentioned an article in *The Daily Telegraph*, which gives us an idea of the kind of advertising to which the tobacco industry is now stooping. It explains how a woman approached six undergraduates and asked them whether they would like to earn £50. To do so, they would have to go into pubs smoking and—among other criteria that they would have to fulfil—circulate among the other people there. They would have to dress in a glamorous fashion, hand round cigarettes—giving them away—and leave packets of cigarettes on unattended tables.

The aim was to attract people aged barely 18. As under-age drinking was taking place in some of the clubs involved, it was not possible to rule on the age of those smoking the cigarettes. The brand involved was Gauloises. It is not a cigarette with which I am familiar, but I have smelt it on occasion, and it is certainly recognisable by those who know someone who smokes it.

What I have described is a particularly disgraceful type of advertising, which I hope the Bill will cover.

Dr. Fox: We deprecate operations of that kind, but, as I am sure the Minister will confirm, the Bill will not cover such advertising.

John Robertson: I think it will, but no doubt the Minister will clarify the position. I certainly hope that it will be covered, but that, if it is not, an appropriate amendment will be tabled in the other place.

I do not wish to speak for long, mainly because I know that Opposition Members want to contribute—far be it from me to stop them—but I remind the House that the Bill has been introduced because 120,000 people die of tobacco-related illnesses each year. In 1996, 350,000 children aged between 11 and 15 were smoking regularly. I was sympathetic towards the amendment on product placement tabled by the hon. Member for Meriden, and I was sorry that the Government did not see fit to accept it. I fear that product placement is the tobacco industry's next step down the road of attacking—as I would put it—young people, and trying to persuade them to smoke earlier. It is important for us to tackle such advertising.

I congratulate *The Daily Telegraph* on its responsible article, although it is not a newspaper that supports my party very often. It has brought an issue to light, as I am sure the Minister will agree. I hope that if there is a loophole in the Bill, the Minister will take that on board, and it will be taken care of in the other place.

8.42 pm

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): Let me again record our support for the Bill, which has worthy aims. If we have a regret, it is that the Government did not present the legislation sooner. We consider it to be a competent Bill—especially in its amended form, following Committee stage—and one whose scope is sensibly limited: it relies on existing legislation and regulatory frameworks to control a number of the media involved, but nevertheless is likely to add a substantial weapon to the campaign against smoking.

No one, surely, can doubt the role played by smoking in deteriorating public health in the United Kingdom and abroad. Smoking is connected with a range of diseases and other conditions; anything that can be done to reduce its prevalence, thereby improving public health, must be worth trying. It was argued on Second Reading, although the argument has featured less since then, that cigarette advertising did not increase consumption. The suggestion was fairly well demolished on Second Reading, and it cannot count for nothing that so much cigarette advertising takes place, but it is worth repeating that advertising generally does not enjoy complete commercial freedom. There are restraints on it, and responsibilities are placed on advertisers.

I do not think that the curtailing of commercial advertising would represent any terrible, swingeing loss of freedom of speech or individual liberty for producers. I do not believe that that is a high price to pay. However, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, we do not really know how effective the provision will be. That is a fair point. Nevertheless, on the balance of the arguments that we have heard and considered, I believe that it is worth trying the provision to see whether it might do some good.

Some goods points were made in Committee. The hon. Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce) made one or two goods points about the internet and electronic advertising. It is fair to say, however, that he made those points at extraordinary length. I am entirely unclear whether that was a tactic to sustain the argument that not enough time was being provided to consider the Bill, or whether he simply could not help it. I shall give him the benefit of the doubt. However, the argument that we have not given adequate time to the Bill is absolute nonsense. Although we did progress unusually quickly from Second Reading to Committee, and from Committee to Report, the total time given to the Bill has been more than adequate for a small, 20-clause measure.

Conservative Members have spent more time debating whether there is enough time, and dragging out our proceedings to try to demonstrate that there is not, than they have spent debating the principles at stake.

Mrs. Spelman: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that in Committee the hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) was given an undertaking that on Report there would be a debate on new clause 5, but we have not had time for that debate?

Mr. Harvey: The hon. Lady's point is reasonable, in that I should have liked new clause 5 to be debated. However, it has not been selected for debate. It therefore seems to be less a lack of time and more that, for whatever reason, the new clause did not find favour in the Speaker's

[Mr. Harvey]

Office and was not selected for debate today. When the Bill goes to the other place, perhaps a similar provision will have a chance for debate.

Sir Peter Emery: May I point out to the hon. Gentleman, as nicely as I can, that, as the selection list shows, there was not time to debate four whole groups of amendments comprising about 30 amendments? At the end of the debate, the occupant of the Chair had to put the Government amendments in those groups en masse without any debate whatsoever. I therefore think that the hon. Gentleman might want to be a little more careful in his assumptions.

Mr. Harvey: I was trying to be kind. It has to be said, however, that the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) moved an amendment and spoke to that group for more than 30 minutes, but, at the end of that debate, did not press any of the amendments to a vote. We have seen exactly the same throughout the Bill's passage. The official Opposition are perfectly entitled to do that if they want. I am simply saying that, after all that, I do not believe that there is a sustainable argument that not enough time has been given to the Bill, which has only 20 clauses. The time provided, both in Committee and in the two full-scale debates in the House, has been proportionate to the scale of the Bill and its objectives. We have given more than adequate time to it.

Although I agree, as I said, that we have progressed more hurriedly than usual from one stage to another—which may or may not have something to do with certain events that we all believe to be pending—the total time that we have given to a short, 20-clause Bill has been more than adequate. If Conservative Members had been a little more concise in making some of their points, they would have had plenty of time, both today and in Committee, to debate all the groups of amendments.

Dr. Fox: I am a little puzzled. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that the time given to the Bill was adequate, why did Liberal Democrat Members vote against the programme motion?

Mr. Harvey: We voted against that motion for the same reason that we have voted against other programme motions. We believe that the motions themselves are being drafted and moved before the Government have had a proper opportunity to assess the arguments that were made on Second Reading and to test the waters before deciding how much time should be provided. The details of the programme motion were perfectly reasonable, but my party opposed it—and other programme motions—because of the haste with which it was implemented. My party is in favour of programme motions—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Before the debate goes too wide, I remind the House that debate on Third Reading is restricted to the contents of a Bill. The question is whether this Bill should have a Third reading.

Mr. Harvey: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sure that you observed that I was simply responding to interventions, but you are, of course, quite right.

This is a good Bill, with worthwhile aims. As a result of the amendments that have been made, it is competently drafted. My party is pleased to support it this evening.

8.50 pm

Mr. Barron: I take great pleasure in supporting this Bill. I was a member of the Standing Committee that considered it, and I found the debates very interesting. The Bill gives us an opportunity to take further last year's excellent work by the Select Committee on Health on the dangers of smoking.

I was surprised at the attitude displayed towards the Bill by the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). Early on, he said that he was prepared to give the Bill a fair wind, and that he wanted to see the evidence that the resulting legislation would reduce smoking in this country by a certain amount. However, he said today that the Bill needed to be evidence based and that he needed to see that evidence.

On 21 December, the hon. Gentleman was sent five reports by the charity Action on Smoking and Health, with which I am involved. Those reports showed clear evidence—from the World Bank and from other international studies—that there is a relationship between tobacco advertising and promotion and the consumption of tobacco. What he said this evening leads me to assume that he has not read those reports. I hope that he takes some time next week, when the House is not sitting, to look at the reports and read the clear evidence that shows the causal link between tobacco advertising and promotion and smoking.

I paraphrase, but the hon. Member for Woodspring also said that no one doubts that smoking is bad for health. It is a pity that he did not read last year's report on the matter from the Select Committee on Health. There are people in society who doubt the relationship between ill health and smoking. Three quotations from the report will prove my point.

The Select Committee asked witnesses a specific question—whether they believed that smoking caused cancer beyond all reasonable doubt. The representative from the Gallaher group said:

"It is generally accepted that smoking is neither a necessary . . . nor a sufficient . . . cause of disease and that causal conclusions in this regard are a matter of judgement . . . As such it would as yet be going too far to say that causation has been proved beyond *all* reasonable doubt".

The representative from Imperial Tobacco said:

"We do not agree that smoking causes (these) . . . diseases beyond all reasonable doubt".

The representative from the firm RJ Reynolds said:

"No—nobody knows what causes these diseases beyond all reasonable doubt".

We know that 50 per cent. of people who smoke will have a shorter life than they should have. The people who have undermined public health policy for years are still coming out with the claim that smokers do not get hurt.

I hope that the Bill will make a start on reversing the way in which public health policies have been undermined. For years we have tried, through arguments and advertisements, to get people off cigarettes. The Government are spending £20 million a year on cessation programmes—more than any Government in the past. That money will not be used to good effect as long as tobacco companies are allowed to advertise and promote their product.

We are at last getting serious about tobacco and its lethal effects, and we are trying to get people off it. We cannot allow that project to be undermined in our popular culture by tobacco advertising. Neither can we allow the project to be undermined by members of political parties in this Chamber who are more concerned about their connections—in the past, but also possibly in the future—with the tobacco industry than they are about public health in this country.

8.54 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I support the Bill, and will do so if there is a Division on Third Reading. Like the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey), my only regret is that this measure was not introduced sooner. Connections with the tobacco industry may have been one reason for that.

This issue was discussed in the Scottish Parliament on 17 January, when the Parliament unanimously supported the Bill. It also decided unanimously, under the Sewel procedure, to remit the Scottish sections of the Bill to this place for legislation.

I want to quote from one of the good speeches that was made by members of all parties that day. One person argued:

> "A Sewel motion should not mean that Scottish ministers abdicate their responsibility in favour of the Westminster Parliament."

He went on to say:

> Perhaps the Scottish Parliament should decide on its own bill, which could encompass not just advertising, but point-of-sale materials, sales to those who are under age, and more enforcement. Perhaps more of the issues should be dealt with in this chamber."—[*Scottish Parliament Official Report*, 17 January 2001; Vol. 10, c. 279-80.]

Those are the views of the Conservative spokesperson in the Scottish Parliament, Mr. Ben Wallace. It is slightly ironic, because one of the amendments that we did not reach this evening was a Conservative amendment to remove the responsibilities from Scottish Ministers which the Conservatives in the Scottish Parliament say our Ministers should not be abdicating. I will leave Conservative Members to explain how they reconcile the position north and south of the border. However, what Mr. Ben Wallace said in the Scottish Parliament, to unanimous assent, was important. He said that Scottish Ministers should look carefully at their responsibilities, monitoring those responsibilities and the effectiveness of the legislation, considering enforcement and signs of success and, indeed, further legislation if that is required.

For this evening, I offer my support for the Bill. I am happy that it is being included in the legislative process—perhaps just in time for coming events.

8.56 pm

Yvette Cooper: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will reply to the Third Reading debate.

I thank members of the Committee for their hard work during the Bill's passage through the House. I welcome the contributions this evening by my hon. Friends the Members for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) and for Glasgow, Anniesland (Mr. Robertson). The example given by my hon. Friend the Member for Anniesland, of students being paid by Gauloises to smoke in bars, will be covered by the Bill, either by the sponsorship or the free distribution provisions.

I take this opportunity to welcome the support for the Bill from the hon. Members for North Devon (Mr. Harvey) and for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond). I am glad that they will be joining us in the Lobby. I also welcome the decline in the opposition of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—that is probably the best way to describe it. As I understand it, his party will not be opposing Third Reading. I urge him to listen to the evidence that he says is so important and to go further by joining us in voting to give the Bill a Third Reading. I urge him to join us in the Lobby tonight.

This is a good and important Bill. We were keen to introduce the ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship across Europe, and we will continue to push for a Europe-wide ban. Clearly, the more co-operation we can get at a European level, the greater the impact will be on public health. Equally, we will continue to push for co-ordinated action worldwide through the World Health Organisation.

This is an important Bill. It is not about preventing freedom of choice—people have the choice whether to smoke tobacco products. However, they should also have the choice to give up if they want to, without pressure from the tobacco companies and without the pressure of tobacco advertising. That is why we are introducing a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising and sponsorship. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 327, Noes 5.

Division No. 119] **[8.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin

Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple–Morris, Peter
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Body, Sir Richard
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Gerald Howarth and Mr. Andrew Hunter.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Capital Allowances Bill

[Relevant document: First Report of the Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills, Session 2000–01, on the Capital Allowances Bill, HC175.]

Considered in Committee.

Motion made, and Question put,

That the Committee of the whole House be discharged from considering the Bill.—[*Dawn Primarolo.*]

The Committee divided: Ayes 313, Noes 12.

Division No. 120] **[9.13 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin

Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
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Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
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Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
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Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Body, Sir Richard
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Chope, Christopher
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hunter, Andrew
Paisley, Rev Ian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Londf'y)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.25 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Before we proceed to consideration of the Bill on Third Reading, will you advise the House whether it is possible to determine how long the Committee sat? I have the report and I cannot identify for how many hours the Committee considered a Bill of many hundreds of clauses.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): That is not a matter for the Chair. We shall now proceed with Third Reading.

Dawn Primarolo: I am pleased to open the debate. The Bill differs in several ways from Finance Bills and most other Bills that deal with tax. It is the first Bill to come out of the project that is rewriting the United Kingdom direct tax code. It is also the first Bill to have been scrutinised by the Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills.

The Bill commands widespread support within the House and from businesses, tax practitioners and others. I do not claim that as a first. Other Bills may well have received equal support. Rather more may have deserved it. However, as a simple matter of observation, the Bill

has united people in support of a proposition that is neither contentious nor complex. Put simply, it is that tax legislation should be clearer and easier to understand.

It may help if I start by describing formally what the Bill does. With minor changes, it rewrites legislation about capital allowances. Broadly speaking, capital allowances are given to businesses that incur capital expenditure on assets that they use in their business. On the basis of estimates for 2000-01, capital allowances are worth more than £18 billion. They affect most businesses in one way or another. This is an important piece of legislation by any standards.

The Bill is not about the substance of those allowances. That was decided in past Finance Acts. Equally, it will be for future Finance Bills to make any substantial changes. The Bill's purpose is rather to make legislation clearer and easier to use. It is the first product of the Inland Revenue's tax law rewrite project. That project was set up in 1996 by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). Its remit is to rewrite all or most of the United Kingdom's direct tax legislation.

I apologise if everyone in the Chamber already appreciates the point, but I must emphasise that the process of putting legislation into clearer and more modern shape and language does not include changing tax policies. The project is not about that, and never was. Proposals for changing policy will continue to be dealt with in the usual way, through Finance Bills.

It was recognised from the outset, however, that some minor changes might be helpful to improve legislation. Examples are legislation to replace extra-statutory concessions, bridging gaps in legislation, and clarifying grey areas of legislation. The Bill covers 66 such points, to which the project drew attention as possible changes in the law.

The 66 changes, and the Bill more generally, were scrutinised by the Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills. The Committee concluded that the changes were indeed of only minor significance. The Committee's first report also commended the Bill as

"a welcome clarification of the existing law".

Perhaps I may be permitted to say a few words about that process, as this is the first tax simplification Bill, about which a few Members have previously expressed concerns, especially on Second Reading. The procedure was recommended for tax simplification Bills by the Select Committee on Procedure in January 1997. It concluded that a new procedure was appropriate for tax simplification Bills, given that they are akin to, but different from, consolidation Bills. That led to Standing Order No. 60, passed in March 1997, which provides for tax simplification Bills to be referred after Second Reading to a Joint Committee of both Houses.

A Joint Committee of the two Houses is by no means unprecedented. It is established practice for consolidation Bills, including Bills which, since 1949, may include minor changes in law. Nor is it unprecedented for a Joint Committee to consider a Bill relating to tax. I understand the principle that concerned the Members who on Second Reading expressed doubt about aspects of that process. However, as the Procedure Committee noted in 1997, the 1952 Customs and Excise Bill was committed to a Joint Committee, without qualms and to good effect. In 1997, the Procedure Committee did not consider any constitutional objection to be well founded.

That procedure has worked well in practice with the Capital Allowances Bill. The Joint Committee benefited from the expertise and experience of the several noble Lords, and also had the benefit of hearing evidence from Mr. Adam Broke. I should like to place on record the thanks of the Committee and the House for the time that he spent with the Committee. He is an eminent tax practitioner in his own right and a past president of the Chartered Institute of Taxation. He is also a member of the project's steering and consultative committees, and as such, could assist the Committee with the extensive consultation procedure that preceded the Bill. The Joint Committee's consideration of the Bill has also, I suggest, fully answered the concerns expressed by Opposition Members on Second Reading. The Committee took evidence in public and scrutinised the Bill—and undertook that very much as a joint exercise.

Other fears expressed by Opposition Members proved to be equally unfounded. All members of the Committee took part in the scrutiny of the Bill and the examination of witnesses, demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the issues. The Joint Committee's report confirms and reinforces the comments made previously by businesses, professionals and others.

For example, the Institute of Directors commented in August:

"the Bill is a magnificent achievement. It will sweep away not just the Capital Allowances Act 1990, but many other bits of legislation scattered through Finance Acts."

The tax faculty of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales similarly welcomed the Bill. It commented:

"the quality of the draft reflects the enormous amount of work undertaken by the Revenue in consultation with organisations such as ours."

The Law Society similarly said in evidence to the Joint Committee:

"we welcome the publication of the Capital Allowances Bill. We believe that it does represent a significant improvement upon the existing legislation."

The Bill has also met with support from both sides of the House. In the course of Second Reading, I acknowledged the contribution of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) in setting up the rewrite project. They have both now participated in the first-fruits of the project, the former as Chairman of the Joint Committee and the latter as a current member of the project's steering committee. With such a broad basis of agreement on what is, as I have said, not a controversial proposition, the Bill comes from the Joint Committee with no amendments.

That is why we have proceeded directly to Third Reading. This process was provided for in Standing Order No. 60 in March 1997. The Bill is a significant demonstration of the commitment not just of the Government, but of the House, to make tax legislation clearer and easier to understand. It will help business, other taxpayers and those who advise them. I commend it to the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind the House that the Bill, as its long title states, is a Bill

"To restate, with minor changes, certain enactments relating to capital allowances."

[Madam Deputy Speaker]

I hope that hon. Members who are called to speak will bear that limited purpose in mind, and will not seek to broaden the debate to cover general issues of taxation or budgetary policy.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. The Order Paper states that the first report of the Joint Committee is relevant, so presumably that means that we will be able to refer to that report in the debate.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Indeed you may.

Mr. Forth: Oh, excellent.

9.36 pm

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): I join the Minister in congratulating all those who have been involved in the tax rewrite project—Mr. Adam Broke and all the officials who worked on the project, and the hon. Lady's officials in the Treasury.

We welcome the Bill. To restate the law on capital allowances is a tremendous feat, which has involved an unbelievable number of man-hours. The House should recognise what an important step the Bill is in making law simpler and easier to understand.

I used the phrases "restate the law" and "making law simpler", but as you pointed out, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill is a restatement, not a simplification. The point is raised in the report, and I have no doubt that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) will refer to it.

The Minister quoted Mr. Richard Baron, who wrote in *Accountancy Age* that the Bill was "a magnificent achievement". That remark represents recognition by practitioners of tax law that the Bill is worth praising. Mr. Baron went on:

"It will sweep away not just the Capital Allowances Act 1990, but many other bits of legislation scattered through Finance Acts. The table of repeals is four pages long."

He continued:

"Moreover, the Act is not too long. One big fear of the Project was that using plain English would mean using far more words than old-style tangled and condensed drafting. It has not happened. If we leave out consequential amendments and transitional provisions, we have a Bill of only 254 pages, well-spaced and in decent sized print."

That is recognition that the project has achieved its objective.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend says that the Bill is simple, and in one sense it may be. We are being asked to accept that it is but a simplification of existing law. Will my hon. Friend tell the House why he thinks that three sittings were sufficient for the Committee to satisfy itself that a Bill of some 332 pages was but a simplification of existing law?

Mr. Ottaway: I was trying to emphasise that the Bill was not a simplification, but a restatement. I will come in a moment to the question of sittings. I was a minority of one on the Committee who believed that we should have taken more independent external advice.

That was the first time that we had gone through the procedure. We sat as a Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills with Members of the other place, but this House had a majority. That was a new procedure, so I want to dwell on it for a moment.

I shall make three points about the operation of the Select Committee on Procedure and the Joint Committee. The Procedure Committee gave the Joint Committee the task of reporting to the House any problems that might arise.

My first point concerns the Joint Committee's composition, which the House debated at length. We became a bit caught up in guerrilla warfare, and its membership was debated in some detail. The other place nominated six of its Members, two of whom were members of the original tax law rewrite committee. Their input was extremely helpful. They have served Parliament and this country with distinction in their parliamentary careers and their integrity is beyond doubt, but I question whether their membership of the Committee was appropriate. As they were members of the original tax law rewrite committee, I am concerned about whether they had a conflict of interest in respect of the Joint Committee. I believe that it is irregular for those who oversaw the original drafting subsequently to be in a position to opine upon its effectiveness. I am not saying that it was improper for members of the original tax law rewrite committee to participate in the Joint Committee proceedings, but I am not at ease with that arrangement.

Secondly, I turn to the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) in his intervention. All the witnesses who gave evidence to the Joint Committee had participated in the tax rewrite project. The quality of their answers was flawless; they gave evidence just as the Committee wanted it and they answered every question simply and to the best of their ability—but they were not independent. No independent witness could consider the Bill and the rewrite, and say simply, "Yes, I think that these people have got it right." As virtually the only Opposition Member who served on the Committee, I might have faced the task of sitting down and spending several weeks analysing the Bill against the original law. Indeed, it took a number of officials on the tax rewrite committee several years to rewrite the proposals. I had to make a decision.

Dawn Primarolo: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point, but I offered him direct access to officials without ministerial supervision. If he felt that he would require such assistance to consider the Bill and to recognise the issues that it raised, he could have taken that offer up, but he declined it. Similarly, Opposition Front Benchers have direct access to officials without ministerial presence or knowledge for assistance in considering the technical detail of double taxation treaties.

Mr. Ottaway: I must confess that I do not recall that offer, but if the Paymaster General says that it was made, that is fine. However, she is missing the point. The Joint Committee should have had the advice of an independent witness.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe) *rose—*

Mr. Ottaway: I give way first to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe.

Mr. Clarke: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the Joint Committee would undoubtedly have called and heard any witness that he wanted to appear before it, had he named such a person? Can he name the independent witness from whom he wanted to hear, bearing in mind the five years of consultation and the circulation of exposure drafts to every conceivable professional and representative body? The Bill received the support of those bodies, and we heard no particular dissent from them.

Mr. Ottaway: As my right hon. and learned Friend knows, he and I disagree on that point. I did not propose a name because it was obvious that I was in a minority position, but I suggest that a partner from a leading firm of City solicitors would have made a perfectly adequate witness. If I had believed that my right hon. and learned Friend, as Chairman of the Committee, agreed with such a proposal, I would have dug out a name.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend knows that it is standard for a Select Committee to have advisers who can advise on the subject before it and on the questions to be asked. Did the Committee receive any independent advice about the content of the Bill or the questions to be asked of witnesses?

Mr. Ottaway: I shall answer that question with some care. If I simply said no, that would imply a slur on the witnesses. They gave evidence with absolute integrity, but they were part of the tax rewrite project. No witness was not part of it.

Mr. Hogg: There was no independent advice?

Mr. Ottaway: That is correct.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all his efforts. I found it odd that the Joint Committee held only three brief sittings. The minutes record long declarations of interest; I remind hon. Members that I have declared mine in the Register. It appears that no amendment was moved and that none of the 581 clauses or four schedules was believed to be defective. Did the Committee consider all 581 clauses, and was it satisfied that none added to or subtracted from existing law?

Mr. Ottaway: The Committee considered the 60-odd minor changes in sequence. An amendment was moved, but the Committee did not accept it.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On page 47 of the minutes of the Joint Committee for 31 January, the Chairman is recorded as saying:

"can Members of the Committee indicate if they agree that we should make no amendment whatever? (*Members indicated by a show of hands*)".

If I understand that correctly, the Committee agreed early in its proceedings that it would make no amendments. What sort of scrutiny does that suggest?

Mr. Ottaway: My right hon. Friend should not read lack of diligence into that. The Committee had every opportunity to consider amendments; it took the changes en bloc and quizzed the witnesses, and an amendment was tabled.

The Paymaster General said that the Committee scrutinised the Bill. I would not have used such a phrase. It had an opportunity to scrutinise the Bill, if it chose to do that. However, I have no idea whether the Bill reproduces the sense of the original draft measure. I am reliably informed that it does. I accept the word of those who gave evidence that it did, but unless I had given up several weeks of my time, I would not have had the opportunity to compare the current measure with the original drafting.

Dawn Primarolo: I am disappointed to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments at the Dispatch Box, because he did not make them in Committee. He had every opportunity to scrutinise the Bill. He claims that we did not have independent advisers, yet he did not propose anyone. He said that we did not have the right witnesses, but again, he did not suggest anyone. Now, having agreed to the report, which had unanimous support, he claims that he did not know what he was doing. Perhaps he should think carefully about serving on such a Committee in future.

Mr. Ottaway: The Paymaster General knows that that is a complete distortion of events. At the first sitting of the Joint Committee, I clearly and repeatedly made the point that I have made this evening. The minutes show that.

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ottaway: I shall do so shortly. The Paymaster General should not claim that I am misrepresenting things. If I had believed that she agreed with the proposal that I made, I could have produced the name of a suitable witness in no time.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman did not ask me.

Mr. Ottaway: The Minister says that I did not ask her. The minutes of evidence make it clear what happened, and what debates took place. I am sorry if she was not listening at the time.

Mr. Ruffley: I wish to make a helpful intervention. I think that my hon. Friend said a few moments ago that the Joint Committee agreed minor changes. As we know, the purpose of the Bill is to preserve the effect of existing law, subject to any minor changes that might be desirable. How many minor changes were there, and was the Committee satisfied that they were minor?

Mr. Ottaway: I believe that there were 66. The Committee was advised that they were minor, and it accepted that recommendation. The point that I am making is clear, and I hope that the Procedure Committee will consider the matter.

A further point concerns the scope of the Committee. We took the Bill as it was. However, it was not clear who had decided the format. The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland made the important point that it agreed with the

[Mr. Ottaway]

Bill but recommended that the new legislation should be accompanied by overviews, explanatory notes and signposts. It argued that self-assessment legislation meant that the taxpayer had a right to understand tax law.

The institute's report states:

"As a matter of principle it is our view that tax law should be capable of being understood by an intelligent taxpayer who is prepared to devote a reasonable amount of time to the task. Unfortunately, in many areas of tax law, so timid is the work of rewriting that an intelligent taxpayer would need a long period of study to understand with any degree of certainty what his tax liability is and how particular legislation affects him."

It continues:

"We are aware that a Parliamentary working party has considered the format of bills and acts generally and it has reported to, and obtained the approval of both Houses for proposals which reject many of the suggestions of the Project Team, including three-part numbering, cross-references and signposts at the end of sections, a larger typeface and overviews and notes. We recommend that these issues are revisited and we hope that overviews, explanatory notes and signposts will be used."

I have to confess that I cannot recall being consulted about the format of the Bill. I hope that the Minister will clarify how the format was decided, and tell us whether she agrees with the suggestion that those issues be revisited.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend rightly said that tax law should be readily comprehensible to an intelligent layman, and provided quotations to that effect. Does he agree that the Bill should be readily comprehensible to an intelligent outsider attending to our proceedings? Will he therefore do the House the favour of summarising in a sentence its purpose and effect?

Mr. Ottaway: I do not think that the Bill is incomprehensible. As I said, I think that it is a big improvement, although it would be inappropriate for this moment to pass without pointing out that there are those who think that it could be improved further, and that three-part numbering would be an improvement in the eyes of many.

The report discusses changing the name of the Joint Committee to illustrate a change from a Committee of simplification to a Committee that rewrites. It proposes that the Committee should be renamed the Joint Committee on tax law rewrite Bills. It is important to make the distinction between a rewrite and a simplification. There is no doubt that simplification of the law is required, and many commentators have said at some length that tax law needs improving. I recommend to those who have not had an opportunity to read it—I know that the Minister has—a paper produced by the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, entitled "Towards a better tax system", which suggests how the famous, or infamous, IR35 law could be simplified and improved.

We are now embarked on the first step of an important project—the rewriting of tax law. However, unless future Finance Acts are drafted in the rewritten style, we shall forever be going backwards: it will be two steps back and one step forward. I hope the Minister will confirm that future Acts will be so written, because otherwise it will be like painting the Forth bridge when it is rusting faster than it is being painted.

There is only one way in which what I want can be achieved. As I said on Second Reading, if resources for the tax rewrite project are increased and more staff are available, it will be possible to introduce the rewritten legislation faster than tax law is being made.

Despite what I have said, I believe that this is a successful project. It is an important step forward, and we wish the Bill a fair wind.

9.56 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) reached that conclusion, because I, too, support a Bill that I consider to represent the successful outcome of a long process pursued by the House and by successive Governments.

As Chancellor of the Exchequer, I was responsible for the launch of the tax rewrite project. I got my just deserts a few years later, when I was persuaded by the usual channels that I should therefore take on the obligations of chairing a Joint Committee on tax simplification. As it happened, it proved to be a reasonable undertaking; there was general satisfaction that the tax rewrite project team had done its work properly. The Committee reported its satisfaction with the Bill, and said that it did not think that any matters needed to be drawn to the House's attention.

I rarely speak in support of the Minister, but I congratulate the Government on continuing the project on a truly bipartisan basis. It has taken a long time for this conclusion to be reached, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South says, there is no difference between the two sides on the desirability of making the House's intentions, and the policy that we decide on tax, as comprehensible as possible to the intelligent layman outside. That is the whole point of the undertaking.

My hon. Friend pointed out that "Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills" was probably a misnomer. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) asked what the "intelligent layman" would think. I see no way in which we could produce a clear and easy read on tax policy—particularly on capital allowances—for the normal educated layman.

This is a highly specialised subject. When I first announced the details of the project, in my 1996 Budget, I said that the task on which we were embarking was rather like that of turning "War and Peace" into lucid Swahili. Indeed, that would doubtless be an easy project compared with this: simplifying tax law involves addressing a more specialised audience.

Although the process has fulfilled a useful purpose, I readily acknowledge the importance of discussing it properly on Third Reading. After all, we are embarked on a novel procedure, and we must ensure that we do not remove from the House as a whole its responsibility—its sole responsibility—for making the final judgment on tax policy and the burden of taxation as it falls on individuals and companies throughout the economy.

Mr. Hogg: What worries many Members is the possibility that substantive changes to law have occurred, rather than mere rewriting. What reassurance can my right hon. and learned Friend give that the Committee and all its members were satisfied that no substantive change in the law had been made?

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and question proposed, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Capital Allowances Bill may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 309, Noes 33.

Division No. 121] **[10 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galbraith, Sam
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*

Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Touhig and
Mr. Jim Dowd.

NOES

Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Fearn, Ronnie
Gray, James
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Luff, Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Ottaway, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Steen, Anthony
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Christopher Chope.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question again proposed, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

10.14 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I have just cast my vote in protest against the Government's insistence that the Bill be debated at this late hour. I regret that the House's family-friendly policies do not extend to those of us who are interested in the rewrite of tax law.

I was about to answer an intervention made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), who asked whether we had addressed the changes. I shall return to the matter a little later in my speech, but I want to make it clear that, although the Joint Committee scrutinised the Bill as a whole—that was our task—we concentrated on two particular issues. The first was whether the drafting was an improvement on the drafting of the existing law—whether it clarified the meaning of the law to an intelligent user of the measure. Secondly, we addressed ourselves to the changes to tax law that were, on the instructions of the House, intended to be only minor and necessary for the clarification of that law. As the report of the Joint Committee makes clear, we were indeed so satisfied—

Mr. Ruffley *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: Before my hon. Friend starts to press me on the details—he probably wants to make an urgent point on dredging allowances in his own contribution—I should like to make a little progress. Before we deal with the details and with the comments on procedure made by my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South, I want to explain the purpose of the legislation and the task that the House asked the Joint Committee to undertake when it embarked on that entirely novel procedure.

The purpose of the legislation was to make tax law in this country more user-friendly. I shall not dwell on the origins of the process, but they go back to 1995—a time when Finance Bills were getting longer and longer, and complaints from Members of the House about the incomprehensibility of the legislation were getting louder and louder—

Mr. Bercow: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) is delivering an intriguing message, which is, or should be, of interest to all right hon. and hon. Members, but there is such a hubbub that I fear many of them are missing it. Will you rule?

Mr. Speaker: I can hear the right hon. and learned Gentleman. As long as the Speaker can hear, that is fine.

Mr. Clarke: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members at the Bar are making the quietest hubbub that I have heard for a long time. No doubt their attention will be drawn when my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham speaks—[Hon. Members: "We cannot wait."]

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), the then Financial Secretary, and junior Treasury Ministers, I was particularly impressed by the fact that complaints about the length and incomprehensibility of Finance Bills were received not only from Members of the House but from accountants, tax lawyers and users of the legislation. They, too, said that they did not understand its drafting.

There is a fond belief that lawyers and accountants welcome complications in the law because that makes for litigation and disputes and thus a higher income for members of their professions. However, that is not my experience of the best practitioners. Hon. Members will find that the best practitioners in accountancy, at the tax Bar and generally among tax lawyers, welcome the chance to be able to advise their clients clearly about the effects of changes in tax law and about the intentions of Parliament.

By the mid-1990s, we had reached the stage of being in danger of expressing ourselves in a way that was quite incomprehensible and that caused considerable confusion for users of the legislation. When we set up the tax law rewrite project, with the aim of making the law clearer and easier to use for those who needed to do so, it received a general welcome. I shall not repeat the tributes that were made, although I am grateful to those who took up the cudgels.

It was easy to set the process in motion, but I pay a special tribute to my noble Friend Lord Howe of Aberavon, who became an enthusiast for the project, based largely on his experience as a former Chancellor of the Exchequer. He took on the chairmanship of the steering committee and helped to devise the procedure that the House now follows to enable the simplification to be delivered by means of a reasonable process. The procedure is based on a precedent established for a 1952 Customs and Excise measure, but we found that it had been adequately refined. I also pay tribute to the director of the project team, Mr. Neil Munro, and to his team, who put years of effort into the production of the project.

When we started the tax law rewrite project, we underestimated how long it would take. I fear that I am on record somewhere as stating that the entire Inland Revenue law would be rewritten in five years so that we could start to deal with a comprehensive body of law. More than five years later, all we have is the Capital Allowances Bill. There is far more to come; capital allowances represent the first discrete block of provisions on which the tax law project team has worked.

That leads me to deal with the process in a way that answers the understandable concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South, who served on the Committee. He is a Treasury Front-Bench spokesman, and I pay tribute to him for the diligence with which he persisted in scrutinising the Bill. As he says, he was sometimes in a minority of one, but I hope that he accepts that he was treated with considerable courtesy and respect when he suggested how we should handle such matters.

My hon. Friend was in a minority of one, which shows that he was unable to persuade me that we needed to take expert evidence; nor was he able to persuade any Member of either House from any party that we needed to do so. However, that is not to say that he did not maintain a very stout argument to that effect and occupied a considerable time during our first sitting's informal and unreported proceedings—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I, too, was concerned about the fact that the proceedings were unreported. We had a discussion about that and we were enjoined to follow Select Committee procedures.

I have never been a member of a Select Committee, although I have often been a witness before one. I am told that Select Committees frequently debate matters in private, without the presence of *Hansard*, and throw their proceedings open to the public when witnesses appear. The Committee persuaded me that we should follow that procedure. I can say only that, in private, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South did indeed argue at some length about whether we should have an independent outside witness, but for several reasons, he was unable to persuade any of us that that was necessary.

In my opinion, the main reason was the very nature of the process that had been used for the previous five years. We often talk about the desirability of consulting on proposed legislation. I do not think that any measure before the House has been consulted on as copiously as the Bill. For five years, the steering committee and the consultative committee have conducted a long process of consulting every interested body in the country.

All the professional bodies, any practitioner who wanted to make representations and any interested business man were given the opportunity to respond to suggestions on how the law might be simplified. Indeed, several draft Bills were given wider exposure and issued for consultation. They were commented on and the comments were responded to by the project team. The process was meant to be consensual and bipartisan, so the project team embarked on no serious controversy if any outside body was prepared to start to get into a ditch to resist any proposal.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. and learned Friend is being very generous with his time in giving way again. He has told the House that the Committee pursued practices adopted by Select Committees. He will know that Select Committees usually—perhaps always—receive advice from their advisers. In this case, why was it not thought appropriate for the Committee to have advisers to give an independent view?

Mr. Clarke: I am aware that that is the usual practice, but I do not think that there is any requirement to have an independent adviser. When I was a Minister, I was known to complain that I faced Select Committees that appeared to allow their entire reports to be written by their supposedly independent advisers. I am sure that the Minister does not agree with that at all. That practice was not always wholly desirable, but we considered it because my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South pressed us to do so.

The problem is that it would have been extremely difficult to find an outside practitioner who had not participated in the consultation process or had not had the opportunity to do so. The list of the bodies that were consulted and the committees formed by the Law Society and chartered accountancy bodies was so copious that almost every interested practitioner had plenty of time to participate. We would have had to comb the country to find someone who had not had a hand in the process.

Our only option would have been to find someone who had no interest in the subject, but who was welcome to receive the substantial fees that would, no doubt, have been required to enable a new lawyer or accountant to get up to speed on five years of work and every feature of the capital allowances tax law so that he was in a position to give us advice. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South will recall that it was argued that any decent practitioner—if we could find one who was new to the process—would require months to get up to speed with the process that had ground everything exceedingly small for the previous five years, although I would not have begrudged that person those substantial fees.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that it would have been beneficial if individuals had given evidence to the Joint Committee? They might have been consultees, but at least they would not have been members of one of the committees.

Mr. Clarke: I am not aware of anyone knocking on our door to give evidence. Any such request passed me by. The evidence showed that every relevant professional body that I had ever heard of gave universal approval for the process and the Bill. We could have put an advertisement in a few national newspapers asking whether anyone wanted to protest, but that would not have been sensible. The main pressure on the Committee was to get on with delivering the desirable simplification. It was not supposed to devise a

[Mr. Clarke]

new procedure for Parliament which would introduce months of parliamentary delay while we tried to process a Bill that was widely welcomed by practically everyone with a serious interest in the subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South commented on the Committee's membership. We always have that discussion. He said that some people should not have been on the steering or the consultative committee. It is not the greatest advertisement for the House if we devise rules that disqualify just about every Member of either House of Parliament who has a detailed knowledge of the subject under discussion from serving on a Committee. I have the greatest respect for the Chamber and hon. Members, but it is not teeming with people who have immense expertise in the subject of capital allowances. A fresh body would not have produced the level of scrutiny that the House is entitled to expect.

There was a reasonably good spread of expertise around the Committee Room. Some members could not claim professional expertise, but they were well known and respected. For example, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (Mr. Ashton) is renowned for his independence and refusal to be rolled over by an establishment stitch-up.

Mr. Ruffley: We have all been enjoying my right hon. and learned Friend's speech. He will have heard that 66 minor changes were made. What were the thought processes of the Committee members when they were deciding whether a change was minor or substantive? A substantive change could not, of course, have been accepted.

Mr. Clarke: That was a key consideration, but before I deal with it, I shall dispose of the other main objective, which was to ensure that the drafting was improved. We sampled the drafting of the existing tax legislation, which is scattered over the past 10 years, and compared it with the redrafts. It is not possible to make the tax law of this country read like Enid Blyton. With the greatest respect, the Chancellor does nothing but complicate the tax law with every Budget that he produces. It will never be a simple matter. However, I congratulate Dr. Helen Caldwell and her colleagues from the parliamentary draftsman's office on the immense improvement that they have made to the wording of the legislation.

When the project was proposed, I was slightly hostile towards the parliamentary draftsman's office. Years of experience as a Minister meant that I had encountered draft legislation that I wanted to present to the House, but it was not expressed as clearly as I had wished. I developed something of an antipathy towards the drafting style of some of the people who produced that legislation. I began to believe that nobody in the parliamentary draftsman's office was familiar with the English language any more. Once, I asked outside lawyers to try to improve the drafting, and if they had charged a little less, they might have made progress.

I shall retract all those prejudices against the parliamentary draftsman's office if they can produce people like the team who worked on this Bill, who have undoubtedly transformed and greatly clarified the way in which the law is expressed. They have done a great service to all those who will use the law. That was the first matter on which we had to satisfy ourselves. We looked at the existing law and compared it with the new text until we were satisfied that this was the dramatic rewrite in plain English which had been hoped for when the project was started.

I can reassure my hon. Friend that the second, even more important, point for me was whether the changes fitted within the definition "minor and necessary". It is a given that any changes in tax policy by any Government are subject to the control of the whole House and should go through the normal procedures of a Finance Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South is not the only one who was suspicious of any suggestion that the Government might be slipping through subtle changes that might enable them to win a battle in the courts or to clarify a doubt in favour of the Inland Revenue, without the tedium of having to go through parliamentary scrutiny of a Budget speech and a Finance Bill Committee. We addressed ourselves to that point.

The 66 changes are of close particularity. My test for determining whether a change is a policy change that ought to be brought to the attention of the whole House is whether it alters the burden of taxation. Would a taxpayer who might have been capable of arguing that he was not liable to a tax burden find himself disadvantaged by being made subject to that burden by a tax simplification measure? The whole Committee concerned itself with that, and our report demonstrates that we are satisfied on that point. It is true that we examined some changes in more detail than others, but a clear principle applied throughout. Where the law had been changed, it usually amounted to a non-statutory concession, previously made by the Inland Revenue, now being incorporated into the law so as to place beyond doubt the non-liability of taxpayers for something that might previously have been argued as applying to them.

The Inland Revenue, led by a former Treasury colleague of mine, Robin Willis, and his team, had thought up rather ingenious arguments that might be made to alter the burden of taxation. As far as we could tell, those arguments had never been raised, and were unlikely to be raised unless the Inland Revenue staff in question were to move to a consultancy later in their career. Wherever possible, the team resolved questions in favour of the taxpayer.

The Committee went through the changes, using them as our agenda, and at the end, as my hon. Friend will agree, we unanimously agreed that we could find no basis on which we could tell the House that any change had been made which went against the spirit of the process. There was nothing that we felt we should draw to the attention of the House as requiring further study. We should certainly have drawn to its attention any example where we thought the burden of taxation was being shifted to the taxpayer without due parliamentary process.

Our scrutiny was careful and proper, and it took only three detailed sittings because it is extremely difficult to find anybody outside the House who is challenging the process. I am not aware that any member of the Committee was lobbied by anybody trying to argue against the process or to get a member of the Committee

to raise an objection. The process has been gone through in such detail that we have now reached a stage where the users of the legislation are waiting for it to be enacted.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Mr. Clarke: I shall give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham first.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. and learned Friend is making a racy and intoxicating speech, but I am still trying to get a flavour of the Joint Committee. In the light of what he has just said about comprehensive consideration, will he tell the House how long the Committee sat on each of the three occasions on which it gathered under his chairmanship; and whether any of the sittings was attended and observed by any right hon. or hon. Member of this House who was not a member of the Committee?

Mr. Clarke: To the best of my recollection—I hope that I shall not be held to this without having had an opportunity to look it up—the first sitting took about half a morning, during which time we discussed the purpose of the Bill, our procedure and how we intended to tackle it. Then, we held two sittings with witnesses, which took two full mornings. When witnesses were present, the sitting was open to the public and we were all hoping that the public would pour through the doors and be queueing down to Central Lobby, but the level of interest appeared to be low; none the less, a small body of interested observers attended. I regret to say that, because of the pressure of business elsewhere in the House, I saw no Member of this House present at the back listening to our proceedings.

I am as suspicious as my hon. Friend. I do not take an apparent lack of opposition at face value. This evening, I have taken part in two Divisions in which I think the score in my Lobby only just reached—or did not reach—double figures, which shows that I am perfectly prepared to walk alone when the occasion requires it. However, the Committee was quite unable to find a hint of controversy in the process; all we found were people urging us to get on with the job.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend has made some play of the fact that there was no hint of controversy and no member of the Committee was able to find anything wrong with the measure it was considering. Does he not concede that that is no great surprise, given that Lord Brightman is a former member of the tax law rewrite committee, Lord Goodhart is a member of the Institute for Fiscal Studies tax law review committee, and Lord Howe of Aberavon is a chairman of the tax law rewrite committee? The Committee consisted of the same old gang getting together to congratulate each other—no wonder there was no dissent.

Mr. Clarke: The Committee was a collection of people who have a great deal of expertise in tax law and have given up hours of their time to take the process forward.

Mr. Forth: The usual suspects.

Mr. Clarke: Had I wanted to find someone to come along to oppose the measure just for the sake of it, rather than wander around seeking the cussed Joe Citizen who would oppose it come what may, I would have consulted my right hon. Friend, who would surely have been able to find someone. In defence of the noble and learned Lords whom he has named, let me say that they are men of independent judgment who devoted a great deal of time to the task. The amendment we discussed was tabled by Lord Brightman—and the quotation my right hon. Friend read out earlier was my summation of a discussion of that specific amendment—although a variety of amendments were submitted from different quarters. In the end, the mood of the Committee was expressed by an overwhelming majority of its members: plainly, they did not want to make any amendment on the particular subject raised by Lord Brightman.

Lord Brightman, Lord Howe and the other noble Lord my right hon. Friend named are among the small minority of people who either understand the subject or are prepared to give up three mornings to the task of taking the project forward after already giving up hours and hours of their time serving on other committees that scrutinised the subject. I do not believe that any of the three would approve a process that did not simplify the law or, more importantly, one that represented any attempt to evade the privileges of the House in respect of tax legislation. I am sure that my right hon. Friend did not wish to traduce them in any way.

Finally, let me tell the House at whom I think this process is aimed. I have already said that the public did not flock to our proceedings, and I doubt whether many members of the public will pull the Capital Allowances Act 2001 from the shelf for a bedtime read—it will not be a best seller in that quarter. The users of such legislation will almost certainly be specialists. I hope that the intelligent layman who wants to understand the reasons why his advisers have given him certain advice will do so by reading the plain English of the legislation, but the main users of the measure will be tax professionals. They will be accountants, tax lawyers and some business men, especially the finance directors of companies, or self-employed business men who are trying to understand the tax liabilities that they might incur and the allowances for their capital against the tax liability of their businesses.

The other main users of the proposed legislation should be parliamentarians. It damages our debates on Finance Bills when most Members, with the greatest respect to them, do not understand the provisions before them because of the way they are drafted. *[Interruption.]* I do not want to hear shouts of horror. I listened to Budget speeches for many years, and I looked round the Chamber on those occasions. In the old days, we used to deal with intractable and unintelligible minor amendments that Customs and Excise used to insist on putting into Budget speeches. I looked to see which Members were nodding sagely to enhance their reputations as tax experts. Most of them were nodding sagely to words that they did not understand—any more than the Chancellor of the Exchequer or the draftsman did.

We need to move away from all that. There are definite benefits to be had in simplifying the expression of the law. Not only a closed group of Members but everybody will be able to understand the policy that lies behind tax changes. The process of simplifying the language of legislation clarifies many tax issues. It will throw out the areas that will be beyond the scope of the Joint

[Mr. Clarke]

Committee, where policy and the law itself need simplifying. That is a matter for the House and for Budgets. The process will show in much sharper clarity where the law is too complicated. We shall be able to understand the issues, and in future the House will be able to address itself to rewriting policy to make matters less anomalous, more clear and more rational. Sometimes the language that we have used in the past has hidden that objective from the House.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Is the right hon. and learned Gentleman offering some hope to the pensioner who was in my constituency office recently, pleading that the self-assessment form should be made intelligible so that he could complete it without the use of professional advice?

Mr. Clarke: This is not yet enough, because it is only the first part of the process. The intention is that the tax law rewrite project should include the entirety of the Inland Revenue's responsibilities. Capital allowances were chosen first because they constitute one of the most closed and self-defined chunks of the law. I believe that the project team is now working on income tax, and the next Bill of this sort to come before the House will attempt to cover the clarification and rewriting of the law on income tax.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith) is right. Now that we have introduced self-assessment, it is essential that we endeavour to rewrite income tax law so that someone who has a decent degree in mathematics, and perhaps some background in accountancy, will at least be able to understand the process. I would like to set our sights higher, and I hope that the ordinary, intelligent and reasonably educated taxpayer might be able to embark on a process of understanding.

We shall never reach that position if the present Chancellor of the Exchequer keeps complicating income tax legislation at the present pace, Budget after Budget. Self-assessment would have been difficult enough when it was introduced. It has been made almost incomprehensible by the subsequent changes that the Chancellor has made, with so many different rates of taxation.

Income tax comes next. We must aim ourselves at the intelligent taxpayer who is being asked to assess himself for his income tax liability and does not feel that he should be obliged to pay professional fees to do so when he is doing so much work for the Inland Revenue.

The new procedure that we have set up works, but it needs some refining. By and large, it is a proper process. We do not want the full procedures of the House to hold things up for months. Everyone who has worked on the project over the years has fulfilled a valuable public service, and I hope that the Bill passes through the House without dissent.

The principles of the tax rewrite project and the object of simplification of legislation could be applied far more widely. Ever since I entered the House, when I was a practising member of the Bar—I practised for a time when I was last in opposition—I have felt that the language of legislation produced by the House is ridiculous. It is arcane and incomprehensible, it adds to the complications of parliamentary procedures, and it creates great difficulties for those outside Parliament. When Ministers and Back Benchers make those points, insiders always give the advice that such people do not understand, and that the law requires precision. They say that practitioners in the courts prefer language set out in that way, so that they can conduct their affairs properly.

I have been a practitioner in the courts and practised on and off for the best part of 16 years. I know many practitioners in the courts; I am now so old that most of my friends are on the Bench. I know scarcely any practitioners who have a good word for the wording of legislation that emerges from the House. I hear frequent complaints about the incomprehensibility of the law as produced by the parliamentary process. At the moment, a huge undertaking is in hand: rewriting tax law and producing simplification. I hope that, one day, the use of plain English, the search for clarity and the ambition of making laws passed by the House intelligible to the ordinary, intelligent citizen who applies himself or herself to trying to read and understand them, will be achieved.

Meanwhile, as we go back tomorrow, no doubt, to yet another Bill to which the Government have drafted hundreds of amendments at the last moment, we shall continue to produce what is sometimes gobbledegook, but which passes for legislation and passes through both Houses. We have passed a lot of gobbledegook on tax law in the past 10 years; the Bill before us this evening clarifies some of it, and I commend it to the House.

10.46 pm

Mr. Burnett: I am sorry that you seem to be out of sorts, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I hope that you recover shortly.

I declare an interest as a lawyer. I used to practise in taxation, but I do not practise any more. I should also declare the fact that I was not a member of the Joint Committee. Nevertheless, on Second Reading, there were tributes from both sides of the House to Lord Howe of Aberavon, the tax rewrite steering committee, the consultative committee and all of the individuals who contributed, either in the past or currently, to the introduction of the Bill. I was, and am, happy to join in the tributes and congratulations to Lord Howe and his committee.

I should like to tackle a few points that arose in the Joint Committee, which have been alluded to this evening. I was surprised that, in that Committee, no evidence was taken in person from a practising tax lawyer or a non-Committee tax expert. I am not sure what steps were taken to encourage outside experts to give evidence, but it is a shame that no one did so. I refer the House to the comments of the eminent accountant, Mr. Adam Broke, who was referred to by the Paymaster General and the hon. Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway). Mr. Broke said:

> "I would say that we have, as a consequence, a much better product than we did have. I say that as an accountant, not a lawyer, and I will be very interested to hear the views of lawyers on the Committee on that."

I looked long and hard in the report of Committee proceedings for the views of an independent, practising lawyer, but I could not find any.

Mr. Broke went on to make one or two particularly interesting points in his evidence. He was complimentary about the Bill and I believe that, across the House,

we share his views. Nevertheless, he made the point that the serious work of tax simplification was yet to come. He said:

"I do not think we have got into the real serious areas of complexity. We have not really got into anti-avoidance yet, where, in some senses, vagueness is the order of the day anyway."

I hope that the Paymaster General will provide a response about the future of the tax rewrite project and what the Government have in mind to introduce in due course. Nevertheless, the Bill fulfils the tests that were set out by the tax law rewrite committee and successive Governments. Tax law is incomprehensible to most people, and overcomplicated. The tax law rewrite committee set itself the task of gradually rewriting the law on various taxes, and the Bill is the first in the rewrite project.

Mr. Redwood: I am surprised by the hon. Gentleman's fulsome praise. Has he, for example, read the hypothetical company test on pages 25 and 26? Is he suggesting that that is expressed with lucidity, so that a reasonable and well educated person can understand it? It looks like the old gobbledegook in a new bottle.

Mr. Burnett: I have not read every word in the Bill—I apologise to the House for that—but I have read significant parts of it. I have read sufficient to satisfy myself that it is a considerable improvement on the law that hitherto prevailed.

Mr. Ruffley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Would he like to hazard a guess as to the average amount of time spent by the Committee deliberating on each of the 66 minor changes?

Mr. Burnett: As I said, I was not a member of the Committee, but I have read the three *Hansard* reports and I suspect that the Committee spent a total of less than 10 hours deliberating on the Bill. I am happy to give way to the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) if he wants to correct me.

To return to what I was saying, the tax law rewrite committee's ambitions have largely been achieved, and the new Bill is considerably more understandable. The use of plain English, with shorter sentences and clearer structure, is welcome. The explanatory notes are helpful and act, as I said on Second Reading, almost as an index.

The real problem that I experienced as a lawyer dealing with taxation matters was hunting around the various sections and statutes to find out exactly what the law was. The dovetailing and consolidation in the Bill are particularly welcome.

On Second Reading, we discussed the drawing into the Bill of various Inland Revenue concessions. That is important. When the Paymaster General intervened in my speech on Second Reading, she mentioned that a number of concessions remain unincorporated in primary legislation. I hope that that will be remedied soon, because although Inland Revenue concessions and, for that matter, statements of practice do not have legislative force, they must be relied on by taxpayers and their advisers.

Mr. Hogg: There is, of course, a problem, which I think the hon. Gentleman would admit: if, in the process of rewriting, extra-statutory concessions are incorporated into statutory language, a substantive change to the law takes place without the authority of Parliament. That has, in fact, happened in this case.

Mr. Burnett: The right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a good point. He anticipates what I am about to say. Taxpayers deserve certainty and should not have to put up with rules that are not laws passed by the House. That is extremely important. With regard to the effect of concessions on the law, concessions were largely an explanation of existing law and do not make a substantial or even a small change in the underlying law.

Mr. Redwood: I am sorry to return to the matter, but the hon. Gentleman said that he admired the shorter sentences in the Bill. I wonder whether he has read it. The hypothetical company test to which I referred has 84 words in its first sentence, and that is by no means the longest one. I recommend to him the definition of the limit on amount deferred—clause 138—which is probably twice the length. He ought to read the Bill.

Mr. Burnett: As I explained to the right hon. Gentleman, who is welcome to look at my copy of the will—*[Laughter.]* I almost had to redraft my will. If he looks at my copy of the Bill, he will see that it is fairly well thumbed. If he has scrutinised at length the Capital Allowances Act 1990 and the numerous Finance Acts that impact on capital allowances, and if he has even a scintilla or a basic modicum of knowledge, he will know that the Bill is infinitely better than the law that now prevails.

After the tax law rewrite committee's report was published, the Select Committee on Procedure conducted an inquiry into the appropriate parliamentary procedures for tax simplification legislation. The tax law rewrite committee stated that the purpose of debating such legislation was to discuss

"the clarity of the law, and whether further improvements could be made to that end; and whether or not the Bill accurately reproduces the effect of the existing law, other than where (with a view to simplification) departures are intentional, as disclosed by the explanatory memorandum."

There was consensus that it was appropriate that policy in general should not be debated.

The Procedure Committee's report stated, however, that

"such a debate would be likely to be largely"—

I emphasise the word "largely"—

"technical and 'Policy free'."

The debate would not, therefore, be entirely technical and policy free, but would be largely so.

With that in mind, I should like to raise one or two issues that relate to simplification and that should therefore be considered and debated now. First, I hope that all hon. Members agree that deeming provisions should be avoided in legislation. Unfortunately, although the Bill is by and large successful, deeming provisions continue to be used. On Second Reading, I referred to clause 297(2), which states:

"This Part has effect in relation to the person to whom the relevant interest is sold as if—".

The provision goes on to define the relevant expenditure, writing-down allowances and appropriate balancing

[Mr. Burnett]

adjustment. However, it is important for clauses in tax law simplification Bills to say what happens in exact circumstances. They must deal with the tax effect in given circumstances, not pretend that something has happened and then provide for the tax consequences.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burnett: No, not at the moment.

Such an approach over-complicates and obscures tax law. I hope that future Bills will avoid the use of deeming provisions.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way now?

Mr. Burnett: No, I shall not do so for the moment.

Secondly, it is important to simplify the law. The last three Finance Bills—I had the mixed fortune of serving on the Standing Committees that considered the last two—have introduced countless extra complications and numerous tax rates. It is asking enough of the rewrite committee to give it the task of rewriting the plethora of existing legislation and dovetailing it into a specific Act. The Government must now resist the temptation to tinker gratuitously with the tax system and make it more and more complicated.

The Government could help the rewrite committee and taxpayers by altering the impact of balancing charges, especially for the small business sector. The balancing charge impacts on the taxpayer in one hit, whereas the allowance is made on a reducing-balance basis and, at best, takes seven or eight years to write out the cost of the asset. Surely the Revenue should not be treated considerably more favourably than the taxpayer and there should be some equity in the law between the two.

I hope that the Paymaster General will make it clear that, once a rewrite Bill has been enacted, future legislation—in this case, capital allowances legislation—will be drafted in the same helpful and comprehensive manner, on the basis of fitting into the existing rewritten form. It would be a complete waste of time and effort if future legislation reverted to type. There would be a mismatch: some legislation would be rewritten, but the remainder would be in the almost incomprehensible language that currently prevails.

As I have said several times, the Bill and the explanatory notes are welcome. I hope that, in due course, tax law will be capable of being understood by a reasonably intelligent person who is prepared to devote a reasonable amount of time to the task. The Bill's chief merits include dovetailing legislation into one measure and reordering legislation. The latter is especially helpful.

In a House of Lords debate on the taxation of chargeable gains, no less a legal authority than Lord Wilberforce said:

> "This legislation is of unimaginable complexity. It is absolutely impossible for the ordinary citizen to understand. It is impossible for many accountants to understand. Indeed, as I know from personal experience, it is also impossible for the officials of the Inland Revenue to understand."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 14 January 1992; Vol. 534, c. 119.]

I look forward to learning from the Paymaster General the next Act that is to be rewritten and when it will be considered in the House.

11.1 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register. The Bill demonstrates that if we begin with muddled, complicated, difficult and detailed legislation, no amount of rewriting can make it simple, straightforward and easy to comprehend. I have every sympathy with my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who chaired the Joint Committee and tried to respond to well intentioned proposals.

However, the Government have missed a great opportunity. If they were serious about simplifying the capital allowance rules, they should have been bolder, changed the rules more dramatically, introduced new policy and attendant legislation and encouraged proper debate on methods of genuinely simplifying legislation that had grown like Topsy over many years under successive Governments and is now out of control.

The Paymaster General invites us to believe that a Bill with 581 clauses and four schedules is an easy read. It may not be Enid Blyton—to echo the vivid speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe—but the Paymaster General tries to persuade us that the measure is sufficiently lucid for ordinary people to read, digest and understand, and remain undeterred by its enormous bulk. It contributes to understanding only part of the way in which corporate tax works in this country. It does not relate to the biggest part of our tax system in terms of the revenue raised or the impact on the daily life of British people. It takes 333 pages to establish the sort of allowances companies can try to offset against corporation tax liability. Yet the Paymaster General tells us without a hint of irony, humour or malice that she is proud of an effort that she perceives as an enormous simplification, which should make us leap for joy.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I was executive director of a couple of companies. What would I think if I was now in that position and had to respond to the Bill, if it receives Royal Assent? Would I be grateful? Would I sit in my office and exclaim, "This is wonderful—the House of Commons has at last done something to make my life easier. I now have only 333 new pages to read and all will be clear about gaining capital allowances for my company's investment"? I fear that that would not be my reaction. I would perceive the Bill as a confounded nuisance. I would already have approached tax lawyers and accountants to take advice on the impact of existing tax law on those businesses. I would have paid the fees, made the calculations, and I would know where I stood. I would then have to repeat the process because the Bill makes 66 detailed changes.

My generous right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe assures us that the changes try to ease the burden on taxpayers and give the benefit of the doubt where doubt previously existed. That is a very worthy idea. However, the companies that I am describing would still—in their own interest—have to go back to their tax lawyers and accountants to find out whether they were beneficiaries of any of those 66 changes. Were they not to benefit from them, they would have succeeded only in spending a lot more money on legal advice, tax advice and accountancy advice for no benefit, because they would not have scraped through into any of the new improved arrangements.

When we consider the Bill in more detail, I fear that we may also find examples in which lawyers and accountants will be able to cavil that the changes have not always gone in the direction of the taxpayer. The House must scrutinise that matter carefully.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): I have been following my right hon. Friend's argument with interest. I have, perhaps more recently, been involved in such a position in corporate life. When the crystal mark was introduced to simplify the language of many corporate documents, I found it notable that although the mark was intended to simplify, the company also had to pay further fees to have the documents properly interpreted because they used different words that could have been taken to have different meanings. Is not the best way of simplifying any law to have less law?

Mr. Redwood: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As the former company secretary of an important British multinational group, he speaks from considerable experience. Voluminous legislation such as this, however well intentioned, will always impose new costs and duties on well run businesses. They must keep up with the change of words, determine whether the change of meaning will have any impact, and ensure that there is nothing untoward in the way in which they are handling their affairs once the law has, effectively, changed.

Mr. Hogg: I often agree with my right hon. Friend. However, he seems to be advancing an argument against any attempt to rewrite or simplify statutory language. I find that a difficult conclusion to accept.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an extremely powerful point. Perish the thought that I should advance such an argument. However, as I said earlier, I would like the Government to achieve their aim by simplifying the thinking behind the legislation that they have introduced or inherited. I would then like them to introduce more radical proposals—which would cut down the number of pages dramatically—and deliberately change the law to make it easier and cheaper in its incidence by being more in favour of the taxpayer than the minor, but sometimes important, changes that we are considering tonight.

We have also heard from some hon. Members, particularly from the Liberal Bench, that they are full of admiration for the much simpler, clearer language, and the shorter sentences. I referred to the hypothetical company test on pages 25 to 26 of the Bill. That is by no means the most confused or difficult part of the Bill; I have not selected the worst example, by any means. I would like the House to get the feel of this proposal, because I am not sure that all hon. Members are as fully acquainted with it as might be useful for the purposes of these debates. Clause 48(5) states:

"To apply the hypothetical company test, assume that—

(a) the qualifying activity is carried on by a company ("the hypothetical company"),

(b) every trade, business, profession or vocation carried on by the business is carried on by the business as part of that activity,

(c) the financial years of the hypothetical company would coincide with the chargeable periods of the business, and

(d) accounts of the hypothetical company for any relevant chargeable period have been duly drawn up as if that period were a financial year of the company."

That is the end of the first sentence. To make matters crystal clear, clause 48(6) states:

"The business passes the hypothetical company test as a small or medium-sized company in relation to the expenditure in question if, on the assumptions in subsection (5), the company would qualify (or be treated as qualifying) as small or medium-sized under the relevant companies legislation in relation to the financial year in which the expenditure is assumed to be incurred.

The clause then goes on at considerable length.

A good, trained accountant who was well versed in company law would probably be able to work that proposal out, but I do not think that one immediately gets the gist of the test from reading the Bill. Clause 48(5) is certainly not a short sentence, and it is a very complicated one. The underlying thought is even more complicated because it deals with hypothetical companies in the test, not with actual companies.

Mr. Bercow: Why is it necessary and desirable—I do not say that it is not; I merely ask the question—to distinguish between qualifying and being treated as qualifying?

Mr. Redwood: That is an extremely good question. I am sure that the Minister will be desperate to respond to that and many other vital points, but I do not think that it is for me to reply to my hon. Friend. I am attacking the formula: I would not have phrased it in the same way, and I do not regard myself as being responsible for it in any sense.

There are many other examples, although I shall not bore the House by citing others or, indeed, by identifying the worst.

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster) *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I detect some interest in what I am saying. I give way.

Mr. Darvill: Indeed, I have listened closely to what the right hon. Gentleman has been saying. Did he choose to make the same observations here when his right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) proposed the project in 1996?

Mr. Redwood: I did not catch the Speaker's eye at the time, but under my right hon. and learned Friend I had greater hopes of the project than would be justified under the present Government. I am sure that, were he still Chancellor, my right hon. and learned Friend would be going in for rather more of the kind of tax simplification in which I believe, and in which I think my hon. Friends believe. It involves simplifying the underlying thoughts and, above all, reducing the incidence of taxation. The simplification that people want involves a cut in their tax bills, and fewer difficult taxes to compute in the first place.

If we examine the Bill's structure, we see why it has ended up so confusing and long-winded. Over the years, our capital allowances system has grown like Topsy, having been changed year after year. No doubt that was done for good reasons, but as a result it is now very confusing and complicated. As the rather good explanatory notes make clear, there is no simple investment allowance: we have to distinguish between different types of allowance.

[Mr. Redwood]

Part II deals with plant and machinery allowances. Part III deals with industrial buildings allowances. Part IV deals with agricultural buildings allowances, which are treated differently from industrial buildings allowances and involve different language. In many cases, it is becoming difficult to distinguish an industrial building from an agricultural building. More and more farmers who are being bankrupted by the common agricultural policy, and by the Government's policies generally, are having to turn to quasi-industrial processes to try to add value to the commodities that they are producing.

There is a mineral extraction allowance, which is different again. It relates to industries such as mining and oil. Careful distinctions must be made between that allowance and the general plant and machinery allowance—which is not always easy, as anyone with any acquaintance with the oil industry will understand.

There are research and development allowances. They are different from know-how allowances, which have yet another definition. There are patent allowances, which are different from know-how allowances and, indeed, from the research and development allowances that may have helped to generate the patent in the first place. There are dredging allowances, which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe was keen should be debated properly this evening. I live in hope, and I note that other Conservative Members feel the same about these important matters. There are assured tenancy allowances, and there is the question of contributions—another aspect of tackling the difficult problem of capital allowances.

Given provision for nine types of allowance, and consequential provision for contributions and other matters, it is no wonder that the Bill has ended up with 333 pages. When the Minister and her boss the Chancellor were considering the project, why did they not ask themselves whether they should be a little bolder? I wonder why it did not occur to them—rather than asking people to devote a large part of their lives to turning extremely lugubrious prose into prose that some consider a little less lugubrious and others deem just as lugubrious in a different way—to ask, "Do we really need these nine different types of allowance? Could there not be just one or two types treated in a similar way, to avoid all the definitional difficulties and niceties involved in trying to split hairs over whether an allowance is a know-how or an R and D allowance—or, if the oil industry is involved, whether an investment is a mineral extraction or a plant and machinery investment, dealt with by a different part of the legislation?"

I should like to know why the Minister and her colleagues did not consider trying to be bolder and perhaps change the structure on which we base capital allowances. If they had done so, we could have cut through an awful lot of the complexity in the legislation.

It is important also, in what time is allowed us in these important debates, to make a stab at considering the issues on which the Committee had to deliberate by sampling and taking evidence—namely, on whether the 66 changes made in the Bill are within the spirit of the outlined process and procedure. We know that the idea behind the process was that the changes should be only minor. We have also heard the very interesting elucidation that the Committee decided—therefore, the Government must have decided before the Committee—that when changes were being made, they should move in the direction of the taxpayer.

Of course I welcome that. As I said, I would far rather that the Government introduced bold legislation that moved much further, and in all types of ways and in all types of cases, in the direction of the taxpayer. However, one or more of the 66 changes could also disadvantage particular taxpayers. It could be that a company has just spent a lot of money on organising its affairs in a certain manner on the basis of the law before it was changed, only to discover that it had got it wrong and that it would have been better off organising its affairs in a different manner to take advantage of one of the 66 changes. One would therefore not want the process to be used for making changes, as it is not being publicly announced and advertised as Budget changes are advertised.

Our Budget process has a lot of showmanship and many critics, but its one good advantage is that it receives enormous publicity when the tax changes are being made, so that everyone, in business and elsewhere, is alerted to them. People's attention is drawn to the Budget, and they know that there is a Finance Bill and that they have to make proper inquiries and ensure that they have kept up with the changes.

Dawn Primarolo: The right hon. Gentleman has been informed on Second Reading, in my speech today and in the very full comments made by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), that the changes are extra-statutory concessions. They are published and taxpayers are already aware of them. One point that the Committee had to deal with was that, for the reasons that the right hon. Gentleman has just given, the tax law rewrite process will result in no changes in the law. The process is not a Budget. Changes to basic, underlying policy can be made only in Finance Bills, with the appropriate announcements and information that they entail, and not in a tax law rewrite process. Moreover, the process was established before the previous general election by the previous Conservative Government, of whom he was a member. We have merely implemented that process.

Mr. Redwood: Although I am very grateful to the Minister, I am not entirely reassured. My point is not that she has failed to inform the House. She has been very courteous, devoted time and provided much documentation to accompany her remarks to ensuring that the House is aware of the changes. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe has been his usual courteous and fulsome self in explaining them as well. However, I doubt whether our proceedings today or on Second Reading will be widely reported. My point is that a Budget by its very nature attracts enormous press and publicity which are followed up when the Finance Bill detail is seen.

Dawn Primarolo: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Redwood: I should like first to finish my point.

The right hon. Lady is quite right that well informed people—tax lawyers and advisers—will be aware of the non-statutory concessions that have been made. However,

they have a stronger status now that they are being confirmed. There are 66 changes, so why are not the Government being bolder about telling the business community about them? The changes could have an impact on people's businesses.

Dawn Primarolo: When each exposure draft was released, it was accompanied by a press release. The explanatory notes accompanying the Bill show that the information was published and that all the relevant organisations were notified. They were given every opportunity to comment on the draft, and changes in the draft were pointed out to them. They were asked if they saw any problems at all with the Bill—that is, whether it changed the law or clouded the interpretation of the law in a way that would put the taxpayer at a disadvantage.

Mr. Redwood: Again, it comes as no surprise that the Minister has behaved properly—unlike many other Ministers in the Government—and that she has gone through due process. I only wish that her colleagues in other Departments would do as much. I am delighted to hear what she has to say, but my point is that the publicity, hubbub and interest generated by a Budget will not be aroused by the changes contained in the Bill. If the Bill is enacted, the Minister may have to take further action to ensure that people are aware of the changes—people who are not consultees and do not belong to the professional bodies, but who run businesses and will be affected by them.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: My right hon. Friend seems to have got the impression—probably from what I said—that the Committee was not averse to accepting changes that would effect a substantial benefit for taxpayers rather than the Treasury. That was not the test that we applied. The test that we were enjoined to apply under the procedures laid down by the Select Committee on Procedure was whether the changes were minor and necessary. Had we found that any of the changes were of substantial benefit to a group of taxpayers, we would almost certainly have decided that the matter was one for the whole House and that it should be referred back to Parliament as a whole.

The 66 changes are minor. Questions were asked about whether the shift in the burden could be quantified. In almost all cases, it was impossible to quantify the shift in the burden as the practical effect was so insignificant. For example, we referred details of the relevant changes to the oil industry. The industry went over them, and its response was totally relaxed, as the changes were considered to be insignificant.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for that clarification. I think that I had understood that the Committee, quite properly, tried to avoid any material change in tax legislation. I had thought that he said that, where a change of a minor nature was being made, the Committee had tried to ensure that it was in favour of the taxpayer. That was the case with the extra-statutory concessions on which the Minister implied that all the changes are based.

I offer no criticism of my right hon. and learned Friend or his Committee. I merely want to make the point to the Minister that a difficult dividing line is being drawn—between a change that is made with all the publicity and hubbub attendant on a Budget, and one that is made as a result of what has happened in case law. I think that the Minister would be well advised to ensure that not only are the special advisers and consultees involved, but the wider business community is alerted to what is going on.

For example, the explanatory notes state in connection with the demolition costs covered in clause 26(1)(b), that section 61 of the Capital Allowances Act 1990

"applies where any plant or machinery 'which is in use for the purposes of the trade' is demolished. On its literal reading, this would appear to exclude the beneficial treatment of demolition costs where the person has ceased to use the plant or machinery before the demolition occurs.

In contrast, clause 26 applies where 'the last use of the plant or machinery was for the purposes of trade'. So there is no risk of taxpayers being excluded from the beneficial treatment of demolition under this clause, because the plant or machinery has ceased to be in use at the time when the demolition occurs."

That is an extremely helpful change. It will clearly benefit some taxpayers who previously were not benefiting or who had to benefit under an extra-statutory concession and might not have been aware of it or claimed it in the right way.

I would like to feel that as there are people outside who will benefit from this change, the Minister will take action to tell them. The Government are always keen to explain new schemes and new sums of money that they are spending. Should they not also be keen to say that, in this minor but important way, the legislation provides a beneficial change for a few businesses?

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Redwood: I will give way to my hon. Friend, who is getting worried.

Mr. Bercow: I am indeed getting worried, and would be grateful if my right hon. Friend could reassure me. Does he agree that whereas one could probably safely take it for granted that most large businesses affected one way or another by the change would be aware of it because of their extensive in-house resources and access to professional advice, small businesses might not be? As they constitute 99.6 per cent. of British businesses, employ 57 per cent. of the private sector work force and produce two fifths of the national output, should they not be told?

Mr. Redwood: I thought that my hon. Friend was getting worried because I was highlighting a small benefit from the Government. It is most unusual to find the Government providing a benefit, and perhaps I was too generous. However, I am delighted with my hon. Friend's intervention. He identifies the bulk of the business community that could not be expected to retain tax lawyers, read the latest exposure drafts or be in contact with the grand consultees to whom the Government go on these matters. Yet those are exactly the types of businesses that might be affected by the legislation.

Such businesses have to be even more careful because the legislation has an impact on whether a business is deemed to be small or medium-sized for the purpose of entitlement to a first year allowance. That is an important question because there is a different regime, depending on the size of the company. The argument is set out—with great clarity and in exemplary prose, according to Liberal Democrat Members, I am sure—on pages 5 and 6 of the explanatory memorandum. It says:

[Mr. Redwood]

"Subsections (8) and (9) of clause 48 correct small anomalies in the way that legislation relating to companies is referred to in connection with first-year allowances for small or medium-sized enterprises."

It goes on to say that the sections of the Capital Allowances Act 1990 on which the clause is based

"deal both with small or medium-sized companies and with small or medium-sized 'businesses'. In this context, 'business' means individuals, partnerships consisting of individuals and so on—people or entities which are not companies."

The explanatory memorandum goes on to try and cut through this complicated Gordian knot. There is an added complication in the case of Northern Ireland, where companies registered and formed were treated differently under the 1990 Act.

I do not want to bore the House, but I hope that I have shown that there are a number of changes—66 in all—that will definitely impact on the tax liability of a number of businesses and people. That is, after all, why they are flagged up as changes. The Government assure us that these are sufficiently minor not to warrant finance legislation. I do not quibble with that, but I think that the Minister owes us an explanation. Given that there will be changes that will have an impact on business, how will she make up for the publicity deficit which, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe says, seems to have dogged this important legislation throughout its passage so far?

I think that we deserve an answer explaining why Ministers are so reluctant to be rather more radical and enterprising and understand that the reason that so much gobbledegook is left in the Bill, even after these fine, learned accounting brains have been applied to it, is because the underlying complexity of the law is inherent in it. We have to sort it out not by rewriting it, but by substantial amendment or, even better, substantial repeal.

We cannot have a simple capital allowance regime with nine types of capital allowance. We cannot have a simple regime if we have different definitions of small, medium and large enterprises and they are treated differently. We cannot have a simple regime if businesses are different from enterprises and companies. We cannot have a simple capital allowance regime if we have calculations and computations on complicated formulae. I have not troubled the House with those, but there are many in the Bill, and some of my right hon. and hon. Friends may wish to mention them if time permits and they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

A great deal of time, money and energy has been spent on the measure, but I should be surprised if it was welcomed by the business community. Many business people will be worried that they have to wade through a further 333 pages of tax legislation that might then all be changed in a few weeks by the Budget. The measure will result in more cost, more regulation and more difficulty rather than the simplification that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe so wisely wanted. That is not being delivered by the Government and the Bill.

11.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Before I get into the meat of the Bill, I want to take an approach slightly different from that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), by looking at the first report of the Joint Committee. That report is quite revealing—perhaps more so than the participants might have wished. It began, helpfully, by stating the declaration of interest of those involved. We were led to believe that the Joint Committee of both Houses would be a useful exercise, and that it would carry out substantial work on our behalf expertly and eruditely. My heart rose somewhat when I read not only that, mercifully, several of its members had considerable involvement in the real world, but that a number of them had already been involved up to their armpits in the whole tax law rewrite venture.

In considering the value of the work that has been done, our first judgment must be whether we believe that the fact that the Committee was substantially populated by people who had already been involved in the exercise was a plus, in the sense that their expertise or experience were being brought to bear on the matter, or a minus, because they were already so committed to the project that they would be unable or unlikely to bring an impartial and fresh eye to their work on the Committee. We should at least pause to consider that question. The report notes that three of the Committee members, Lords Brightman, Goodhart and Howe, had previously been involved in the tax law rewrite exercise, so presumably they could not reasonably be expected to bring a fresh mind to bear on the matter.

Whether Members of this House were able to do that is another matter. The Paymaster General has an honourable and proper position—albeit hardly impartial—on the subject. It would appear that my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway) was rather isolated in his desire to bring a fresh mind to the matter—or, indeed, to introduce anyone else with a fresh mind. He seems largely to have been denied in that endeavour, which must heighten our suspicions.

All that is bad enough. However, we might have thought that if the Committee was to do any substantial work, it might have made some alteration to the documentation that it was offered. I read the proceedings of the Committee to try get into the minds of its members—to understand their approach to the matter. During its proceedings on 31 January 2000, the Chairman said:

"I think we ought to be clear on the procedure. Without taking advice, I am not sure."

He was commendably honest, as ever—as we expect our Chairmen to be. He continued:

"I would be very surprised if we could amend the Bill."

Straight away, a glimmer of suspicion enters my mind: what on earth is the point of the Joint Committee sitting if, right at the beginning of its meeting, the Chairman says that he would be very surprised if they could amend the Bill? If the Committee is taking that position, under the guidance of its Chairman, at the outset, why have we asked it to undertake that work on our behalf?

The Chairman then went on to talk about how difficult it would be to make amendments, saying:

"If they are taken after 10 o'clock they would be subject to the new-style votes, no doubt."

He was probably referring to our ghastly deferred Division procedure, which has made such a farce of our proceedings. He then said:

"We are making up procedure as we go along, but I cannot believe that we shall be allowed to set a precedent where we can amend a Bill without it going back to the Floor of the House."

I begin to wonder whether there was a suggestion that if the Committee decided that it needed to amend the Bill, it might have had to return to the Floor of the House, where we might have had an opportunity to consider it further in a substantial way. I therefore wonder whether the Committee had a wholehearted commitment to give the Bill proper scrutiny, and whether it had the freedom to amend it if it felt constrained in that way from the start.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: It is most untypical of my right hon. Friend to be deficient in his reading or to misquote in quite that way. The point of the words that he quotes was that I would have been surprised if the Committee could amend the Bill without the amendment going back to the Floor of the House. I was expressing the opinion that nothing could be done to change the Bill in Committee that would avoid debate on the Floor of the House. He suggests that I was arguing that we could not amend the Bill at all, which, as I am sure he will agree, must be an entirely accidental misreading of the purport of my remarks.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for helping me, but the thrust of what is said later in that paragraph at the very least gives the impression that the Committee would want to avoid doing anything that would cause the Bill to return to the Floor of the House.

Mr. Clarke: I strongly dispute that interpretation; the opposite point was plainly being made.

Mr. Forth: I am delighted to hear that confirmation, because it shows that the Committee felt entirely free to make any amendment that it thought necessary, but that it did not think it necessary to make any. So we obviously need to probe much further to find out why that was the case.

Mr. Clarke: At last we reach agreement, but for the avoidance of doubt, I should say that the Committee felt perfectly free to make any amendment that it wished; we insisted that we were entitled to do so. We were clear that any amendment that we made would have to be debated on the Floor of the House, which could revise it. After considered discussion, we concluded that we wished to make no amendment.

Mr. Forth: That is extremely reassuring. We have been told over and over again that 66 allegedly minor changes—I shall return to the word "minor" later—had been identified, so we might have expected the Committee to have spent some time considering them.

Mr. Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend accept, moreover, that the consequence of the decision not to amend the Bill in Committee is that only four Members of this House had the opportunity to consider it in detail? The absence of amendments means that the House did not debate the Bill on Report.

Mr. Forth: That is the case.

Perhaps my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe can help me on another matter. On page 47, he is reported as having said:

"As we are a Select Committee I do not want to take a vote unless we have to, but can Members of the Committee indicate if they agree that we should make no amendment whatever?".

On a simple reading, without understanding the subtleties of thought involved in the Committee's deliberations, that again suggests that the Committee set out with the determination not make any amendments.

Mr. Clarke: With respect, my right hon. Friend would agree that a simple and careful reading would reveal that the remark he quotes relates to amendments on the particular topic then being raised by Lord Brightman. There was no inhibition about proposing other amendments. The fact is that no member of the Committee was in favour of any amendment, and no outside body suggested any amendment to us; nor, so far as I am aware, has any hon. Member done so during the years of consultation that took place to produce the Bill.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend is fond of saying that, but surely this is the point at which the House would have had an opportunity to consider the matter properly, but for the fact that the Joint Committee chose not to make any amendment so that, procedurally, the Bill could zip through without touching the sides, to confront us now, when the House has no chance to make any amendment.

Mr. Clarke: My right hon. Friend and I are great reactionaries concerning the procedures of the House, which shows that we are jealous of its privileges. Surely he will concede that we never debate any Bill on Report if the Standing Committee that considered it made no amendment.

Mr. Forth: Exactly, and we find ourselves in an invidious position. My right hon. and learned Friend may be aware that I argued against the Joint Committee, and my suspicions are being fully confirmed. It has seen fit to make no amendment to such a large Bill, and that has denied Members who were not on it the opportunity to have an input.

Mr. Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend remember that the House approved a Government motion to discharge the Committee of the whole House from considering the Bill? If that had not been approved, presumably the Bill would still be in the charge of a Committee of the whole House and, in theory, amendments could be made.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman should not be discussing procedure.

Mr. Forth: I am delighted by your nudge, Madam Deputy Speaker. Having got rid of the little preliminaries, I can get on to the meat of the Bill.

The problem with the project is that it is all smoke and mirrors. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham hinted at that. My brief perusal of the Bill has confirmed my suspicion that we have not got very far.

Mr. Bercow: We are being invited to pronounce our verdict and to decide whether to give the Bill a Third

[Mr. Bercow]

Reading. How can we be confident that the decision not to table amendments was reached by members of the Joint Committee after a thorough consideration of the Bill's contents when, sadly, three of its members who hail from this House have been unable to be present for our deliberations?

Mr. Forth: I greatly regret the fact that key Committee members have not felt it necessary to guide us tonight. We have received guidance from the Chairman, which was most welcome, and the Minister will no doubt guide us further. In the meantime, we are having to engage in much unguided speculation, which simply lengthens our proceedings.

Mr. Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend recall that when we appointed the Committee members a few weeks ago, only one prospective candidate was in the Chamber when the nominations were made?

Mr. Forth: There seems to have been a rather casual attitude throughout our proceedings. I was going to analyse the attendance of Committee members, but I decided not to embarrass them.

I shall now deal with the Bill itself; you can see, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is in my hands. I have annotated it so that I can guide myself and the House through it.

Mr. Clarke: Is my right hon. Friend proposing a new rule of procedure to ensure that anyone who is nominated to a Standing Committee is in the Chamber when nominated? If so, would it ever be possible to man a Standing Committee on a major Bill?

Mr. Forth: I am not proposing that, but it might be beneficial to the House if only those people who showed a sufficient interest in Bills were appointed to Standing Committees, so that they were not composed of the usual zombies—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman about parliamentary language.

Mr. Forth: Perhaps I should have said robots. I would not dream of calling any hon. Member, irrespective of his party, a zombie. However, I want to get on with debating the Bill and shall not be led astray any further by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

There have been several references to "minor changes". That concept has bedevilled our deliberations. "Minor" is a subjective word at best. As the Chairman explained, it was a prime consideration of the Committee to determine what was a minor change. The magic figure of 66 minor changes has been mentioned. We have not got to the bottom of the question of whether the Committee considered in detail each of the minor changes, satisfied itself that they were minor, and then decided to approve them without amendment. We can assume that it probably did. I remain worried, however, about whether that formed part of the Committee's deliberations.

That worry increased when I considered the wording used in the Bill, which was unamended by the Committee. We must therefore assume that the wording has the Committee's approval, and that it saw no need to amend it. My eye first lit on clause 33, headed "Personal security", which says:

"This section applies to expenditure if . . . it is incurred by an individual or partnership of individuals in connection with the provision for, or for use by, the individual, or any of the individuals, of a security asset".

I wonder whether that form of words is remotely detailed or specific enough to help those who seek to interpret it. It involves the use of terms such as "in connection with", "any of the individuals" and "of a security asset" in one sentence, and I should have thought that any of those terms could reasonably give rise to doubt. Given that the whole point is supposed to be simplification, and that it was stressed earlier that all the experts have considered the Bill at great length and pronounced themselves satisfied, I wonder whether they have done the job properly.

My suspicion grew when I read clause 45, headed "ICT expenditure incurred by small enterprises". That starts rather encouragingly by saying:

"Expenditure is first-year qualifying expenditure if . . . it is incurred on or before 31st March 2003".

I should have thought that one could be reasonably satisfied that that is specific and definite and could therefore be relied on by those who look to the Bill for guidance on capital allowances. The clause then plunges into uncertainty, however, because it says that expenditure is first-year qualifying expenditure if

"it is incurred by a small enterprise".

Let us give the Bill the benefit of the doubt and say that small enterprises are adequately defined in prior statute.

The Bill goes on to say that expenditure qualifies if

"it is expenditure on information and communications technology, and . . . is not excluded by section 46 (general exclusions)".

It continues:

"'Expenditure on information and communications technology' means expenditure on items within any of the following classes."

One assumes that the Bill will now give sufficient information to put the matter beyond doubt. It says that the first class covers computers.

At this point, doubts start to arise in my mind. I confess straight away that I am not a computer expert, nerd or anorak. I do not use a computer; indeed, I do not know how to use one. Even I should have thought, however, that simply to say that the first class covers computers can hardly, in this day and age, be sufficient. I imagine that the term now covers state-of-the-art, hand-held telephones with an internet capability, hand-held computers that are not telephones, and also any other device that is capable of computing. That encompasses a wide range of equipment.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I have been following my right hon. Friend's argument, and although of course it carries the force of logic and eloquence, as ever, I find it confusing that he seems to be arguing for greater detail. As we are dealing with a simplification Bill, surely he should be seeking a change in the other direction.

Mr. Forth: I am afraid that I have to disagree with my hon. Friend, because simplification, in tax matters above all things, does not mean reducing phrases to one word, which could have a variety of interpretations.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Bill's objective

is not simplification as he has described it, but clarification and codification, which makes legislation more acceptable to practitioners, businesses and other interested individuals, and that his remarks are misguided in that respect?

Mr. Forth: I do not believe so. The whole purpose of the exercise was alleged to be tax simplification; that is what the Joint Committee—indeed, the whole exercise—was supposed to be about. Therefore, that is what I am looking for in the Bill and why my search has been so frustrating.

Mr. Bercow: There is a real problem. The hon. Member for North–West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) has contributed to the debate, apparently without having had sight of the relevant material. My right hon. Friend was a bit soft on him, but does he not think it unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman is unaware that he has only to look at the cover of the first report to see that the name of the Committee is the Joint Committee on Tax Simplification Bills—not codification, but simplification?

Mr. Forth: Yes, the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire appears to have wandered into the Chamber unarmed with any documentation, so he was presumably guessing when he intervened. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for providing that guidance to the hon. Gentleman, who might want to go to the Vote Office and arm himself before he intervenes again.

Moving on swiftly, as is my wont, I turn to clause 81, which is headed "Extended meaning of 'car'" and states:

> In this Part "car" means a mechanically propelled road vehicle other than one—
>
> (a) of a construction primarily suited for the conveyance of goods or burden of any description, or
>
> (b) of a type not commonly used as a private vehicle and unsuitable for such use.

I do not know much about computers, but I do know a little bit about cars. Contemplating categories that include sports utility vehicles, the vehicle known in the United States as a pick-up truck, and all the other varieties of vehicle in between, which might have an open rear part for carrying goods, but a cabin designed to carry a number of people, or be a four-wheel drive vehicle designed primarily for off-road purposes but also able to carry heavy burdens, causes me to wonder whether the description provides sufficiently flexible coverage of the range of vehicles known generally or generically as "car" to serve as any useful guide in the matter of capital allowances.

Confusingly, the clause then states:

> "References to a car accordingly include a motor cycle."

If that is the fruit of the work of the Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament on tax simplification, I despair. I begin to have great sympathy with my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, South (Mr. Ottaway), who uttered a cry of frustration when speaking about the Bill. I suspect that he had nightmares about clause 81 after reading it, and well might it cause him to wonder why he spent all that time—well, not much time at all, as it turns out—in the Committee during its deliberations.

Mr. Redwood: My right hon. Friend has passed over the preceding clause. Did he find clause 80 easy to understand? I found the calculation of the final chargeable period especially difficult under the formula therein. Would my right hon. Friend care to alert the House to the fact that

$$(AQE–TDR) \times \frac{A}{B}$$

is not a terribly lucid explanation of how one goes about calculating one's balancing allowance as an employee? I pity the poor employee who has to use that formula.

Mr. Forth: My right hon. Friend would be right, were it not for the fact that, helpfully, the clause goes on to define—

Mr. Thomas McAvoy (Comptroller of Her Majesty's Household) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 238, Noes 31.

Division No. 122] **[11.53 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Elman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith

Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Maxton, John
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Don Touhig.

NOES

Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Burnett, John
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Day, Stephen
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Hayes, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Keetch, Paul
Leigh, Edward
Maclean, Rt Hon David
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'rns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Webb, Steve

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Atkinson and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *accordingly put and agreed to.*

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly?

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Prevention and Suppression of Terrorism

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Code of Practice for Authorised Officers) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 16th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Companies

That the Companies and Business Names (Amendment) Regulations 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 259) dated 1st February 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 2nd February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Civil Aviation

That the draft Transport Act 2000 (Designation of Transferee) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Terrorism

That the draft Terrorism (Interviews) (Scotland) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 15th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PREVENTION AND SUPPRESSION OF TERRORISM

That the draft Terrorism Act 2000 (Carding) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 29th January, be approved.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.

( ) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

( ) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That Judy Mallaber be discharged from the Education and Employment Committee and Mr. Jon Trickett be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITIONS

Helme Chase Maternity Unit

12.9 am

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): This petition represents a strong cross-party consensus in my constituency. Indeed, there is near unanimity among the population of south Cumbria, who want Helme Chase maternity unit to stay in place and to provide into the long-term future a full range of services for the whole community. I was delighted to meet earlier today those behind the petition, including Audrey Hawkes, the representative of the midwives at the unit, and Nicola Kaye, the Kendal mother who started the petition. Particular importance is attached to what the petition says about elective caesareans.

The petition states:

"The Petition of the mothers, midwives, Families and residents of South Cumbria

Declares that the Helme Chase Maternity Unit is a much-loved public service which is admired and respected nationwide, provides a Quality of care which is not matched anywhere else in our area, and continues to be needed on the grounds of safety, travelling time, Public affection and local tradition.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons encourage the Morecambe Bay Health Authority to heed public opinion in South Cumbria, Provide for a long-term secure Future for the Unit, and enable a full range of service including elective caesareans to continue to be provided there.

And the Petitioners remain, etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Free Television Licences

12.11 am

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I am delighted to present a petition signed by more than 6,500 residents of the west of Scotland, including more than 2,000 of my constituents. The Strathclyde Elderly Forum

[Mr. Brian H. Donohoe]

collected the names on the petition, which calls on the Government to introduce free television licences for all pensioners over the age of 60.

The petition states:

"The Petition of Strathclyde Elderly Forum

Declares that giving free TV licences to pensioners over 75 is to be welcomed but is discriminatory to pensioners under 75.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to grant free TV licences to all pensioners over 60.

And the petitioners remain, etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Mobile Telecommunications Masts (Somerset)

12.13 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I have pleasure in presenting a petition signed by my constituent Mr. C. N. Barrow, of Styles close, Frome and by 676 other residents of Frome who are rightly concerned about the imposition of a mobile phone mast on an urban part of the town. They are anxious about the consequences for themselves and their families, as well as for the amenity value of the area. They draw attention to the need for proper planning controls on the erection of mobile phone masts.

The petition states:

"The Humble Petition of the citizens of Frome, Somerset sheweth:—

That mobile phone masts and base stations should not be sited amongst built-up areas, particularly not near houses or schools, due to the health implications, the loss of amenity, and the negative effect on property values.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House will take such measures as lie within its power to ensure that phone masts and base stations will always need 'full planning consent' and no longer enjoy 'permitted development rights'; that health concerns will be considered a valid reason for refusal of planning consent, and that the 'precautionary principle' be adopted and practised by the planning authorities.

And your petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray etc."

To lie upon the Table.

Young Offenders Institutions

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

12.14 am

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Young offenders institutions, such as Castington in my constituency, play a crucial role in the criminal justice system. Young offenders who serve periods of custody in those institutions have many years of life ahead of them when released. The staff do valuable work with difficult youngsters to attempt to steer them away from a long life of crime, which could have a great impact on their communities if they return to it on release.

Excellent work is done in Castington, especially in the Oswald unit, where there is a high ratio of staff to trainees. Particularly difficult youngsters are dealt with in those special conditions. Castington is one of the few parts of the prison estate that is currently under-used. There is spare capacity, a little more of which is currently used for trainees from further away. Its work is generally recognised as valuable in the Prison Service.

The problems that I shall describe have arisen as a secondary effect of an initiative that is designed to reduce reoffending: the detention and training order. It came into operation on 1 April 2000 through the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. I want to focus on the consequences of its introduction in Castington. It is widely acknowledged that the order is a worthwhile initiative, which will prove to be a good method of dealing with young offenders. However, some aspects of it have created serious problems in young offenders institutions.

Between April and October, 10 incidents of multiple cell damage occurred in Castington. A total of 32 cells were damaged, and many more incidents have occurred since then. In the first few months after the introduction of the detention and training order, there were 25 assaults on officers, mainly punches and kicks, which would not go to court, and were previously tackled under a governor's power to award extra days.

In September, an officer was assaulted by two trainees in education and attacked with a metal chair. That case went to court. One trainee received a two-month concurrent sentence, which had no effect on his time in custody, and the other received a conditional discharge. In October, a trainee threw boiling water over another trainee and got a conditional discharge. There was also a serious assault, which involved a trainee under section 53(2) of the Children Act 1989. That regime can present similar difficulties of providing a suitable punishment. Two or three alarms happen every afternoon in the large part of the institution that deals with those on detention and training orders.

Drugs policy is undermined by the absence of a real deterrent to misbehaviour and violence. That extends to failing the mandatory drugs test, which, when there is no deterrent, becomes simply a collection of statistics, not a means of influencing trainees' behaviour.

Newspaper reports detail similar occurrences in other young offenders institutions. They refer to a 700 per cent. increase in attacks on officers in one institution and a £200,000 bill for damage. At Huntercombe, it was reported that 16 cells a week were being damaged. At Stoke Heath, six cells a week were damaged. Has the

Minister assembled any figures on the problem? What has been the total cost to date of cell damage by DTO trainees? How many assaults on officers have DTO trainees committed?

In the past, governors would have awarded additional days for lesser offences. That power has gone. It is no longer possible for a governor to extend the sentence and use the threat of extension as a deterrent to misbehaviour in prison. The power could not be reintroduced in the old form without measures to ensure that the judicial process complied with the European convention on human rights. The loss of the additional days procedure has meant the loss of a major disincentive. However, the situation is more complicated than that under the detention and training order. Magistrates courts are presented with a problem. The maximum sentence that they can impose, including the community portion, cannot exceed the sentence that an adult would be given for the same offence.

For criminal damage valued at under £5,000, a detention and training order cannot be imposed at all. It is quite difficult—in fact, it is virtually impossible—to do more than £1,000 worth of damage to a cell. To do £5,000 worth of damage to a cell is pretty much beyond the means of a prisoner, even one using as much violence as he possibly could towards everything around him. The magistrates therefore end up imposing a conditional discharge, which is no deterrent whatsoever to the trainee.

Fines can be imposed, but what meaningful fine can one impose on a trainee who earns £5 a week? If one does impose fines, the bullies—often the people carrying out this violence—will get the money from other trainees. Their regime of fear and intimidation—of which cell violence and assaults on officers are all a part—will enable them to extract the money from other trainees, so the fine becomes meaningless to them.

The Secretary of State has powers to apply to a youth court for a late release from the custodial part of the sentence. Those powers—clearly rare, last-resort powers—are heavily circumscribed in the guidance that the Home Office has given the Prison Service. They involve a lengthy procedure and, crucially, the Home Office circular of 9 February on the detention and training order states:

"Late release . . . should not be used as a means of supplementing disciplinary sanctions."

The circular goes on to state that recommendations for a late release should not be used as a disciplinary sanction.

Only overall progress towards the individual's objectives can bring about late—or, for that matter, early—release. That sends a clear signal that the mechanism of late release is not intended to be used in the way that the old sanctions were used to deter and punish people who behave in a wholly unacceptable way that is damaging to other trainees and officers and to the interests of the taxpayer, as in the case of this very expensive cell damage.

I am not aware of the Home Secretary's powers being used in the way that I have mentioned. If the Minister has any examples to suggest that the power is being used to help in the situation that I have described, I should be interested to hear them. That might represent a case for some revision of the circular, to make it clear that progress towards objectives must be discounted by behaviour of this kind. If someone wrecks his cell or engages in acts of violence against other trainees or officers, that ought to be recorded as a failure to progress towards his objectives, and therefore represent a means of invoking the procedure.

I still believe that the procedure is slow and cumbersome. I shall not read out the enormous list of consultations and meetings that have to take place to bring it into effect. The feeling among prison officers is that, by the time it has been invoked, the offender will long since have left the institution and be half way through the non-custodial part of his sentence.

I understand the thinking behind the detention and training order, which is designed to ensure that the custody period and the community period are both carefully structured to develop the young person's understanding that they have done wrong, to change their attitude and to equip them to redirect their lives away from crime. The whole process—the time spent in custody and the time spent in the community under supervision—is meant to contribute to the same objectives and should, therefore, be planned so that such time is used and not spent idly sitting around for several months in an institution. The time should be structured, and there should be an overall plan. That is the essence of the scheme.

To accept that, I do not think that one has to accept that it is impossible to extend the sentence period as a deterrent in some circumstances. To have to face two or three more weeks of custody would not, if someone had behaved badly enough to have threatened the achievement of their objectives, undermine the essential process.

In the early stages, the Youth Justice Board may have got a bit hooked on the belief that it must in some way preserve the integrity of the concept of the detention and training order, rather than addressing some of the problems that have arisen under it. I do not think enough attention was given to the need for an effective deterrent to disruptive and violent behaviour, or to the needs of prison workers, including both discipline officers and education and other professional staff.

Prison workers must be able to maintain order and stop violent trainees from posing a danger to the rest. They must maintain an atmosphere in which trainees are not prevented by the violence and intimidation of other trainees from benefiting from their time in custody—but that is what will happen: those who are trying to meet the objectives that are part of their sentence will find their ability to do so disrupted if the atmosphere inside the institution is violent, and if they are themselves constantly subject to intimidation. It is much harder to resist a bully when an officer cannot be looking in one's direction than it is to worry about whether there is a mark against one's progress in the assessment that is made as part of a detention and training order.

I have been raising the issue for some time, which is why I felt it necessary to raise it here tonight. In a letter dated 29 August 2000, the Minister of State told me that the Youth Justice Board was

"currently commissioning research into effective practice and into the effectiveness of reward and incentive systems. The results of these evaluations will be available later this year and will form the basis on which new practice guidance is based."

I am not sure whether that has actually happened. I am not sure whether the research has produced results that the Minister has seen, or whether, if it has, any new practice guidance has emerged. I certainly have not seen any yet.

[Mr. A. J. Beith]

What has been the result of the process? Certainly there has been no result so far that has been noticeable to prison officers, professional staff or governors. The concern felt by prison officers is shared by those of governor grade, who must try to maintain good order in their institutions. The difficulties that I have described are recognised at all levels in the service.

The ability to add to a sentence is surely needed for the worst cases, but if that mechanism is not to be used, the Minister and the Youth Justice Board must come up with alternatives. Mere withdrawal of privileges, or a few days without television, will not be enough. In any event, we are talking about people who wreck television sets, and everything else in sight, when an atmosphere of violence develops. Something that actually deters must be found. At present many prison officers are saying "They can do what they like and they still walk out of here on the same day"—and the force with which they say it is an indication of the deep concern that is felt.

Prison officers now say that they would be much happier working with those over 18, because more sanctions are available and the working atmosphere is better, or even with those under 18 who are on remand. Very few are being remanded to young offender institutions, but they too are not subject to the same regime. In the case of detention and training orders the sanctions have gone, or whatever little remains is not really intended to be used as a sanction as we normally understand the term.

Ministers and the Youth Justice Board must come up with an answer. If they do not, the value of detention and training orders will be undermined by a violent and intimidating atmosphere for all trainees, and the ability of prison officers to do the challenging job expected of them will also be constantly undermined by assaults, by the absence of officers who are off sick as a result of assaults, and by a feeling that they cannot exercise sufficient control to do the positive work that they value.

Prison officers achieve most when they are able to interact positively with the people in their charge. I have seen that happen, and I have seen its effectiveness. It should be borne in mind that many youngsters who are the subject of these orders have had great difficulty in relating to others in a civilised way. If the young people have had a family background, it may have been a severely disrupted one. Many of them may have been in and out of local authority homes and had no stable background. Others have been exploited, and many of them have been abused physically or sexually. Therefore, many of them have had a lifelong problem with relating to other people.

If those young people have prison officers who genuinely care for their welfare and relate positively to them, it would be a real advantage. However, that advantage cannot be deployed to the benefit of the youth justice system if there are not sanctions to prevent intimidation, violence and other pressures that make it very difficult for officers to perform the basic order and security aspects of their job, let alone the rehabilitative work in which they all want to engage.

12.30 am

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): I thank the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) for his careful and measured approach not only to this subject, but to a range of home affairs issues about which he has very real knowledge, not least from the days when he served with such distinction as the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman on these issues.

The particular interest that hon. Members take in custodial institutions in their own constituencies is valued by the Home Office and by Ministers. It enables both the Government and the House to hear at first hand the experiences of prison officers and of constituents. I take very seriously the concerns that have been expressed to the right hon. Gentleman, as I certainly do those that have been expressed to me as I have visited institutions across the country. Although I have not yet had an opportunity to visit Castington, having heard his account of that institution's experience since the introduction of detention and training orders, and linking that with the experience of other institutions, I have been given occasion to reflect very carefully on the operational impact of the orders and all the limitations that he has outlined.

The good order and discipline of our custodial institutions are of the utmost importance. They are particularly important in institutions that cater for young offenders and their needs. As hon. Members on both sides of the House will appreciate, if rehabilitation of young people is to be effective, there has to be an ordered and structured environment in which the causes of their offending can be dealt with. Anything that undermines good order and discipline is a threat to that process.

We are therefore absolutely determined to bear down on any who seek to disrupt the good order and discipline of our establishments, by using the full force of the criminal law; by utilising such incentives as are available to us within the establishments; and also by recognising the important role of effective management in maintaining and delivering regimes, which should not be underestimated in creating good order and discipline within establishments. Variations between establishments' performance on those matters tells us something about the effectiveness or otherwise of the management and the strategies that the management has adopted to cope with a group of inmates who are problematical and volatile at the best of times.

I note what the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said about assaults and other disorder at Castington. Especially worrying are assaults on staff, who are entitled to feel protected. We are determined that they will feel protected, but it is interesting to note that the total number of adjudications, including those for fighting, showed a significant reduction in the third quarter of 2000 compared with the first two quarters, when DTOs first came into force.

That should in no way lull us into a sense of false optimism or complacency, but the decline gives an impression of a service in which staff and governors across the whole youth offender estate are getting to grips with the problem. That is wholly admirable, and to be commended.

We have to examine how best to respond to the situation, and to do so in a way that does not undermine the rehabilitative impulse that propels and guides DTOs

and their implementation. The right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed referred to the survey and the research into these matters that was commissioned to be carried out by the Prison Service. I can tell him that the picture that is emerging is one in which there was a fairly high overall level of indiscipline, with some 8,300 adjudications—that is, four per trainee—in the first six months of the DTO. That bears out the experience that the right hon. Gentleman shared with the House.

The research shows that one quarter of the adjudications were for violent offences, and that three quarters were for other offences. It found marked variations between establishments in the pattern and incidence of offences. There has been a year-on-year increase in adjudications, but it is interesting to note that the pattern is uneven. The establishments at Brinsford, Castington, Huntercombe and Onley all experienced disproportionate increases in adjudications relative to population, although the House must bear in mind the caveat that I gave in relation to Castington. The establishments at Lancaster Farms, Thorn Cross and Wetherby showed absolute or proportional decreases, although it should be noted that Wetherby was not functional for most of the year. Werrington and Stoke Heath showed modest increases.

We need to reflect on the causes of that variation. Where good practice has been developed, it can usefully be spread as a means of addressing the problem outlined by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed. The focus of the DTO is on a clearly structured sentence with an obvious end-point, which allows for sensible sentence planning and proper engagement with the young offender. The sentence aims to give the young person a better chance of living a crime-free life on release. It is therefore necessary for regimes to focus on rehabilitation and constructive behavioural change.

I doubt that there is any disagreement between the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed and the Government about the importance of that approach, nor about the importance of ensuring that any remedial action that we take to deal with the problem that he has identified does not undermine that focus.

As a result of the fact that extra days in custody as a disciplinary measure are not available for young offenders serving a detention and training order, there has been an increase in the incidence of disorder in some institutions. There undoubtedly is an element which has seen the absence of such a power as a green light for unacceptable behaviour. They would be mistaken, however, to believe that we lack the resolve to address the problem. We can and we will. We will expect the prosecuting authorities and sentencers to recognise the significance of the phenomenon that they are required to address.

I am bound to say that in some of the sentences handed down in the examples that the right hon. Gentleman gave, I am surprised—I put it no higher than that in this forum—by the leniency of the approach taken by sentencers. There are some restrictions, which the right hon. Gentleman outlined, on the capacity of the courts to deal with incidents of juvenile criminal damage, but the assaults that he described, I would have expected a more condign punishment. We shall continue to bring home to sentencers the importance of their role in ensuring good order and discipline in these establishments.

Nevertheless, we have taken the view—and I am not, at this stage, persuaded to change it—that it would be premature to legislate to restore added days, and that the new juvenile regimes have not yet been given the opportunity to bed in. I feel that more time is needed before any definitive conclusions can be drawn about how disciplinary strategies, which are being taken forward with vigour by the Youth Justice Board and the Prison Service, are working and about the extent to which they are getting to grips with the problem. Castington is a good example of improvement, and I want us to build on it.

There is also the issue, of which the right hon. Gentleman is aware, of deciding on any particular legislative course before the outcome of the current European convention on human rights challenge to powers concerning adults has been determined. I am absolutely committed, as are the Youth Justice Board and the Prison Service, to bringing about a number of non-statutory improvements. We are taking those forward as a matter of urgency. A comprehensive package of measures will focus on effective practice in Prison Service regimes and address the understandable concerns of staff with supportive measures to help to deal with situations in which the law may have been broken.

We believe that improvements can be made in the present law. The Prison Service and the Youth Justice Board have already started working on these. We intend to continue to develop strategies along those lines and to ensure that they are properly resourced and supported. We intend to publish research findings about positive staff and trainee attitudes to good reward and incentive schemes, to improve staff guidance and to provide consultancy support and training, particularly in restorative justice methods. That is being done at Wetherby. We also intend to build disciplinary compliance into more explicit sentence plans, and hence qualification for early or late release. All that can and will be done.

I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for enabling the House to have this short debate. We recognise the challenges that management and staff face in running custodial establishments. We are enormously grateful to them for all that they do. I give a clear commitment to ensuring that we continue to monitor the situation very carefully. There will be a vigorous and determined response from Prison Service management and from the Youth Justice Board—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at sixteen minutes to One o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 14 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Correspondence

2. **Mr. Harry Barnes** (North-East Derbyshire): If she will make it her policy that all Government Departments and agencies make use of constituents' postcodes in correspondence with hon. Members and others. [148766]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer): It is general practice for constituents' full addresses, including the postal code, to be included in ministerial replies to Members of Parliament. It is not, however, in the guide to Departments issued by the Cabinet Office for replies to MPs' letters.

Mr. Barnes: It is not my experience that the postcode is included. If a constituent writes to me from the S45 postcode area, complaining about the loss of 700 jobs at Biwater in Clay Cross, I forward that to the Department of Trade and Industry, seeking a response. Normally, however, the reply from a Department gives the full name and address but not the postcode details. It is administratively convenient to give the postcode details. I hope that that will be put in place. I would much sooner have the jobs, but will settle, on this occasion, for the postcode details.

Mr. Stringer: I take my hon. Friend's point. When we re-issue the guide to Ministers replying to letters sent to Members of Parliament, we shall include the point that postal codes should be included.

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Will the hon. Gentleman examine not only the postcode issue but an extraordinary development that has taken place since the last election? MPs' letters are often replied to at their constituency office. I regard my work as a Member of Parliament as separate from my work as a Conservative based in the constituency office. To an extraordinary extent, more and more letters are returned to the constituency office, not to the House of Commons. I regard the roles as a little different.

Mr. Stringer: I shall certainly look into the point that the right hon. Lady raises. My expectation is that letters are returned to the Member of Parliament at the address that was on the original letter. However, if that is not the case, I shall look into the matter and ensure that it is considered when the next guide is issued.

Commonwealth Games

4. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If she will make a statement on preparations for the Commonwealth games. [148768]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Ian McCartney): I am pleased to say that Manchester 2002 is on target with plans and preparations to host the biggest sporting and cultural celebration ever held in the United Kingdom.

The sports programme has been finalised, and will be the largest ever for a Commonwealth games, with 14 individual and three team sports. Six new venues are being provided for the games, with improvements made to others. The £32 million aquatic centre was opened in October last year, the Bolton arena is nearing completion and is expected to open later this month, and work on the City of Manchester stadium is on target, with completion scheduled for December 2001. Some £18 million of commercial income has been announced and a further sponsorship announcement is expected later this month.

Mr. Grogan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. As a proud Yorkshireman, it is rare for me to wish any event in Manchester well. On this occasion, however, will my right hon. Friend do everything possible to ensure that the games, which will occur in jubilee year, are promoted not just in the north-west but throughout the United Kingdom, so that they will be as inspirational for our sportsmen, sportswomen and youngsters as the Sydney Olympics were in Australia?

Mr. McCartney: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. This is an international event—a window of opportunity for the United Kingdom—based in the city of Manchester. I am delighted to say that, across the country, Members of Parliament on both sides of the House are fully behind this project.

The national spirit of friendship festival will organise a programme of events in celebration, engaging skills, clubs and communities across the country in the year of Her Majesty's golden jubilee. Sport England is organising youth regional games alongside the Commonwealth games, with events in which up to 250,000 young people can compete. So we are well on schedule for the biggest sporting and cultural event ever held in Britain.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): The Minister will be aware that there is concern that the high-speed rail link to the games may not be completed in time. Along with Members on both sides of the House, I hope that it will be. What steps have been taken to ensure that the rail link is completed on schedule?

Mr. McCartney: I think that the hon. Gentleman may be mixing up the transport infrastructure for the Commonwealth games with the proposal for the extension throughout Manchester of the metro system. The metro system is not part of the transport infrastructure for the games, and never has been. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to be helpful to the hon. Gentleman. In terms of getting to the games and getting around the city of Manchester, discussions are taking place with all the transport partnerships, including the buses and trains. There will be a separate, clear transport infrastructure strategy to ensure

that not only is there access to the games from outside Manchester and the north-west but that people in Manchester have fast and easy access to and from all the venues. In addition, we hope to have a ticketing arrangement that includes transport costs. That will make it easier for people to buy a ticket, get on a tram or bus and go to and from the games.

Drug Arrest Referral Schemes

5. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If she will make a statement on the effectiveness of drug arrest referral schemes. [148769]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): There is clear evidence that arrest referral schemes work. For example, in Barnsley, the custody sergeant's promotion of the scheme has helped to accelerate take-up, and drug users not previously in touch with services are being reached. There has been a steady increase in the number of people seen for initial assessment, and a high rate of those attending for drug treatment. Areas where referrals have been working longer show significant reductions in the amount spent on illegal drugs, and drug-related crime has been reduced by as much as 80 per cent.

Mr. Clapham: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that answer. I thank her for her recent visit to Barnsley, when she was able to hold discussions with the chief executive of Barnsley metropolitan borough council, the co-ordinator of the community partnership and the vice-chair of DAT—the Drug Action Team—Barnsley's drug strategy. From those talks, she will be aware that the drugs referral system is vital in getting young offenders who are on drugs into treatment. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is a need to strengthen the community support services after treatment? Will she look into how resources might be focused on improving that service to complement the referral system?

Marjorie Mowlam: I certainly recognise what my hon. Friend says—helping young people stay off drugs and giving them support once they have finished treatment is crucial. The best approach to ensuring that that care is provided is to make certain that the partnership that developed during the arrest referral continues afterwards. I hope that system is working in Barnsley; as my hon. Friend pointed out, I heard about it while I was there.

We are also working to encourage young people to stay away from drugs—not just helping with treatment and post-treatment care. I am pleased to announce that an additional £152 million is going into drug education for young people, particularly to identify the most vulnerable and those most at risk so that they can be given special help.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): How soon does the Minister expect that drug arrest referral schemes will have an effect on reducing drug-related crime nationally? Does she agree that, unless the early release of 3,000 drug dealers is halted forthwith, Government targets will be seriously jeopardised?

Marjorie Mowlam: As I have just said, where the schemes are working, there is already a real decrease in crime. Arrest referral schemes are being rolled out across the country at present and, by the end of this year—definitely by next year—we hope that most areas will have them. The schemes bring results.

Mrs. Winterton: What about early release?

Marjorie Mowlam: That is a matter for the Home Office. It is important that when people are in prison we give them help to ensure that they come off drugs. Whatever the reason for them being in prison—whether they are dealers or people caught using drugs—the best course is to get them off drugs so that when they get out, they do not continue with the same behaviour.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the concern that those who enter drug treatment programmes through the judicial system might displace those who do not do so? If that is true, it could send out dangerous signals.

Marjorie Mowlam: Let me assure my hon. Friend that that is not the case. In areas where demand is high or fluctuating, adequate treatment—whether inside or outside the judicial system—is not always available. The national treatment agency that will be set up with £145 million will provide the additional treatment needed. That is being rolled out at present. Local drug teams are putting in their requests, so where there are problems—I readily acknowledge the problems—they will be dealt with.

Rural Development

6. **Mr. Andrew George** (St. Ives): What recent discussions she has had with her colleagues in other Departments on the co-ordination of rural development. [148770]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam): I chair the ministerial rural affairs group, which provides a forum for discussions with colleagues on rural development and other issues.

Mr. George: I am grateful to the Minister for her reply, but what has happened since the establishment of the Cabinet Committee on rural affairs? How often has it met? Does it recognise that there is an urgent crisis in rural areas? What action is it taking with other Departments to address the fact that small family farms are going out of business in their droves? After all, they are the bedrock of rural life in this country and they deserve better treatment. How is the Cabinet Committee addressing that issue?

Marjorie Mowlam: The ministerial rural affairs group is co-ordinating rural policy and rural proofing to ensure that Departments consider the impact of their policies on rural areas, that the policies work as effectively as possible to support rural life, and that a joined-up approach is taken to tackle the problems faced by rural communities. The hon. Gentleman refers specifically to small farms. We have put £1.6 billion into the English

rural development programme, which will provide vital support to help farmers to play a role in diversifying their production in the economy.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, although the initiatives on farms from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and on village post offices from the Department of Trade and Industry have played an important part in assisting rural regeneration, local authorities are the principal agents of joined-up government in rural areas? Will she evaluate whether this year's well above inflation settlements for local authorities have gone a long way to improve the co-ordination of services in rural areas?

Marjorie Mowlam: The additional funding for local authorities will help co-ordination and delivery in rural and urban areas and is a welcome development, so efforts are already being made in relation to rural areas. We have put an extra £239 million into transport, with an extra £15 million in parish funds for community-based solutions. Alongside the £37 million in extra funding for market town regeneration, that shows that we are making noticeable progress. It should be compared with the Tory party's record in government, when 30,000 post offices were closed, one in four parishes were without a bus service and 30 village schools closed each year. I hope that the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) bears that in mind before he asks his question.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not a fact that the only real rural co-ordination going on at the moment is the massive co-ordination for the even more massive march that will be held on 18 March to protest about the way in which the Government keep attacking the rural way of life and neglect totally the problems of the countryside?

Marjorie Mowlam: If the hon. Gentleman's party had not neglected rural areas when in power, the anger would not be so great. We inherited one in four parishes with no transport; 3,000 schools closing; a transport system that was not working; and village schools that were closing. In comparison, we have put money into transport and given a 50 per cent. rate relief to village shops, pubs and garages—which are crucial to communities—and £40 million extra to support small schools, and there is an affordable house scheme. We are concerned about rural areas and we are making a difference. Yes, people are unhappy because we are having to make a lot of progress very quickly, given what we inherited from the Conservative party.

Mr. Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): My constituency has rural areas to the north and west. What is the Government's commitment to rural Britain after years of neglect?

Marjorie Mowlam: I have talked about rate relief for village shops and the money for transport and schools, but, at the same time, we are encouraging housebuilding on brownfield sites, which is terribly important if we are to have a sustainable policy to keep the green belt alive. We have saved a lot of green belt with our emphasis on building on brownfield sites. We have an area of greenbelt land the size of Bristol. All that we need to do is compare that with what the Opposition did when in government.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Has the rural affairs committee focused in its discussions on the issue of farm incomes? I am sure that the Minister will agree that many rural areas have been very hard hit by the fall in farm incomes by three quarters, so will the Government claim the agrimonetary compensation that will be available before 30 April—yes or no?

Marjorie Mowlam: It is common practice not to discuss the detail of a Cabinet Committee's discussions, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that we cover the whole waterfront in terms of rural policy. Since 1997, we have provided an extra £1 billion to help the farming industry through difficult times and, now, an additional £1.6 billion for the English rural development programme will provide vital support to help farming play a greater role in the diverse economies in rural areas.

On Europe, I assure the Minister—*[Interruption.]*—the Leader of the Opposition—*[Interruption.]* I do not know what the hon. Gentleman is.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does it matter?

Marjorie Mowlam: I do not think that it does.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that, in relation to Europe, we are working hard to maximise the benefits for industry, including agriculture, in this country. That cannot be said of the Conservative party.

Mr. Lansley: The Minister must know from her discussions across the waterfront that farmers have been hard hit. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has made it clear that this is the worst agricultural recession for many years, and farm incomes are at their lowest in real terms since the 1930s. If ever there were a moment to use the resources that can be claimed from the European Community, it is now and £200 million is available before 30 April. Farmers know that the Conservatives, should we form a Government before 30 April—[Hon. Members: "No."] Yes, and farmers know that the Conservatives will make that £200 million available. Will the Government do that—yes or no?

Marjorie Mowlam: Farmers know that we have been helpful since 1997 and should compare our record with what happened before. In Europe, we are doing all that we can to help farmers to obtain the benefits that Europe offers. The Conservatives promise that the agrimonetary payments will be claimed but, if I were a farmer, I would consider how many agrimonetary payments they obtained when they were in government. The answer is none.

Drug Use

7. **Mr. David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): What new initiatives and resources are planned in the campaign against drug usage by younger adolescents. [148771]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Ian McCartney): As the Government announced this morning, we are putting £152 million over three years into

co-ordinating and targeting local services to help young people, including those most vulnerable from drug misuse.

The Government's anti-drugs strategy has set challenging targets to halve the numbers of young people using illegal drugs by 2008. We are ensuring that young people receive the help and advice that they need to resist drug misuse, and we shall increase drug education and prevention spending from £63 million this year to £120 million in 2003–04.

In Leicestershire, the county council education department's drug policy is due to be published in the spring of this year, with training planned to support its implementation.

Mr. Taylor: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. May I commend to him the work in Leicestershire schools of the life education centres, whose drug prevention education helps many thousands of children make healthy choices? Will he discuss with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment ways of sustaining and developing the LECs, particularly in the use of digital technology, to make their programmes more effective with pupils, teachers and parents?

Mr. McCartney: Yes. I am also prepared to come to Leicestershire to hold discussions with my hon. Friend and his colleagues there about how we can build on the work that is already being done in the county to prevent addiction but, when it does, to provide proper treatment. We shall also help to relieve communities in Leicestershire from the stress that drug dealers cause in some of them.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Is it— *[Interruption.]* It is always a pleasure to brighten up the lives of miserable Labour Members who are about to lose their seats.

Is it the right hon. Gentleman's policy that young offenders who abuse drugs should be eligible for drug referral schemes? If so, what assessment has he made of attendance at, and participation in, such schemes? Does he believe that it is necessary to have a mixture of a carrot-and-stick approach to ensure compliance? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I ask the House to settle down; there are too many private conversations.

Mr. McCartney: The issue is not about saving seats; it is about saving lives. Perhaps I can draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to that. The schemes are working effectively. They encourage young people who have a drug abuse problem to take responsibility for seeking out a partnership with the local authority to receive available treatment and to address the issues that arise from the criminal activity related to their misuse of drugs.

The pilot project has had two results: first, there has been a dramatic decrease in criminal activity—up to £300 a week less has been stolen to feed the drug habit; and secondly, a large proportion of the people in the schemes are successfully participating in the treatment programmes and are about to go on to receive education, training and housing. However, it is a hell of a job to get those young people to work in a sustained way in the community. It is difficult to get them to give up drugs, sustain the lack of drug activity and to go on to a healthy life style, but we must ensure that we get on with encouraging that. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that that is what we are doing.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): May I invite my right hon. Friend to visit Halifax to meet some of the dedicated workers who are employed in drug referral and prevention strategies? Will he join me in condemning the proposals by Tory-controlled Calderdale council to cut staff in that vital service?

Mr. McCartney: First, I would be more than happy to visit my hon. Friend's constituency. Secondly, a year or so ago I went to her local authority to discuss drug issues on estates. I would be staggered if any local authority decided to reduce funding in such a vital service when the Government have put in place a £1 billion investment programme to prevent drug abuse, provide treatment, encourage community safety and reduce the availability of drugs in communities. There is no reason why her local authority should not be involved in a strategy to ensure that the system in her community works effectively to get young people off drugs and into a more proactive life style.

Regulation

8. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): If she will make a statement on her role in achieving better regulation by Government Departments. [148772]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Graham Stringer): My right hon. Friend the Minister chairs the panel for regulatory accountability. Yesterday, the Regulatory Reform Bill completed its Report stage in the other place.

Miss McIntosh: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that the Government continue to gold-plate European Union directives, the most recent of which were on HACCP—hazard analysis and critical control points—and on meat hygiene inspection? Members of Unison have been consulted and are up in arms at the prescriptive nature of the conditions that will be imposed on United Kingdom producers but that would not have to be met by our EU competitors.

Mr. Stringer: Most of the complaints that I receive about gold-plating come from the time when the Conservative party was in government. The Cabinet Office, under my noble Friend Lord Falconer, has issued new guidelines on the transposition of European legislation.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): Would my hon. Friend consider better regulation of the steel industry by Departments in view of Corus's decision not to allow the workers to buy out Llanwern steel works because it would produce competition? According to Sir Brian Moffatt, it is better to get rid of manufacturing at Llanwern and Ebbw Vale than allow competition. Does he agree that no one should treat, or be allowed to treat, their work force in that way?

Mr. Stringer: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the possible loss of jobs in the steel industry. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is still in discussions about those jobs.

Health Information

12. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): If she will make a statement on her Department's role in co-ordinating the information relating to health in the Government's annual report. [148776]

The Minister for the Cabinet Office (Marjorie Mowlam) *rose—*

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Ian McCartney) *rose—*

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government's annual report was produced by the strategic communications unit in the Prime Minister's office. Chapters on each section were written in collaboration with advisers from No. 10 and the relevant Departments. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We cannot hear the right hon. Lady.

Marjorie Mowlam: Shall I read the answer again?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government's annual report was produced by the strategic communications unit in the Prime Minister's office. Chapters on each section were written in collaboration with advisers from No. 10 and the relevant Departments.

Mr. Amess: What a shambles of a Government.

Rather than co-ordinate the misinformation on the health service, as contained in page 3 of the annual report, will the right hon. Lady consider co-ordinating exactly when the general public will receive appointments with consultants to diagnose their various problems? Will she consider co-ordination to ascertain where this rotten Government intend to find the staff to run the national health service?

Marjorie Mowlam: In terms of staff, the hon. Gentleman well knows that we are already recruiting more nurses and training more doctors. The situation is improving day by day. If he listened to the facts, he would not have to ask the question.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [148795] **Mr. Ken Purchase** (Wolverhampton, North-East): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 14 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

Mr. Purchase: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Age Concern, which today has published its manifesto for older people? Will he note that, on page 6, it makes a splendid case for increasing and improving the state pension, as the best way of avoiding the indignity of means-testing our oldest and poorest people? Will he give a commitment that the Labour Government will always protect the value of the state pension, rather than let it be whittled away in the disgraceful manner that the Tories allowed?

The Prime Minister: Certainly. There is the £200 winter allowance that has been given to pensioners, there are free television licences for pensioners over 75, and there are free eye tests. This year, there are the increases of £5 and £8, which are meant to be increased even further next year. These increases are greater than those that would be linked to earnings. These are substantial sums for British pensioners, and deservedly so. We shall have spent more money on pensions during this Parliament than if the pension had been linked to earnings. Pensioners can know with absolute certainty that the money comes to them under the Labour Government and would be taken from them under the Conservatives.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Today, people have travelled from throughout the country to lobby the House in opposition to the Prime Minister's policy of abolishing community health councils. When I last asked him about the matter, he said that he would consult on the proposals and listen to the representations made. How many representations has he received in favour of his policy?

The Prime Minister: We have made it clear that we are consulting on the community health councils. Our proposals involve replacing the councils not with nothing, but with patients forums in each hospital and each local general practitioner's premises. There is widespread concern about whether CHCs have performed properly the function of looking after patients' interests. However, we continue to listen to the representations made, and we shall announce our final proposals in due course.

Mr. Hague: As the Prime Minister was happy to quote Age Concern a moment ago, has he listened to Help the Aged, which says that the Government's policy

"is likely to lead to confusion and lack of clout in addressing the . . . representation of patients"?

The Prime Minister's policy is opposed by Age Concern, Help the Aged, Mencap, the British Medical Association, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the National Childbirth Trust and Action for Victims of Medical Accidents. He has not had the decency to admit that nobody is in favour of his proposals. Will he reverse his policy or will he maintain that he knows better than all those organisations?

The Prime Minister: I said that we would listen carefully to people and, indeed, we shall. I do not think

that the right hon. Gentleman will have to wait much longer for the answer. As he is quoting those organisations on our health proposals, he should also quote them in support of the massive extra investment that the Government are making in the national health service—the extra nurses, doctors and hospitals—and on the contrast between the investment going into the health service under this Government and the cuts that there would be under the right hon. Gentleman's.

Mr. Hague: It is no good the Prime Minister wriggling off the point because he does not know the answers to the questions. What about the following representation, with which he should be familiar? It says:

"there has been no consultation".

It also says that abolition is a

"cynical attempt to silence any negative publicity".

What better way, the organisation asks,

"to deflect attention from . . . shortcomings"

of the Government? That was said by South Durham and Wealden community health council, Sedgefield district. Does it not tell us something when the people who know the Prime Minister best say that he does not listen, that his policy is utterly cynical and that he is interested only in publicity? Have they not got it in one?

The Prime Minister: I think that the right hon. Gentleman's comments may look a little foolish when the results of the consultation are announced, if I may respectfully say so. As this is about the only health service subject that he dare raise—he knows that he has nothing to say about anything else—it is correct that there have been many representations on community health councils, and it is for that reason that we said we would listen to them.

If we are to have a balanced debate on the health service, however, let us also debate the amount of investment and change going on. The fact is, we are prepared to put that extra investment in to the NHS, far more than the right hon. Gentleman ever did. Perhaps, in the interests of an exchange of views, the right hon. Gentleman can say whether it is still the case that he will take £750 million out of the NHS for private medical insurance.

Q2. [148796] **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does the Prime Minister remember the snarl-ups that we used have in the Chamber on the minimum wage and the bogus arguments threatening a cataclysmic loss of jobs? Is he aware that, at that time, one in every five workers in South Yorkshire were earning less than £3.50 an hour? They are now between £30 and £40 a week better off; and unemployment has halved. Is my right hon. Friend surprised that the Opposition have changed their mind about that policy?

The Prime Minister: I am proud that the Government introduced a statutory minimum wage which has helped hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers in this country out of poverty. Some said that it would increase unemployment. In fact, today we have the lowest unemployment in the country for over 25 years; we have the lowest inflation in Europe; national debt is down; interest rates—and therefore mortgages—are half what they were in the Conservative years. We can, and do, have both economic efficiency and social justice.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On 13 December last year, the Deputy Prime Minister advised the House that he anticipated that rail services would be back to normal by Easter, having earlier said that they would be back to normal by January. Given the recent reports that the Office of the Rail Regulator now estimates that rail services will not, in any way, be back in efficient running order before the summer, does the Prime Minister still confirm the earlier statement of the Deputy Prime Minister?

The Prime Minister: It is our understanding that rail services will be back to normal by Easter, but of course that depends on Railtrack and the companies carrying out the work that they have agreed, which is precisely why we will carry on putting pressure on them to do so. There is no doubt that for many passengers still, particularly on the inter-city lines, the situation is simply unacceptable. The only way that we will cure the problem long term is to make sure that we have proper strategic control of our rail industry, given up under privatisation by the Conservatives, and that we put the urgently needed investment into our railways.

Mr. Kennedy: We want safe, reliable, affordable rail services. In that case, should not the Government's strategic approach be, first, to reduce the ridiculous number of train operators, and secondly, to turn Railtrack into a non-profit-making organisation? If the Government did that, they would demonstrate that they put passenger safety before Railtrack's commercial profits.

The Prime Minister: There is, as we know, a strong case for better securing passenger safety. I do not know what the right hon. Gentleman means by a not-for-profit organisation, but it is vital that we get strategic control, which is what the Strategic Rail Authority will do. Secondly, and perhaps above all, we need to make good the investment in our railways.

The country has a simple choice: either we invest in the basic public services and the infrastructure, or we go back to the cuts and privatisation that we had for 18 years before. We have set out clear plans for investment, which I hope the right hon. Gentleman supports. I know that in time—and it will take time—they will deliver a better rail infrastructure. There is no point in believing that we can get decent public services unless we are prepared to pay for them.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Can my right hon. Friend be persuaded that winter fuel payments for pensioners and free TV licences for those aged 75 and over are complicated when pensioners want simplicity, and patronising when pensioners want respect, and that they should be abolished—in which case he agrees with what the leader of the Conservative party was saying at the beginning of last week? Or does my right hon. Friend believe that many pensioners are happy to receive winter fuel payments and free TV licences, and that they should

be maintained—in which he agrees with what the leader of the Conservative party was saying at the end of the week?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend, as ever, makes his point extremely well. The complications involved in trying to organise the system along the lines suggested by the Conservative party would be appalling in terms of bureaucracy, red tape and so on. The basic point is that the £200 winter allowance is popular and it is right. The free TV licences for those over 75 are popular and right. The rise in the basic state pension coming in this April is, again, the right thing to do. We will carry on standing up for the proper interests of British pensioners.

Q3. [148797] **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): This time last week, the Prime Minister promised that if he were re-elected, he would hold a referendum on the question of scrapping the pound. That comment was well noted in Wiltshire, where people do not like it at all. Does the Prime Minister remember promising his friends in the Liberal Democrat party that he would hold a referendum on proportional representation? Will that be within two years?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait for the manifesto for all that. On the euro and the good people of Wiltshire, whom I think the hon. Gentleman represents, I believe that what they will like most is the fact that interest rates came down last week. They will like the fact that job numbers are up, living standards are up, and from this March and April, there will be a family tax cut for millions of families which would be taken away by the Conservative party.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the great satisfaction that there is in the north Nottinghamshire and South Yorkshire coalfield areas at the announcement of the £60 million subsidy for six pits, which is gratefully received? Is he aware that, for years, I and many of my colleagues marched under banners calling for "coal not dole", as the Conservatives butchered 270,000 jobs in the industry, in which there are now 20,000 jobs left? The Conservatives got their answer when they were butchered at the last election. Will my right hon. Friend accept the thanks of us all?

The Prime Minister: There is now huge investment—hundreds of millions of pounds—going into coalfield communities, not only to preserve those jobs in Britain's mining industry, but to provide hope for areas that have lost their mining industry. I think that that is right and necessary, because it gives us the chance to regenerate these areas. It is one reason why unemployment is so low in this country today.

Q4. [148798] **Mr. Julian Brazier** (Canterbury): Is the Prime Minister aware that during the past fortnight in east Kent, more than 100 people have been waiting on trolleys in our three casualty departments? They include a woman of 97 who had to wait for two nights. Is he aware that 80 consultants from the three Kent sites last night voted unanimously for a motion saying that lack of capacity is compromising their ability to deliver health care? Is he still committed to an ill-conceived £100 million reorganisation that will not add a single bed and which was opposed by the local community health council?

The Prime Minister: Of course it is entirely unacceptable if people are waiting that long on trolleys. The hon. Gentleman and his consultants rightly say that the issue is one of increasing capacity. That is precisely why we have increased capacity and are increasing it year on year. Let me remind him and Opposition Members that they cut 40,000 to 60,000 beds in the national health service. When we came to office, they had cut the number of nursing places and the number of training places for midwives, and they were cutting capital investment in the health service. In all those areas, we are putting the investment in. It will take time, but the one group that has no cause to criticise is the Conservative party.

Wimbledon

Q5. [148799] **Mr. Roger Casale** (Wimbledon): What plans he has to visit Wimbledon.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so.

Mr. Casale: When my right hon. Friend does come to Wimbledon, he will discover that low interest rates are one of the achievements that my constituents most identify with a Labour Government. Home owners are now paying less than £700 a month for an average mortgage, compared with more than £760 a month in 1992 under the Tories. Will he assure the House and my constituents that he will continue with his Government's policies to set a course for economic stability? Nobody in Wimbledon wants to go back to the high and fluctuating interest rates, negative equity and house repossessions that were the legacy of Tory boom and bust. *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: Conservative Members seem to think that my hon. Friend's constituents will not be interested in economic stability or low interest rates. I think they will find that they are rather wrong. Of course, the importance of low mortgage rates is that there is nothing better for hard-working families who are pressed to make ends meet than being able to rely on low rates and thus on lower mortgage payments. On average, they are running about £1,000 a year less under this Government than they were when the Conservative party was in government. People remember the days of interest rates at 15 per cent., negative equity, repossession and boom and bust, and they never want to go back to them.

Engagements

Q6. [148800] **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): May I welcome the employment figures published today? They show that unemployment in Wirral, South, for example, has fallen by a third generally since the last election, and by 80 per cent. among long-term unemployed young people. My right hon. Friend will appreciate, however, that structural change is occurring, not least in manufacturing, and that the picture will vary from area to area. Excellent though the figures are, does he agree that the Government will be judged not only by these excellent headline items, but by the way in which they handle the

process and help the areas, individuals and communities that are affected by economic and industrial change? *[Interruption.]*

The Prime Minister: A moment ago, the Opposition were not interested in listening to what was said about interest rates; now they are not interested in jobs either. Today's figures show that unemployment is now at a record low for almost 25 years. Many people remember when 3 million were unemployed. The figures indicate, along with the fact that there are still 1 million vacancies in the economy, that we are finally providing the ability not only to have economic stability, but to put on top of that a productive job-creating base for the economy. That is immensely important.

I hope that the whole House recognises that when there are more jobs in the economy, more wealth is created for this country and we can make the investments in our public services that people so desperately need. There is a pretty obvious answer to why the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) never asks me any questions about the economy.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): Let me ask the right hon. Gentleman for some figures. The Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), stated in a written answer on 23 January that the cost of asylum support was £664 million. Does the Prime Minister stand by her answer?

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Hague: Even by the Government's standards, their reputation for honest answers has sunk to a new low. The real cost to the taxpayer was sent from the Home Office to No. 10 Downing street in the same week as the parliamentary answer was given. Total asylum support costs £835 million. The covering memo from the Home Office states:

"this report is for internal information . . . lines to take for public use will be provided separately".

Will the Prime Minister stop using the

"lines to take for public use",

give the real internal information, and provide a straight answer to the people of this country?

The Prime Minister: That is quite wrong. The budget is as I set it out a moment ago, and accords with the figure that the right hon. Gentleman first put to me. He describes the costs that depend on, and fluctuate because of, the number of asylum seekers. They will go up and down. However, as a result of our measures, approximately three times as many asylum seekers are being removed now as five years ago. From next year, somewhere in the region of 30,000 will be removed. That will reduce those costs considerably.

Mr. Hague: Once again, the Government have been caught out on their statistics. We know that the budget was £660 million. The right hon. Gentleman and the Minister were asked about the cost. The Prime Minister talks about the number of removals; will he confirm that, of the 69,000 asylum claims that were rejected last year, only 9,000 claimants left the country? Taken together, do not the figures demonstrate the collapse of the Government's asylum policy? They have made this country a soft touch and turned us into the asylum capital of Europe. Everyone knows the Government's true record: a record number of applications, a record number of people avoiding deportation, and a record amount of deception and failure.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps I can give the right hon. Gentleman the facts. The figure of 9,000 is correct As I said earlier, that is three times the number of people who were removed five years ago under the Conservative Government. However, the overall number of people removed is some 46,000.

Which policies will reduce the number of those entering the country: an end to cash benefits, penalties on lorry firms that bring in illegal immigrants, or a boost to the number of people who work in the immigration and nationality department? We have introduced all those measures; the right hon. Gentleman has opposed every one. Let me explain, so that the public understand, that he goes around the country telling people that asylum is a terrible problem while obstructing in the House of Commons every move that allows us to deal with it.

The right hon. Gentleman is wrong to say that Britain has the highest number of asylum seekers per capita. In the past six months, Britain's numbers have remained constant, while Sweden has experienced a 53 per cent. increase, Denmark a 44 per cent. rise, France a 13 per cent. increase, and Belgium a rise of 16 per cent.

We say that our measures are best for dealing with asylum seekers; the right hon. Gentleman says that he would set up detention centres for all asylum seekers, genuine or not. Conservative Members nod their heads. We have proposed one detention centre at Aldington; they have opposed its establishment. They oppose one detention centre while saying that they will create 50. That says all that needs to be said about the right hon. Gentleman's policy.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Jim Cousins.

Q7. [148801] **Mr. Jim Cousins** (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): On Monday, the Prime Minister rightly set out the need to improve educational opportunity. Nowhere is that need greater than in the north-east of England, as he well knows, Will he promise the people of the north-east of England an early opportunity to decide for themselves whether they, like the Scots, want a political voice to tackle their deep-seated problems for themselves, rather than just being the victims of them?

The Prime Minister: As I have said before, that is a matter for local people to decide. I understand the case for a regional assembly. The advent of the regional development agencies has been immensely important in the north-east and other areas. In our region, they have safeguarded some 11,000 jobs and brought in a great deal of inward investment. That is why I believe that it is so

important that we keep the regional development agencies and build them up, rather than abolishing them as the Conservative party has suggested.

Sir Richard Body (Boston and Skegness): Will the Prime Minister help the lobby outside by telling us how many representative bodies have called on him to bring to an end community health councils?

The Prime Minister: As I said in answer to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) earlier, we will have to wait for the outcome of the consultation that will be announced soon. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the size of the investment in the national health service is a better testimony to our commitment to the national health service than the cuts proposed by the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues.

Q8. [148802] **Mr. Michael Connarty** (Falkirk, East): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the warmth with which Polish people and people of Polish descent in this country welcome the setting up by the Government of a commission to examine the substantial contribution of Polish people—some of whom did not survive—in fighting alongside the allies in the second world war? Is he also aware of their hope that the Government will not be diverted from the path to enlargement of the European Union by the xenophobia shown by the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: We have been advocates for the enlargement process right from the beginning. The vision of a unified Europe, east and west, is a vision of peace and prosperity for all the people in Europe for the future. That is why this country will continue to advocate enlargement, and why we will not allow any obstruction to get in the way of that enlargement process moving forward.

Q9. [148803] **Mr. Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): Does the Prime Minister believe that physiotherapy provided to an elderly person who has suffered a stroke should be provided free in their own home or in a residential or charitable nursing home? Does he also believe that elderly people who are not in hospital but in their own home or in a residential home and require incontinence pads should be entitled to receive them free under the national health service? If he does, will he ensure that the Secretary of State for Health issues a proper definition of personal social care as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: It is important that the definition is right. Nursing care, in future, will be free. We had to take a decision—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members may grumble, but none of those provisions were free under the previous Government. Let me just point that out to them: we are introducing free nursing care. We have chosen not to introduce free personal care because it would cost about £1 billion, and we believe that that money would be better spent elsewhere.

I must also point out to the hon. Gentleman that, in addition to the investment in free nursing care, we are also investing a large sum of money in trying to provide for people to be looked after in their own homes. The number of at-home care packages has been increased by many tens of thousands. Those, of course, are funded by the state. I agree that it is important to have a precise definition, and we shall have one, but I believe that the balance that we have struck between nursing care and free personal care is the right one.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister give his personal attention to resolving issues concerning state aid that are currently holding back a number of important public-private sector investments in the Merseyside objective 1 area? Does he agree that speedy resolution of that issue is essential to enable the Government's policy of supporting private investment as part of regeneration to be maximised throughout the country?

The Prime Minister: I entirely agree about the importance of proceeding as quickly as possible with the public-private partnerships that will yield such benefit in terms of investment and jobs in regions such as the north-west, particularly those undergoing structural economic change. I can offer my hon. Friend this assurance: we will do all we can to make progress quickly.

Q10. [148804] **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): In July, in the House, the Prime Minister promised Labour Members a free vote on the report "Shifting the Balance". On Monday—not that the Prime Minister troubled himself to vote—they were denied a free vote.

If the Prime Minister does not allow Labour Members a free vote on "Shifting the Balance" before the general election, what possible construction can the country put on the Government's behaviour—except the construction put on the Government's response to the Liaison Committee's first report by Peter Riddell of *The Times*, who said that the behaviour of the right hon. Gentleman's Government was arrogant, contemptible and mendacious?

The Prime Minister: I understand that the debate took place on a Tory Opposition day, so it is hardly surprising that we should oppose what the Opposition wanted. Let me offer the hon. Gentleman some advice, however. Next time he asks a question at Prime Minister's Question Time—perhaps a question on the economy—he should recall the words of Lord Strathclyde, which I think bear repeating. Just a couple of days ago, Lord Strathclyde said:

> "I think there's always a danger of political parties peaking too soon, and I think William Hague and the shadow cabinet have very cleverly avoided that."

Speaker's Statement

Mr. Speaker: I have a short statement to make about the conduct of Question Time. I wish to ensure that the four hours each week that the House devotes to Question Time are used to best effect.

The primary purpose of Question Time is to hold the Executive to account. "Erskine May" says that a question must either seek information or press for action, and that it must relate to matters for which Ministers are officially responsible. Questions are out of order if they relate to Opposition party policies rather than Government responsibilities. Moreover, a question should not be, in effect, a short speech. *[Interruption.]* Order. There is more.

Answers should be confined to points contained in the question—*[Interruption.]* Order. I must deal with criticisms from both sides of the House. As I was saying, answers should be confined to points contained in questions, giving only such explanation as renders an answer intelligible. A certain latitude is permitted to Ministers, but it does not extend to Ministers discussing Opposition policies at length, or to their putting a series of questions to Opposition spokesmen. It is those long-established rules that maintain the difference between Question Time and ordinary debates in the House.

Of course I recognise that, over many years, Question Time has developed as a lively occasion on which political points are scored. That applies particularly to Prime Minister's Question Time. As I said last week, although the same constraints apply, I think it right to allow the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition a greater degree of latitude.

I emphasise that I do not wish to interrupt the flow of questions and answers, but I believe that the House would work better, and would enhance its reputation, if Members followed the basic principles that apply to Question Time. In particular, it is crucial for questions and answers to be short and to the point; that will allow more Members to make a contribution.

Members on both sides of the House have got into bad habits at Question Time, and we must all co-operate to put matters right. I look to Ministers, and to other Members, to respect the rules and practice of the House. I also expect Members to allow me to preside over the House without sedentary comments or noises designed to influence the conduct of the Chair.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Nigel Griffiths (Edinburgh, South): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Some hon. Members have been very concerned that the Opposition's policies have been mentioned at Question Time. We are therefore grateful to you for saying today that they should not be dealt with at Question Time. It is, after all, merely cruelty to examine those policies, which are so transparently poor that, on that basis, the country will never elect the Opposition to government.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order for me.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is a very basic point of order which affects the welfare of many hon. Members. May I advise you that every lavatory in Portcullis House is out of order? As that problem is in addition to problems with the escalators and with the lifts, could you please investigate the matter? I believe that, after forking out £250 million of taxpayers' money for that place, we deserve better value for money.

Mr. Speaker: Order. There was a burst water main in Bridge street.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. We shall study your ruling with great care. I was not quite clear which were your own words as Speaker, which we must follow, and which were words quoted directly from "Erskine May". I think that my constituents sent me to this place not only to test and question the Executive, but, in part, to test and question the ability of the alternative Executive, who are sitting on the other side of the Chamber. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] That is a serious part of my job as a Member of Parliament. I should be grateful if, in due course, you could give some reflection to that duty that I have as an hon. Member, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the best thing the hon. Gentleman could do, if he has not already done so, is to read "Erskine May". It would make good reading for him.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be familiar with the paragraph 1(iii) of the ministerial code, which states:

> "It is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity."

This time last week, the Prime Minister told the House that there were 500,000 extra students in further and higher education since the Government came to office. However, that figure is contradicted by all the information that is available in the Government's own statistics, and it is certainly wildly inaccurate. Has the Prime Minister come to you, Mr. Speaker, or made any other attempt to correct that inaccurate information? If he has not done so, how can I press him to ensure that his own ministerial code is brought into force?

Mr. Speaker: No approach from the Prime Minister has been made to me. However, the hon. Gentleman is able to use the Order Paper, and I suggest that he does so.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I enthusiastically welcome your statement, as far as it goes? However, if your wishes are not carried out, could you reflect on whether it is sensible to have open questions to a Prime Minister? Considering the amount of prime ministerial time that is taken up in preparing for questions that may be asked on any subject, is there not an argument for having specific questions to the Prime Minister?

To cater for the needs of the Leader of the Opposition, is there not an argument for reflecting also on whether, if the Leader of the Opposition wants to pursue a subject at length, which he is entitled to do, greater use should be made of the private notice question? A long time ago, when I was first elected to the House, Hugh Gaitskell would use the private notice question if he wished to pursue a particular point with Harold Macmillan, which made possible a sequence of questioning that really did hold the Executive to account. One could ask whether it is possible for those ridiculous open questions to be effective in holding any Executive to account.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I first answer the point raised by the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell)? It is open to the hon. Gentleman to make approaches to the Procedure Committee and the Modernisation Committee. Perhaps I could suggest that he does that.

Mr. Winnick: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you bear it in mind that if we were restricted to the sort of questions that my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has suggested, it would make Question Time far less topical? If an issue arose that an hon. Member on either side wished to raise—particularly at Prime Minister's Question Time—it would be virtually impossible to raise it, as you would rule it out of order. Open questions came about to give Members of this House, both Opposition and Government, much more flexibility. I hope that there will not be a decision to change that; it would be a retrograde step and against the interests of Back Benchers.

Mr. Speaker: Once again, I would say that these are matters for the Modernisation Committee and the Procedure Committee. The hon. Gentleman has a view contrary to that of his hon. Friend. He could make that view known.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On 18 April 2000, the previous Speaker announced to the House that she had had long discussions with the head of the civil service and the Cabinet Secretary about letters from Ministers taking a long time to get to Members. I wrote to the Department of Health on 29 September for some information that it would have been fairly easy to provide quickly. The Department acknowledged, in the first paragraph of the reply, the name of my constituent, and went on to say:

"You and your constituent will be pleased to learn that the British Medical Association currently runs a mentoring scheme for overseas doctors. They can be contacted at

British Medical Association

BMA House

Tavistock Square

London".

The phone number was then given. The letter continued:

"I hope this information is of use to you and your constituent."

I sent the letter to the Department of Health on 29 September; I got that reply on 12 February. It was not a difficult issue, and I would have thought that the reply could have come a lot more quickly. Do you think that Members of Parliament are getting the right service at the moment?

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. If I answer the first point, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will not have to raise a point of order. I cannot comment on the particular case that the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) raises, but I would expect Ministers to act promptly on correspondence from all Back Benchers on both sides of the House. I am a Member of Parliament myself and I expect prompt and full replies. I hope that that is taken on board.

Mr. Luff: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. I have had similar problems with the Department of Health on many occasions; without doubt, it is the worst Department in Whitehall for responding to letters in good time. A reply to my parliamentary question last year said that the Department's target for replying to hon. Members' letters was 20 working days. I cannot immediately recall a letter to which I have had a reply within 20 working days. I have been pursuing the case of my constituent Kevin O'Donnell for two and a half years, and the average length of time for a reply to a letter is six to nine months. Can I urge you to see whether there is something you can do to encourage the Department of Health, in particular, to reply to letters more punctually?

Mr. Speaker: I replied to the hon. Member for West Derbyshire on that point, and I hope that my comment is taken on board.

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I add to the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) and for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick)? It was the practice of the House to have closed questions to the Prime Minister in the age of Mr. Macmillan. He stood up and simply referred the question to the appropriate Minister, and Prime Minister's Question Time more or less collapsed. That is the reason why the open question came in.

Can I refer you to another point that has struck me over many years? It may be useful for you to draw attention to it, Mr. Speaker. The only second person singular in the House is yourself, and far too many right hon. and hon. Members from both sides use the word "you" across the Floor of the House, when they should be referring to "right hon. and hon. Members". It might be appropriate to add that to your earlier statement, so that all right hon. and hon. Members know what they should do.

Mr. Speaker: I have noticed that practice. Most hon. Members, with the exception of those who have come in

[Mr. Speaker]

following by-elections, have been Members for four years now. They should know the conventions and rules of the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Oh for the golden days—but they never happened. You will find if you scan the *Hansard* record of Parliament in 1964, Mr. Speaker, that on occasions so few people wanted to participate in Prime Minister's questions that my late hon. Friend Eric Heffer asked two in questions in 15 minutes.

I am trying to convey the fact that it is a different world now, with different attractions. Parliament is on television, and on C-SPAN in America—and one of the reasons for that is the to and fro of Prime Minister's Question Time. It would be a sad day if we were not allowed to put our points across. I am also extremely pleased that you said that we should not talk about Opposition policies at length.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me answer the hon. Gentleman. I must say that I do miss the times when I used to sit with him below the Gangway and he told me those stories.

Mr. Dalyell: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) mentioned a golden age, but I am unashamedly of the Jurassic age. The wider and more sensitive issue is the extent to which Prime Ministers, whoever they are, think that Question Time allows them to interfere in every Department of Cabinet government. Like other hon. Members, I gave evidence to the Procedure Committee on this matter, which is part of the deeper question about the role of a Prime Minister and a Cabinet in a parliamentary democracy. That question should be addressed.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. This will be the last point of order.

Fiona Mactaggart: Further to those points of order, Mr. Speaker. Your statement did not mention the behaviour of the hon. Members who are listening to the questions and answers. I have been concerned about the lack of listening in the Chamber, and I know that it distresses my constituents. Could you use your office to encourage hon. Members to listen more carefully to each other, so that we can hold people to account instead of merely listening to people shout at each other?

Mr. Speaker: I agree with the hon. Lady and I hope that hon. Members will listen to me. That would help.

BILL PRESENTED

Adoption of Sewers

Mr. Andy King, supported by Mr. Stephen Hepburn, Mr. Martin Bell,, Mr. Steve McCabe, Mr. Bill Olner, Mr. Peter Bradley, Mr. David Stewart, Mr. Tony Clarke and Mr. Tom Brake, presented a Bill to require sewerage undertakers to adopt all remaining unadopted sewers; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 9 March, and to be printed [Bill 47].

Consumer Accountability and New Mutuals

3.47 pm

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to allow for the creation of community mutuals; and to improve accountability of key services to consumers.

Community mutuals offer a marriage between low-risk community ownership of key services and a competitive, efficient operation and culture. They offer an approach that pulls together the best aspects of both public and private ownership. In short, the new mutuals could be powerful efficient enterprises, accountable to the communities and consumers who rely on their services. They offer, for example, a different option for the future of the water utilities and for Railtrack, currently in the private sector. Equally, they offer new options for services now in the public sector, such as care services, housing and so on.

The privatised water companies have been successful in many ways, but they have not succeeded in winning the trust of the many consumers genuinely concerned that shareholders' interests be placed ahead of their own. There is on-going concern about the commitment of water companies to the investment necessary to enhance water quality and modernise the water delivery infrastructure.

There has also been considerable concern at the performance of Railtrack since the privatisation of the rail network, and especially since the Hatfield crash. Railtrack has refused to say whether the cost of the repair work since Hatfield meant that it would cut its annual dividend for the year to April. Indeed, its dividend payment to shareholders was in fact increased by 5 per cent. for the first half of the year. That insistence on financing dividends, when moneys could be used to increase investment levels and help improve services to rail consumers instead, has inevitably increased concern about the sense of priorities among the members of the Railtrack board.

At the same time, equity investors, notably in the water industry, have seen the end of substantial growth in returns because of the entirely welcome and overdue intervention by the regulator. The need to increase returns has driven the search for non-core business, which many companies have entered into, in an attempt to increase their profits and shareholder returns. That additional risk has often been reflected in the cost of capital available to the utilities, reducing their future profitability.

In addition, many utilities feel increasingly pressured and constrained. The pressures of the regulatory system mean that their core monopoly earnings will be highly controlled. Moreover, there is little new equity coming into the water utility sector, with new capital programmes in general having to be financed by debt.

Community mutuals offer a vehicle to deliver significant private capital into key services while increasing the accountability of those services to their consumers in a cost-effective and efficient way. How will they work? Several water companies are already at different public stages of considering how they could vest the core monopoly assets of their business—those controlled by the regulator, having identifiable income streams and providing essential services to local communities—into the ownership of those same communities via a mutual. Glas Cymru, which was recently allowed by the regulator to take over Hyder's core water business, will be 100 per cent. debt funded, rather than equity funded, because all risky speculative ventures have been stripped from the core business. The lower risk profile will provide high levels of capital efficiency and long-term security, both of which will feed back and benefit customers of the core services.

According to the *Financial Times*, Glas Cymru is reducing the cost of its capital by almost 25 per cent. by moving to debt finance. The money saved will be reinvested elsewhere within the business to improve the core service further. In addition, the day-to-day operation of that core business can be contracted out in a competitive market to outsource suppliers, who are incentivised to deliver operational and service efficiencies, the benefits of which can also be passed back to the consumer.

A community mutual would own the service. All customers of that service would be entitled to one nominal share in the business and to a vote in electing a board of non-executive directors. In turn, their role would be to provide a strategic direction for the business, to maximise the benefit to the community. Professional executives, who would be responsible for the day-to-day running of the business, would be subject to the control of the elected board, and would be committed to providing only the core monopoly service, while outsourcing any operation that could be provided competitively.

The responsibility of the management of the mutual to achieve success in running the business is no less hard-edged than in any other corporate model. The management would be incentivised by rewards based on achieving targets. Management and the board would be accountable to their consumers for their performance, with those consumers ultimately having the ability to determine who should run the organisation.

As well as offering the powerful attraction of the community owning, and indeed running, the key services on which they rely more efficiently and effectively than at present, community mutuals have other benefits. The ability to become a member, to receive information, to attend and speak at meetings, to vote and to participate in democratic structures, all provide opportunities for individuals in a community to participate and have a role as citizens within that community. As membership is open to any person who is in receipt of the services, there is no financial barrier excluding those who could not afford membership, so those running a community mutual are truly accountable to the entire community that they serve. Hard decisions will inevitably still need to be made by the mutual, but they will be based on the interests of those whose lives will be immediately affected.

Investor-owned services listed on the stock exchange have, on occasion, been criticised for short-term thinking. The focus on the best interests of the company—effectively share price and profitability—and on executive reward schemes based on share options, encourages decision making that brings tangible, quick results. Investment for the long term is clearly necessary and takes place, but commercial expediency determines spending priorities.

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

The boards and executives of new mutual organisations are free from that disadvantage. They can and must make decisions based on what is in the best interests of the business in serving its community. Clearly, that includes the long-term interests of current members of the community as well as those of future generations.

The most obvious long-term needs that ought to inform day-to-day commercial decisions are environmental issues. Unless there is a specific statutory requirement or an unarguable commercial reason compelling a company to choose a less environmentally damaging but more expensive option, commercial companies' legal duty, whatever they might want to do, is to put the needs of the shareholders first. That will inevitably drive directors to choose the cheaper option, even if it is more environmentally damaging. In a new mutual, carrying on business for the benefit of the community, the directors would be at liberty, and may be legally obliged, to choose the less harmful, albeit the more expensive option.

The opportunities for my constituents as consumers to have a direct influence on the policy and direction of organisations delivering key services such as water, rail, care of the elderly and leisure are negligible and, in truth, would remain limited if the services were, or continued to be, administered by the public sector.

The Government's efforts to modernise local councils, the Strategic Rail Authority and the new water regulator are making important differences in improving the responsiveness of these services to public concern. Community mutuals offer another option—another weapon in the armoury, which is not appropriate in every circumstance—to increase the accountability of key services to their consumers.

I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Gareth R. Thomas, Mr. Andrew Love, Dr. Doug Naysmith, Mr. Paul Clark, Mr. Phil Hope, Mr. David Taylor, Mr. David Drew, Mr. Mike Gapes, Angela Smith, Mr. Adrian Bailey and Mr. Alun Michael.

CONSUMER ACCOUNTABILITY AND NEW MUTUALS

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to allow for the creation of community mutuals; and to improve accountability of key services to consumers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 20 July, and to be printed [Bill 48].

Health and Social Care Bill (Programme)(No.2)

3.57 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Health and Social Care Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 10th January:

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting.

2. Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

4. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Consideration of Lords Amendments and further messages from the Lords

5. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments; or

(b) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords,

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

The motion proposes that the remaining stages of the Bill should be completed this afternoon. I pay tribute to members of the Standing Committee for what were uniformly constructive and often enjoyable debates. The Bill came under close scrutiny and the Committee stage was, as it should be, a valuable exercise.

There were 14 Committee sittings in total. In only two of the seven afternoon sittings did we fully utilise the time available. Indeed, something like five hours and 38 minutes of scheduled time for the Committee was not utilised. None the less, I think that we gave the Bill good scrutiny.

There was agreement in the Programming Sub-Committee, and the Government showed flexibility in extending time to discuss additional amendments on primary care although, in the event, the extra time that was allocated was not fully necessary.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The Minister has shown his customary courtesy in praising the members of the Committee. Will he go further and praise the Select Committee on Health, which opposes the community health council abolition proposed in the Bill?

Mr. Denham: I am not aware that the Health Select Committee has formed an opinion on a specific proposal in the Bill. However, the proposals for a better and more powerful system of patient representation and health service scrutiny were discussed in some detail in Committee.

It is worth noting that the Committee did not utilise all the time that was available and scheduled for discussion of the issue of scrutiny of the NHS, even though it was arguably the most publicly contentious part of the Bill.

However, we gave it a good degree of scrutiny and, depending on the interest in the House, I imagine that that subject will attract a great deal of attention later when Opposition amendments are debated, along with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). I look forward to that.

In Committee, the Government tabled a number of amendments. Some were technical and some reflected direct responses to comments that had been made by Members of the House as well as professional and lobby groups. Today's debate and the amendments tabled by Members on both sides of the House will allow us to revisit—albeit in a new form—the major issues on which the Committee spent the most time.

The Government's amendments are for the most part technical and consequential; other amendments pick up on and, I hope, accurately reflect concerns expressed by hon. Members in Committee. We are not introducing by way of Government amendment any major new issues of principle so, in my judgment, one day should give us ample time to debate the remaining stages of the Bill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): It may well be that the Government are not introducing issues of principle, but the Opposition most certainly are doing so. For example, amendment No. 6, which deals with the abolition of CHCs, is a matter of major importance. That will inevitably mean that many Members will want to speak. The effect of the timetable motion will make that extremely difficult.

Mr. Denham: In Committee, when those matters were discussed in some detail, we did not take all the time allocated for their scrutiny. I see no reason why we should not hold a perfectly adequate debate later today, which will enable us to examine the issues that hon. Members want to raise.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): As the Minister has twice asserted that the Committee did not use all the available allocated time, will he make it clear to the House—for the avoidance of doubt—that the timetable contained fixed milestones? Because of those fixed milestones, it was not necessarily open to the Committee to debate issues that needed further consideration. The total amount of unused time is not an indication that all matters were fully debated.

Mr. Denham: No, but in this case there could have been more discussion of the particular topic that has been mentioned today. The Government showed flexibility by agreeing to additional time—not all of which proved necessary—to deal with the amendments that we tabled on primary care.

With those comments and in the hope that we can move on to Report at the earliest opportunity, I commend the motion to the House.

4.2 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I oppose the motion on grounds of both principle and practicality. Throughout the appalling number of recent debates on such programme motions, we have made no secret of our belief that a contempt for parliamentary process is being systematically operated by a Government who want to avoid scrutiny wherever possible. In recent years, there has been an unhealthy strengthening of the Executive—this is the latest and greatest manifestation of that trend. It diminishes the authority of Parliament itself; it diminishes the voice of each us to represent the needs, wishes and interests of our constituents on a range of issues.

Increasingly, with automatic timetabling, there is an abuse of process and a contempt for scrutiny, coupled with Ministers playing fast and loose with a strict interpretation of the honest truth. For example, it is unusual for us to talk in the House about discussions between the usual channels, but I must refer to the comments made last night during the debate on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill by the Minister for Public Health. Replying to my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Mr. Bruce), she said:

"I have to tell the hon. Gentleman that the Government offered more time for debate in Committee, and if the Opposition had wanted to, they could have taken up that offer."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 189.]

I am told that that is not true; no such offer was made through the usual channels. Having said that it was, the Minister needs to come back to the House and explain exactly what she meant by her words. Our use of the English dictionary would not show that an offer for more time was made in a way that we would normally understand.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I am somewhat surprised, as well as perturbed, by what my hon. Friend says about the Minister for Public Health. Is he aware that that statement by the hon. Lady is in stark contrast to, and incompatible with, what she previously told the House? Previously, she said that she had held no discussions with representatives of the Government Whips Office about the timetabling.

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend makes a valuable and serious point. Those two statements seem mutually exclusive, and I am sure that he will carry out further investigations because the House will want to know the exact truth. We cannot have Ministers saying that discussions have taken place through the usual channels, which is how we maintain civilised relations and order in the House, when it appears that they have not taken place. That can only undermine confidence in those discussions.

The Government's ethos is one of intensely disliking scrutiny, and they do all that they can to avoid it. The Prime Minister's demeanour at Question Time shows that he regards Prime Minister's questions themselves as impertinent. That is shown in his answers as well as his body language. So that the Government are not scrutinised properly, they ensure that those Labour Members with strong views are not represented in Committee, which causes a further diminution of scrutiny.

During a point of order this afternoon, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) made it clear that some Government Back Benchers have not the faintest idea that one of their jobs is to scrutinise the Executive on behalf of their constituents, rather than simply being Lobby fodder and the Whips' poodles, which they are so often in the House.

The timetable motion is another example of the Government playing fast and loose with the House. They have tabled more than 120 amendments to the Bill since

[Dr. Fox]

the end of its consideration in Committee, and most of them were tabled at the last possible moment. They first appeared at 10.15 the night before last, and the explanatory notes were not available until last night. What are we to conclude from that?

Mr. Hogg: Is not the inevitable consequence of the timetable motion that many of those amendments will not be debated in the House? If they are debated at all, it will be in the other place. If amendments are made there, they will return to the House, probably on a timetable and so will never be debated in the House.

Dr. Fox: It is the ultimate irony that the Government, who came to office with open contempt for the other place, have now created arrangements whereby the electorate rely even more on the other place to scrutinise legislation, because we in this House are given so little time to do so by a Government who ruthlessly use their large parliamentary majority to restrict the time available. People outside want many issues to be debated today and there are many groups of amendments—for example, on medical, dental and pharmaceutical lists; on local authority overview; on patient information; on representation of patients and the community health councils; on nursing care; and on intervention orders.

A huge amount needs to be debated, but that will not happen not only because of the number of Members who want to take part, but because the Minister will have to do a great deal of explaining on the 120-odd amendments and new clauses that the Government have tabled to try to clarify their own Bill. What are we to conclude from the fact that they have tabled so many amendments and new clauses?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend will be only too aware that so many amendments were tabled to the Utilities Bill that, in the end, it was such a mess that half the Bill had to be discarded after a considerable waste of time. Is he aware that we have just five hours in which to discuss all nine groups of amendments that Mr. Speaker has selected? Perhaps the most important group, which concerns our constituents most of all, is that on the representation of patients and community health councils, which contains 22 amendments. My hon. Friend has correctly said that many amendments and new clauses will not even be discussed, but, by my simple calculation, we shall have less than a minute to discuss each amendment or new clause that is debated. Does he agree that that amount of time is inadequate?

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend makes several important points, the first of which is that the problem is not confined to the Bill; it has occurred on numerous occasions. Secondly, good legislation requires a lot of scrutiny. No matter how recently hon. Members were elected, they will all know of legislation that would have been better if we had spent more time scrutinising it in greater detail. It is distressing that those of us who are elected to represent our constituents increasingly have to rely on an unelected Chamber to scrutinise legislation appropriately. That cannot be the correct constitutional balance. Major issues have been raised by the fact that the Government have sought to gag the elected House in a way that they are, thankfully, incapable of doing with the unelected House. There is a gross imbalance in the way that we consider legislation.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): The Committee is one of the most important stages in the scrutiny of a Bill. Unlike me, the hon. Gentleman was a member of the Committee that considered this Bill, but how many Committee sittings did he actually attend?

Dr. Fox: I am afraid that, in addition to selling out on community health councils, the hon. Gentleman appears increasingly to be selling out to his Whips. The issue is how well the Bill was scrutinised in Committee and how much time was given to that. I have every confidence that my Front-Bench colleagues scrutinised the Bill in Committee better than I would have done. They did a magnificent job. The hon. Gentleman knows that there are major issues to be debated, so I am sorry that he has tried to sidetrack the House in a manner that is frivolous and unworthy of him.

The Government have clearly not thought through the issues. What are we to make of the fact that they have tabled so many new clauses and amendments? Does that mean that they had not thought about possible problems before they introduced the Bill? That is probably part of the answer because we all know that, for all their talk of consultation, very little consultation took place with the groups that will be affected by the Bill. The Government probably did not think about the problems in advance.

Have so many new clauses and amendments been tabled because the Bill has been so poorly drafted? Where does the blame for that lie? Do Ministers and the Government take responsibility for any of their actions? Did Ministers miss things when they first read the Bill and did they fail to understand their own legislation? Does the number of consequential amendments that have been tabled suggest that Ministers did not understand the Bill's proposals, speedily drafted as it was? I suspect that all those issues contributed to the mess that we have to put right in a short time today.

Mr. Bercow: The point made by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) was pitiful. It was unworthy of his status as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health. Will my hon. Friend confirm that the Secretary of State for Health did not sit and did not seek to sit either on the Standing Committee for this Bill or on that for the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill? We do not particularly criticise him for that: he is very important, very senior, very respected and very busy and has a very full diary. However, my hon. Friend contributed intelligently to the Committee, and he was aided and abetted by my hon. Friends the Members for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). It ill behoves the hon. Member for Wakefield to make such a cheap, invalid and thoroughly bogus criticism.

Dr. Fox: Yes, and I have no intention of continuing the debate on this point. We all understand that the Secretary of State is far too important to take part in the scrutiny of his or any other legislation. He is above the normal tasks that the House carries out, and it is far more important these days for Secretaries of State simply to make sure

that they are fully available for the photo-opportunities, headlines and soundbites that are the Government's hallmark.

I wonder whether the Bill has been made up as it went along. The strong impression that was given to us in Committee was that Ministers made up their answers as they went along. In the debate on what was clause 59 and is now clause 62, the Government presented information to the Committee as they went along and no notice of it was given in advance. It related to whole new structures for which no explanatory notes were given to members of the Committee. We were working entirely in the dark during our consideration of some of the Government's most major reforms. Ministers simply seemed to change tack according to the questions that were asked and as notes were passed from civil servants. That is an extraordinarily unsatisfactory way to consider legislation. However, I am afraid that it is not unusual.

This is a hugely centralising and authoritarian Bill. It will give the Secretary of State enormous powers to hire and fire NHS staff. He can fire certain staff at will and replace them with any staff that he wants, but he had the nerve to say on Second Reading that this was a devolving Bill. It could not be more different from a devolving Bill; it is the diametric opposite.

When we considered the community health councils, the Government came up with all the nonsense about how they had consulted. However, there was no consultation before the Bill's publication, and the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State had to eat if not humble pie—I am sure that would have been too indigestible for them—at least their words.

A centralising measure on patient information was also introduced. It will allow the Secretary of State to control information in a hitherto unprecedented way. Almost every group with an interest in health care which wrote to Committee members and wanted to have their voices heard opposed that measure, but debate on it was curtailed, as it will be today.

Ministers never consider the effect of restricting the length of time between Committee and Report, and between the tabling of amendments and new clauses and their consideration on the Floor of the House. It is not only Members of Parliament who do not have time to research their implications and to get proper legal advice on their impact; outside bodies that have a great interest in the Bill also do not have the time to work out what they entail. They are unable to determine what effect amendments and new clauses might have or to pass information and advice on to Members of the House and Committee members, so that we know how they want us to proceed.

The Government have no time for us, the House, the process of Parliament, the due process of scrutiny or the outside bodies that want to make representations. All those are cavalierly swept away so that the Government can stick to their timetable and complete their legislation, irrespective of its quality. We are being driven entirely by the Government's desire to clear the decks for a general election. The quality of legislation is not the main consideration.

In all probability, we will have an hour on Third Reading, which is ridiculous. Any hon. Member who scans *Hansard* will see that it is traditional for Third Reading to be a shorter part of the scrutiny process. We should devote more time to other aspects of scrutiny. Third Reading deals with the Bill's generalities, but we will fail properly to scrutinise its detail, which will ultimately decide whether we produce satisfactory legislation. All in all, it is an extremely unsatisfactory process from a very unsatisfactory Government who are, for internal reasons, happy to give us unsatisfactory law.

4.17 pm

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): Liberal Democrats do not usually approve of wasting time on programme motions, but it is important to make a few points now.

The Committee stage was useful because it became clear that some of the Bill needs to be rewritten. So many issues were raised that Ministers agreed that they needed to be addressed. However, instead of a proper rethink and rewrite, the Bill has become more complicated in terms of drafting and the extra bodies that are being introduced. Not only do we have a problem of too little time between Committee and Report, but the Government have been unwise to introduce some of the measures.

In Committee, the Minister told us that the working party, which has been beavering away on patient confidentiality for, I think, two years, will be reporting in the autumn; yet we are being invited today to pass legislation to cover that issue. We were also told that a proper complaints and advocacy procedure for patients is about to be announced, yet we are being asked to approve legislation today that is intimately involved with that procedure. In addition, the Prime Minister told the House today that the Government are still consulting on the future of community health councils. That is a short consultation, because we are legislating on that matter today.

I do not like to waste time—it would be better to use it to discuss the amendments—but the Government are unwise to legislate now on at least those three issues. The Bill started as a curate's egg, but has turned out to be a dog's breakfast.

4.20 pm

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in opposing the motion. I am not fundamentally opposed to all programme motions. I know that some of my hon. Friends are against them all, and I respect that view. I do not share that view, and there have been occasions when I have put my name to programme motions. I did so because I felt that that was in the best interests of a structured debate, sometimes with benefits to the Opposition. However, I am in favour of programme motions only when they do justice to the issues under discussion and give the House an adequate opportunity to scrutinise them. That is not the position this afternoon.

There are three reasons—the Minister did not deal with them—why the motion is particularly inappropriate. One reason relates to community health councils. Much concern was expressed on Second Reading about CHCs. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) initiated a debate in Westminster Hall. There were meetings in Committee Rooms that were well attended by hon. Members from both sides of the House.

For whatever reason—I make no complaint about the Committee of Selection—no Labour Members were notable critics of the Government's policies on CHCs.

[Sir George Young]

Their only opportunity to voice their concern will be this afternoon. I am sure that, as we speak, Labour Members are in the Central Lobby, from where I have just returned after a constructive dialogue with the Winchester CHC, being briefed about the damage that the Government propose to do to CHCs. I would be amazed if many Labour Members did not wish to speak later on behalf of their CHCs and register their concern at what is about to happen.

Dr. Fox: Given the Prime Minister's indication at Question Time that the Government may be intending to make a partial U-turn, does my right hon. Friend agree that in the light of the discussions in defence of the Government's original proposals in Committee, in which the Minister of State participated, it would be unacceptable to have any new Government ideas being put briefly to the House this evening? We would be unable fully to scrutinise what the Government intend to do. That opportunity should be available to us in Committee.

Sir George Young: If the Government are about to make a major change in their policy on CHCs, that could not be accommodated within the programme motion, which was tabled before such a U-turn was contemplated. That would be an injustice to the House.

The second reason—

Ms Linda Perham (Ilford, North): The right hon. Gentleman commented on Labour Members speaking on behalf of community health councils. Does he remember that on Second Reading I spoke on behalf of Redbridge CHC and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) spoke on behalf of the CHC in her constituency? We put forward our views on Second Reading.

Sir George Young: We were sorry not to see the hon. Lady and the hon. Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) in Committee, where their concerns were not done justice by the Labour Members who served on it.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Member for Ilford, North (Ms Perham) has made a challenging and important point. Does my right hon. Friend agree that although she and the hon. Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) bravely and eloquently criticised the Government's policy on CHCs on Second Reading, that does not remove or diminish their responsibility, if the Government have not responded to that concern, to repeat their criticism in even more forceful terms?

Sir George Young: The House awaits the hon. Lady's speech with bated breath.

My second reason for thinking that the Government are wrong was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring, and it is the number of Government amendments. There are 15 pages of Government amendments to an 80-page Bill, yet they seriously expect us to consider these matters in the time that remains available, which is about four and a half hours. It is impossible for us to consult the bodies that are interested in the Bill during that time, given the range of amendments that have been tabled. Thirdly, a 9 pm cut-off does not allow adequate time to conclude our consideration, given the important issues that the Bill tackles. For example, there is the establishment of care trusts, with all the implications for social services.

My interest in speaking on the motion is that the final group of amendments on Report are in my name. I am concerned that, given the time frame, we may not reach that group.

Mr. Hogg: Perhaps my right hon. Friend will remind the House that there is no reason why we should finish at 10 pm. Last night, we continued until 12 midnight on a Government Bill. The Government were content to allow the House to debate the complications of the Capital Allowances Bill between 10 pm and 12 midnight. Why should we not do the same with today's Bill?

Sir George Young: I am sure that the Minister will deal with that when he replies. My right hon. and learned Friend said that there is no reason why we should not go beyond 10 o'clock but, as he knows, that is what the programme motion says. If it is carried, we will have to stop at 10 o'clock. Health councils, patient information—dealt with in clause 62, which was previously clause 59—the new regime for prescribing, important changes for residential and nursing homes and the new changes to capital limits are important issues in the Bill to which the House will not be able to do justice by 9 o'clock.

That is symptomatic of the mismanagement of the Government's legislative programme. They are simply trying to get too many Bills through in too short a time. The House cannot do justice to the sheer volume of legislation with which it is confronted. Within their programme, the Government have mismanaged matters because this Bill comes after the Hunting Bill. It is clear that the Hunting Bill will not reach the statute book, but it is conceivable that this Bill could. If the Government had put it ahead of the Hunting Bill, we would not be facing this programme motion and we would have had more time to discuss the Bill.

I want to register my protest against the programme motion. I shall follow my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring into the Lobby with enthusiasm.

4.26 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I, too, want to speak briefly against the programme motion. I am not opposed to modernisation or the timetabling of Bills, and I have supported programme motions when I felt that sufficient time and consultation had been allowed. However, it is clear that we do not have enough time to scrutinise the details of this Bill before 9 o'clock.

I was concerned on Monday when I saw that so many Government amendments had been tabled. I was interested in the details of the Opposition's amendments and to see what important issues they brought out. I am also concerned that no Member from Wales served on the Standing Committee. That issue needs to be addressed by the usual channels, whoever they are, because no Welsh Member, whether from the Government or the Opposition, was on the Committee.

The Bill will have a huge impact on Wales. Of course, Wales is keeping community health councils—the National Assembly has already consulted on the matter and decided to keep them.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman remind the House and, through it, the wider community that a Bill's Report stage is the only occasion when Members as a whole have an opportunity to address its details? As there were no Welsh Members in Committee, the Report stage is the only occasion when Members who represent Welsh constituencies can debate the detail of the Bill. They are being prevented from doing that by the Government.

Mr. Thomas: I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman, which is why I oppose the programme motion.

As I was about to say, last week the National Assembly for Wales announced the principles of its national plan for the health service in Wales. That raises many issues which should be debated in the context of the Bill, such as the abolition of health authorities in Wales and the fact that many people in Wales want CHCs to be improved, not abolished. There is a moot question whether the Bill allows Wales to change CHCs in a positive way, not merely retain or abolish them. There is also the question of long-term care for the elderly, which now faces people in Wales as, previously, it faced people in Scotland.

Dr. Brand: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) is too modest to point out to the hon. Gentleman that he had to make the case for giving powers to the National Assembly for Wales to make its own decisions on matters such as personal care and nursing.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful for that information. I am sure that many hon. Members do not forget Wales. My point is that we need Members from Wales to ensure that all the issues are put across. I am sure that the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) did his best, but it is important that we acknowledge that, on Report, ordinary Back-Bench Members have an opportunity to scrutinise legislation and to support or oppose individual amendments.

My particular concern is that the worthy and correct debate that we will have on CHCs in England, which may not affect people in Wales as much, will take up so much time—as it should—that we will not have time for the full debate that we need on new clause 3 and the definition of nursing versus personal care. With all due respect to those who have been so concerned about community health councils, to me an even greater issue in the long term is how we look after the increasing elderly population in the United Kingdom. We may run up against the buffers of 9 pm while we are discussing that.

Although I feel quite warm towards much of what the Government do in the name of modernisation, I do not believe that modernisation should equate to a lack of time for scrutiny of any aspect of legislation. Because I do not think that we will have sufficient time for scrutiny on Report, I shall oppose the programme motion.

4.30 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): I commend to the Leader of the House the speeches that have been made on the guillotine motion. The motion is in the name of the Leader of the House and the Secretary of State for Health, neither of whom had the courtesy to move the motion personally, although it touches on the principal reason why we are in this place: the scrutiny of legislation and the holding of Governments to account. The motion needed the authority of a Cabinet member.

My objection is similar to that of my hon. Friends, but it is wider ranging. Since the Queen's Speech, all Bills have been treated to the guillotine procedure. It is a new procedure, brought in only by a Government majority imposing a new system on the House. My opposition to guillotines goes back a long time. It came about when I first perceived the guillotine as the means by which the Executive could govern the House more totally than it had ever been governed in the past. I used to keep count of the number of guillotines imposed under Mrs. Thatcher—39 or possibly 41; my memory may not be accurate. This Government have been responsible for many more guillotines than were ever envisaged in the 11 years of Mrs. Thatcher.

Under the new device, everything is to be guillotined. Behind that is a Modernisation Committee assumption, which appeared in the first report of that Committee: the Government are entitled to get their business. That was repeated in the Modernisation Committee report that initiated the train of guillotines. It is an entirely new constitutional proposition that a Government are entitled to get their business. That, effectively, is what the guillotine motion states. Scrutiny is not required—the only condition is that the Government have a majority.

The use of the guillotine procedure is a celebration of majoritarianism. The due process by which we achieve consent and acquiescence is thrown out of the window. It does not matter what the Opposition say, because the Government majority will prevail. The logical next step in new Labour's thinking is, "Why do we bother listening to what others say? We have the majority." That view was well expressed by the Leader of the House on Monday and by her one machine gunner in support of that proposition, when Chairmen and members of Select Committees presented their views on the report, "Shifting the Balance".

The Government are increasing their power and their contempt for the House of Commons through motions such as this and the Standing Orders that inform them. It is a denial of the purpose and function of the House of Commons. Ministers who were in opposition for many years know that I say that genuinely. Their views when they were in opposition were an important part of forming public opinion and testing whether the public gave its consent and acquiescence to the measure in question.

The subject of the Bill, community health, is particularly important to many of us. Earlier, we all watched the Prime Minister dancing, yet again. I never know whether he is making a journey between fantasy, half-remembrance and retrieved memories, or just making it up as he goes along. We half expect an announcement of some concession on community health. Whether that can be incorporated into the Bill when a consultation process is still under way raises another question: what is the purpose of legislating on Wednesday, only for the

[Mr. Richard Shepherd]

House of Lords to accommodate further changes at a later stage, following the completion of that quiet consultation process?

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): The hon. Gentleman rails against the Government for using their democratically elected majority to get their business through the House. Does he also rail against the other place for using its huge undemocratically elected majority to hold up business?

Mr. Shepherd: A majority ultimately comes into play, but let us be clear that we are discussing the process. That process, which the motion tries to deny, involves the rights of Members—who represent diverse communities—and their only opportunity, if they are not members of a Standing Committee, to discuss the issues that they deem to be important. That is called process, but the new system has effectively eliminated it.

As a member of the Modernisation Committee, I know that there is great concern about the arrangements, the way in which they are dumped on to the House and the contempt that they bring to it. There is also anxiety that they do not satisfy the one genuine cry of many new Labour Members: "Can we not go home earlier?" I happen to respect that cry. I am not sure why hon. Members should be in the Chamber at midnight when we could start at 9 am, but it was the Government who did not want us to start earlier.

Dr. Fox: I have a further point in line with what my hon. Friend is saying. The Government might cave in to some extent today on community health councils, but there will be restricted time for consideration of any new proposals. Not only will we have little time at this sitting, if the proposals are amended in the other place our consideration will be guillotined yet again, which will be a double insult to us and to our constituents.

Mr. Shepherd: That is the essence of the point that I am trying to make. The Government are not interested in the process or in the fact that we may or may not discuss these matters. No Government should consciously impose an absurd guillotine such as that in the motion—and the motion is not isolated; it is part of the Labour Government's consistent policy to relegate the proper processes within which we try to represent our electorate. There is no question about that.

The Government now try to make us use polite terms such as "programme motion". I notice that that has worked with some hon. Members, even on the Conservative Front Bench. I think that it was an American politician who said that if it squawks like a duck, walks like a duck and looks like a duck, then it is a duck. We are considering a guillotine motion. I reiterate that no Government can sustain themselves in the regard of the people when they treat elected representatives in such a manner. That does not apply only to Conservative Members, as the Government are doing the same to their Back Benchers, some of whom, through lack of experience or wide-eyed optimism, hope that all will come right.

We have a purpose that survives beyond the existence of individual Governments and Parliaments. It is a continuing theme of the British people that they are properly represented and that their elected representatives can speak honourably and openly on the issues of the day.

4.38 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I support my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who spoke with considerable passion. I want to speak not about the constitutional issues, but merely the practical issues raised by the programme motion—or the guillotine, as my hon. Friend called it.

Mr. Speaker has selected nine groups of amendments and new clauses for debate in only five—or maybe four—short hours. That is half an hour per grouping. We have already established that the group that relates to community health councils, which has the heading "Representation of patients", contains 22 amendments and new clauses.

Dr. Fox: Twenty-three.

Mr. Fabricant: It contains 23 amendments and new clauses, as my hon. Friend points out. It includes some Government amendments, which were presumably tabled because Labour Members learned in Committee that the Bill was incomplete, incorrect or flawed.

Surely the point of scrutiny on the Floor of the House is to enable us, through the democratic process, not only to oppose clauses with which we disagree but to improve the Bill, to ensure that it is not flawed and that drafting errors that may remain after consideration in Committee can be corrected. The Conservative party does not oppose every aspect of the Bill.

The programme motion, which will be accepted because the Government will force it through with their huge majority, does not time the debates on the amendment groupings. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who represents Plaid Cymru and many Welsh people, said, we may spend time debating representation of patients and community health councils but not even reach the amendments on nursing care and personal care, which are important to many elderly patients. Elderly people now comprise 40 per cent. of the population.

The programme motion is facile; it is an insult to Parliament and the House of Commons; and, worse, it is an insult to the people of Britain.

4.41 pm

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): The Government's Achilles heel is arrogance. The speed with which they took the Bill through Committee demonstrates that. Second Reading occurred on 10 January; barely a month later, on 14 February, we have reached Report. Yet the Bill has 70 clauses, six schedules—

It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [7 November 2000].*

The House divided: Ayes 342, Noes 181.

Division No. 123] **[4.42 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nick *(Newcastle E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fyfe, Maria
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malleber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*

Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverhton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Greg Pope and
Mr. David Jamieson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Osten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thompson, William
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Waller, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered:

That the following provisions shall apply to the Health and Social Care Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 10th January:

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed at today's sitting.

2. Proceedings on Consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Nine o'clock.

3. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock.

4. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading.

Consideration of Lords Amendments and further messages from the Lords

5. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(a) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments; or

(b) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords,

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

Orders of the Day

Health and Social Care Bill

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 11

ENHANCED CRIMINAL RECORD CERTIFICATES

'.—(1) Section 115 of the Police Act 1997 (enhanced criminal record certificates) shall be amended as follows.

(2) In subsection (2)—

(a) the word "or" after paragraph (a) shall be omitted; and

(b) at the end of paragraph (b) there shall be inserted "or

(c) in relation to an individual to whom subsection (6C), (6D) or (6E) applies."

(3) After subsection (6B) there shall be inserted—

"(6C) This subsection applies to an individual included or seeking inclusion in any list prepared for the purposes of Part II of the National Health Service Act 1977 of—

(a) medical practitioners undertaking to provide general medical services,

(b) persons undertaking to provide general dental services,

(c) persons undertaking to provide general ophthalmic services, or

(d) persons undertaking to provide pharmaceutical services.

(6D) This subsection applies to an individual who is—

(a) a director of a body corporate included or seeking inclusion in a list referred to in subsection (6C)(b) or (c),

(b) a member of a limited liability partnership included or seeking inclusion in a list referred to in subsection (6C)(c),

(c) a member of the body of persons controlling a body corporate (whether or not a limited liability partnership) included or seeking inclusion in a list referred to in subsection (6C)(d).

(6E) This subsection applies to an individual included or seeking inclusion in any list prepared by a Health Authority under—

(a) section 28DA of the National Health Service Act 1977 or section 8ZA of the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997 (lists of persons who may perform personal medical services or personal dental services), or

(b) section 43D of the 1977 Act (supplementary lists),

and to an individual included or seeking inclusion in any list corresponding to a list referred to in paragraph (a) prepared by a Health Authority by virtue of regulations made under section 43 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 (which provides for the application of enactments in relation to local pharmaceutical services).".'.—*[Mr. Denham.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.55 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 12—*Conditional inclusion in medical, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical lists.*

Government amendments Nos. 40 to 109.

[Mrs. Sylvia Heal]

Amendment No. 32, in clause 28, page 31, line 11, at end insert—

'(7) Before making regulations under this section the Secretary of State must consult such organisations as he thinks fit appearing to him to represent medical practitioners providing personal medical services or personal dental services as the case may be.'.

Government amendments Nos. 110 to 113.

Amendment No. 31, in clause 34, page 36, line 27, at end insert—

'(4) If the relevant authority makes a direction to a Health Authority under subsection (3) it shall make directions at the same time requiring the Health Authority to contract with each participant in a pilot scheme brought to an end as a result of a direction under subsection (3) to provide Part II services from the premises from which he was participating in the pilot scheme.'.

Government amendments Nos. 132, 137 and 139.

Mr. Denham: I should like to preface consideration of this group of amendments with some introductory remarks that will put them into context. In this group, we are proposing two new clauses and various amendments to clauses 20 to 29. Together, they will substantially update the provisions for managing primary care practitioner lists. The health authority lists of practitioners underpin health authority systems for managing primary care services and for assuring quality.

The clauses will modernise the system by giving health authorities powers to suspend or remove practitioners from their lists; by extending those arrangements into the new service delivery arrangements, such as personal medical services, under part I of the National Health Service Act 1977; by giving health authorities powers to remove practitioners from their lists on grounds of their unsuitability, as well as in the interests of the efficiency of the service or because of fraud; and by giving practitioners rights of appeal to the Family Health Services Appeal Authority against decisions by their health authority to remove them from its list.

At the same time, we are reconstituting the appeals authority, so that it will be fully independent of the Secretary of State, and including provisions to ensure that the new system operates quickly to address any risks to patients or to the service and effectively to deliver outcomes that are proportionate and fair to practitioners.

The legislation is, however, only part of the new arrangements that we are putting in place. We are developing primary care trusts and clinical governance arrangements. In the next year, beginning in April 2001, we are introducing appraisal for all general practitioners. We are also introducing the new National Clinical Assessment Authority.

We think that only a very small number of practitioners are likely to be removed or suspended under the new arrangements. Suspension or removal may not be the best response. In the first instance, support through clinical governance or reference to the NCAA may be the appropriate response. We need to know, however, that we have effective powers in place if they are necessary.

This group of amendments includes Government new clauses 11 and 12. Although I accept that there seems to be a long list of amendments in this group, they are designed to give effect to the proposals which I explained in Committee and which I have just outlined. They are intended to refine the provisions, to deliver a consistent approach for all the primary care practitioner professions and to achieve the best balance between safeguarding patients and the rights of the practitioner.

There are so many amendments because the legislation is complex and necessarily deals with each practitioner group separately. There are four separate groups—doctors, dentists, pharmacists and optometrists—and one hybrid group composed of dispensing doctors. Four of those groups—doctors, dentists pharmacists and dispensing doctors—may now operate under part I or part II of the 1977 Act. Consequently, it may be necessary to replicate a simple technical amendment several times. New clause 11, for example, is accompanied by 17 consequential amendments.

I propose to concentrate in my opening remarks on the more substantive amendments, beginning with new clause 11 and its consequential amendments. Current legislation does not allow a health authority to have access to the criminal record of a doctor working in general practice. In requiring a doctor to declare his criminal convictions when he applies to join a health authority list, it is our intention that the health authority should take action to verify the information that it is given. To do that, we have to rely on the Home Office's new Criminal Records Bureau, which was established in part V of the Police Act 1997, to provide criminal records checks for employers.

5 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: I would like to make a little progress, if I may.

Our policy, supported by those responsible for setting up the Criminal Records Bureau, has been that the health authority should have the fullest possible report from the CRB to ensure maximum protection for the public. The Bill currently provides that health authorities will be able to obtain from the planned Criminal Records Bureau certificates issued under sections 112 and 113 of the 1997 Act to confirm the completeness of any declarations made by a doctor about criminal convictions.

New clause 11 would also enable health authorities to obtain section 115 certificates. These are enhanced criminal records certificates which provide valuable additional information to health authorities, albeit in a small number of cases. They might well help to keep an unsuitable practitioner off the health authority lists and out of primary care. As such, we do not think we should lose the opportunity to improve the level of protection available to patients.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: I shall give way first to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman on the ground of seniority and then to the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant).

Mr. Hammond: I do not wish to get in front of my hon. Friend in the queue. By what process did the Government originally conclude that the standard certificates were adequate and subsequently conclude that

an enhanced certificate would be appropriate? Could not the Government have reached that conclusion in Committee?

Mr. Denham: That is a somewhat metaphysical question. The consultation document issued last summer indicated the need for the broader range of scrutiny through the Criminal Records Bureau. We are ensuring that legislation reflects that policy intent.

Mr. Fabricant: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me, finally. Is he aware that the Criminal Records Bureau will be using the police national computer to access the information as to whether someone working in the health service has a criminal record? Is he aware that the Home Office admits that up to 65 per cent. of the records of the Phoenix database—the system used on the police national computer—are either out of date or wholly inaccurate? How will the Minister ensure that a doctor, nurse or someone else in a position of responsibility will not be accused of having a criminal record when they do not have one? More worryingly, what provision has he made for those who do have a criminal record that does not show up in the CRB investigation? Also, what fee will be charged for the CRB inquiry? Will it be at enhanced or standard level?

Mr. Denham: Issues of accuracy are important, but they are for Home Office Ministers. We will work closely with the Home Office and we will need to follow Home Office guidance on the use of the Criminal Records Bureau. A code of practice has been set out by the CRB on the handling of data and information. I assure the House that we will work closely with the Home Office on the issue. Clearly, we wish to avoid circumstances where people are unfairly accused of crimes or are reported for complaints in relation to which they are not guilty.

I understand that a Home Office decision on the fee is imminent, but there has been no announcement as such. I do not know what the fee will be. Clearly, we will need to discuss this with the professions. The system of remunerating professions varies; there are variations in the systems for paying expenses and so on. The liability for various expenses varies from profession to profession; that is something we will need to discuss with them.

Mr. Fabricant: The Minister will be aware that there are provisions for the transmission of what the Home Office calls soft data. That is not covered in new clauses 11 or 12. What is the reason for that omission?

Mr. Denham: I should have to refer back to the drafting to clarify that point, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the new clauses do include what is called section 115 data—the soft intelligence to which he referred. I do not have the text of the new clauses to hand and so cannot point to the exact line as the hon. Gentleman might wish me to, but I assure him that the point is covered by the proposed amendments. Perhaps he was trying that question on, but I assure him that I understand what the new clauses are intended to achieve.

I shall deal now with new clause 12 and amendments Nos. 69, 70, 108, 109, 112 and 113. Clause 27 already introduces proposed new section 49G to the 1977 Act to allow a health authority in fraud and efficiency cases contingently to remove a person from its lists. The effect is that a person's continued presence on the list may be subject to specified conditions. If those conditions are broken, the person may then be removed from the list.

That provides a half-way house: a person is given the opportunity to provide family health services but under sensible conditions imposed by the health authority to protect the interests of patients and the NHS. Clearly, if it is possible for there to be contingent removal from a list, it is reasonable to be able to impose conditions when a person applies to join one of the lists. New clause 12 therefore provides for a health authority to have conditional inclusion in a list to match the possibility of conditional removal.

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): It is clearly important to have the maximum patient protection regulations, but I am worried by what the Minister said about such regulations being in the interests of the NHS. I am also concerned that new clause 12 uses the word "efficiency" but does not define it. If the word "efficiency" is not used to mean the interests of patient care, will the Minister help the House by defining it?

Mr. Denham: The term "efficiency" is not defined in primary legislation, to the best of my knowledge, but it has been used in such legislation for a very long time. It is one of the grounds on which the NHS tribunal is able to remove a practitioner from the NHS. We have sought to include the test of suitability in the new clause, but the amendments as a whole provide a consistent set of criteria needed to meet the tests set by the Bill. The use of the word "efficiency" in new clause 12 merely mirrors a usage that has appeared in legislation since the establishment of the NHS tribunal.

Amendments Nos. 69, 70, 108, 109, 112 and 113 make similar changes to those outlined in respect of the services lists. The remaining amendments in the group cover technical matters. If hon. Members want to go through them in more detail, I should be happy to do so.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The Minister will not be surprised if I return to my normal, and I think justifiable, hobby horse—the means by which regulations will be approved. Will the Minister confirm that, as usual, the Government intend that the regulations will be subject to the negative resolution procedure—that is, that no debate on the regulations and their detail will be permitted?

Mr. Denham: Normally, instruments subject to the negative resolution procedure may be prayed against, in which case there will be debate in Committee. Some of the most important and sensitive regulations in what used to be clause 59 and is now clause 62, which deals with patient information, will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. That has been the case since the Bill was first drafted, and it is a mark of the importance that the House and people outside it attach to those provisions.

Mr. Hammond: Before I start my speech, I draw the House's attention to my registered interests. They are not directly relevant to the subjects under discussion, but I have declared them at every stage of the proceedings on the Bill.

Amendment No. 31 deals with clause 34, which introduces local pharmaceutical services, or LPS, pilot schemes and provides for a relevant authority—the

[Mr. Hammond]

Secretary of State in England or the National Assembly in Wales—to end a pilot scheme in certain circumstances. The schemes proposed will probably involve providers of part II services who are in place prior to the pilot scheme and, possibly, new entrants, to expand the provision of services in areas where the relevant authority feels that it is not adequate.

To take part in the schemes, new entrants will have to expend capital, principally in establishing a place of business. In Committee and, indeed, before that, Ministers told us that there will effectively be a two-way ticket for pilot schemes in personal medical services and personal dental services. If a scheme ends, the practitioner will be able to return to providing general medical services or general dental services under the former arrangements. Ministers also indicated in Committee that when LPS pilot schemes end, they intend that those involved in providing services through those schemes should have the opportunity to continue to provide pharmaceutical services under part II of the 1977 Act. The amendment would insert into the Bill the assurance that Ministers have given.

That assurance is important because if the pilots are essentially to be terminable at the whim of a politician, it is difficult to see how private sector businesses will be encouraged to invest their capital in setting up premises and delivering the services that Ministers want to be provided under those pilots. It is important that people who are contemplating investing in projects to make the pilots work know that if the scheme is terminated at the Secretary of State's whim, they will still be able to continue to provide pharmaceutical services from those premises and that their investment will be protected. That guarantee is essential to ensure full uptake of opportunities under the pilot schemes, which we support. I urge the Minister to consider including that in the Bill to send a reassuring signal, as I am sure he wants to do, to private businesses whose investment he will be seeking to encourage.

Amendment No. 32 deals with clause 28, which concerns arrangements for personal medical services and personal dental services lists. It is right and proper to include in lists those who are providing those services, which are in addition to the range of primary care services provided. There are indications that the Government are pressuring practitioners to move to PMS and PDS as the preferred modes of delivery. It would be strange if it appeared that providers of those services were being penalised in comparison with providers of general medical, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical services.

Clause 27, which deals with general services, contains a specific requirement for the Secretary of State to consult with organisations that represent people providing those services. There is no similar provision requiring the Secretary of State to consult with people representing providers of personal medical services and personal dental services.

5.15 pm

In Committee, the Government sought to justify the exclusion of any consultation with the representatives of PMS and PDS on the ground that such services were governed by a different, locally negotiated contract. However, the representative bodies concerned—largely the same as those representing providers of general medical services and general dental services—do not entirely agree with the Minister. The introduction of the national core contract in PMS somewhat undermines the Minister's argument that these contracts are wholly different, locally negotiated and not amenable to national level discussions with representative bodies.

Under clause 27, the Government are proposing to consult with the representative bodies. We think that it is proper and appropriate to include in the Bill a requirement to consult with bodies representing PMS and PDS providers before making any regulations under clause 28. It is not obvious from any debate that has been held so far what objection the Government have to such a provision, especially since, in practical terms, the Government would almost certainly discuss any such regulations with the very same body with which they were discussing clause 27 regulations.

There are 74 Government amendments and two Government new clauses in this group. I am tempted to say that that must be a record, but my time in the House has taught me that that is a dangerous statement to make—and there are Finance Bills to be taken into account. It is none the less a very large group of amendments.

The Minister has told us that these are technical amendments. I have been through them in some detail and I concede that that is right. For the most part, they are technical and, to some extent, repetitious. It is not the substance of the amendments that concerns me but the Government's need to table this vast number of amendments very late on Monday night. I thought that I was cutting it fine tabling the Opposition amendments at 10.5 pm, during the Division. However, I have since discovered that all the Government amendments were tabled after mine, cutting it very fine indeed.

What that tells us is that when we have rushed legislation, a very short gap between Second Reading and Committee and another very short gap—two or three sitting days—between Committee and Report, there is a danger that the drafting of the legislation will be found wanting. Clearly, the Government have found the drafting of the legislation wanting, and so have tabled a vast raft of amendments and new clauses in an attempt to address some of those defects. It would be stretching credulity to imagine that in the frenetic rush between Thursday, when the Committee concluded its proceedings, and 10.15 pm on Monday, when the Government finally tabled their amendments, they had exhaustively examined every aspect of the Bill and discovered every defect, given that the 100-odd defects were not discovered prior to the Bill's consideration in Committee. It is reasonable to assume that more defects will emerge in due course.

It would be useful to reflect on one of the reasons why we traditionally leave gaps between the different stages of our proceedings in legislation. It is not so that we can diligently spend our evenings reading the small print of Bills, but so that bodies outside may have an opportunity

to reflect on what the Government propose and suggest to them ways in which the Bill might be improved or tightened up.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend agree that, in relation to this group of amendments, the Government must be convicted on one of two charges? Either the Minister of State knew perfectly well at, or shortly after, the conclusion of Committee on Thursday night what the content of the new amendments was to be—in which case it was, at the least, a gross discourtesy not to table them earlier and to give Members and outside organisations an opportunity to study them—or, alternatively, the right hon. Gentleman did not know until some time after 10 pm on Monday what the content was to be—which, if true, is even more disturbing.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is right. The latter prospect alarms me most; it suggests that rafts of further amendments will be tabled in the other place which we shall have an extremely limited opportunity to scrutinise in this place.

To take up my hon. Friend's first proposition, I was quite surprised to hear the Minister's comments on new clause 11. If I heard the right hon. Gentleman correctly, he suggested that the need for an enhanced criminal record certificate was identified during the consultation procedure last summer. If that is so, I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that it begs the question—why did the Government not table the amendment during Committee? Indeed, why did they not draft the original Bill so that it reflected the requirement for an enhanced criminal record certificate? I intervened to ask the Minister whether he could throw any light on the matter, but I am none the wiser.

Mr. Bercow: The situation becomes curiouser and curiouser. As you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a kindly chap and always charitable towards Ministers; far be it from me ever to cast aspersions on the competence—still less on the mindset—of Ministers. However, in the circumstances that my hon. Friend has just pithily described, is he not concerned that the Minister is becoming almost as unfocused as the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson)?

Mr. Hammond: I suspect, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you would not want me to pursue the line of argument towards which my hon. Friend tempts me. I am sure that the Minister has heard my hon. Friend's comments and that he will reflect on his own state of mind in his private moments.

If the Government are telling us that an enhanced criminal record certificate is a vital part of the procedure—the mechanism outlined in the measure—new clause 11 is, of course, essential to the Bill's architecture and we have no argument with the substance of the provision. However, the Minister owes the House an explanation as to why, when the requirement appears to be central to the working of the Bill, the Government failed to identify it at an earlier stage; the provision is not about a missing comma—it is a major requirement that amends another piece of legislation. Had the Government failed to recognise the problem and amend this Bill, an absurd situation would have arisen: practitioners would have been required to obtain a certificate under the Bill that they were not empowered to do under another piece of legislation—the Police Act 1997.

Either the Minister must explain why the Government have only so recently identified that error in their thinking, or—to refer to the right hon. Gentleman's earlier remarks—he must explain why the Government neither included the requirement in the original Bill nor tabled it as an amendment in the Standing Committee. Bluntly, the Government ought to tell the House whether they became aware of that shortcoming only after the conclusion of the proceedings of the Standing Committee. I look forward to hearing from the Minister in due course.

Government new clause 12 provides for conditional inclusion in lists, with an adequate right of appeal against the conditions. Once again, we have no argument with the principle of the proposal. When I first read the new clause, I wondered why it applied only to providers of general medical, dental and ophthalmic services and so on. I initially concluded that the explanation was that the Bill will already write into the National Health Service Act 1977 proposed new sections 43D(3)(d) and 28DA(3)(d), which will, in effect, provide for conditional inclusion in lists. However, I continued to read the amendment paper and discovered that the Government will amend those provisions under Government amendments Nos. 69, 108, 112 and 113. I can only describe that as a mess.

It appears that the Government initially forgot to include part II services in the arrangements for conditional inclusion and now want to correct that under new clause 12, but they then realised that the arrangements that they had included on the conditional inclusion on lists of PMS and PDS providers were faulty and needed to be corrected, which they will do under Government amendments Nos. 69, 108, 109, 112 and 113. Perhaps the Minister will explain exactly what happened.

Perhaps the Minister will also explain why Government amendments Nos. 69, 108 and 109, under which the arrangements on conditional inclusion in lists for PMS and PDS providers will be amended, and Government amendments Nos. 112 and 113, under which the supplementary list will be similarly amended, do not use words similar to those in new clause 12. Why does the right hon. Gentleman still propose for PMS and PDS providers and for the supplementary lists a different regime from those that proposed in new clause 12?

In particular, the two provisions diverge on what I shall call a motive test. Under new clause 12, proposed new section 43ZA(2) will provide such a test. It states:

"The imposition of conditions must be with a view to—

preventing any prejudice to the efficiency of the services . . . or preventing any acts or omissions within section 43F . . . "

No such motive test has been included in proposed new sections 43D and 28DA of the 1977 Act. I should be grateful to the Minister if he would explain that apparent inconsistency.

Government amendments Nos. 40 to 109, which could give the House serious indigestion, are largely technical, but I want to make one or two other points on them. Of course, it is disappointing that the Government have had to table them on Report. On Government amendment No. 59, will the Minister tell us why it has been necessary to replace the term "director of" with the phrase

"member of the body of persons controlling"?

[Mr. Hammond]

A perfectly good definition of the word "director" exists in company law, which deals precisely with people who exercise the functions of a director and are part of the body controlling a company but may not be called a director. Why have the Government found that amendment necessary? Does that presage a wider amendment of company law to change the definition of the word "director"?

I should like the Minister to tell us about amendment No. 75. First, it will introduce a wholly new concept in legislative drafting. Perhaps I have merely missed the concept previously. It refers to "this group of sections". I have seen references to a section, a subsection, a part or, indeed, a whole Bill, but I have not seen a reference to a group of sections. Incidentally, that reference reappears in Government amendment No. 105. Will the Minister tell us where the group of sections is defined? Which sections belong to the group and which do not?

5.30 pm

At a substantive level, amendment No. 75 will create a situation in which, for example, the whole business of a chain of retail pharmacists could be placed in jeopardy by the actions or omissions of a director which may have taken place not during his service as a director but formerly. Perhaps he has failed to divulge information to his current employers. I am charitable enough to imagine that it is the Government's intention that the power in the amendment will in fact be used to impose a condition requiring that person to stand down or to cease to have control over, or a hand in, the running of the business. That would be entirely understandable, reasonable and fair. If the Minister could make that explicit when he winds up this short debate, we would feel much more comfortable.

Unless I missed it amid the routine of dealing with the other amendments, the Minister failed to acknowledge the small part that the Opposition played in amendments Nos. 84 and 85. We achieved a small victory in Committee by extending the period allowed to practitioners for appeal from 21 days to 28 days, bringing it into line with the appeal deadlines for General Medical Council hearings. We are grateful to the Minister for tabling the amendment, but not for his failing to acknowledge its provenance.

I have one other concern. Amendments Nos. 96 and 99 make changes to the use of the words "practitioner" and "person". They change the word "practitioner" to "person" in a number of places in new section 49K. Superficially, that is an attractive change. A practitioner is a practitioner if he practises, and if he is prevented from practising it is arguable that he ceases to be a practitioner, while remaining a person. However, the word "practitioner" remains in new section 49K(1) at lines 5 and 12 on page 28 of the Bill. Amendments Nos. 101 and 102 also change the references from "practitioner" to "person" in relation to the appeal procedure in new section 49K(4)—at line 32 on page 28, for those who follow such matters avidly. Amendment No. 102, which extends the same subsection, also uses the word "person". The wording appears to me and to my hon. Friends to be inconsistent, but that is possibly the result of shoddy drafting. We have ended up with a single subsection that refers both to "practitioner" and to "person".

This large group of amendments amply demonstrates the dangers of rushed legislation. It represents a warning to Ministers of the pitfalls of rushed legislation in general and of this Bill in particular. I am sure that the Minister cannot be happy that his officials, having trawled through the Bill, have found in the space of a week about 100 matters that need correction. He will be as alarmed as I am at the prospect that there will be hundreds more to come before the Bill sees the light of day in another place.

I concede that no issues of great significance are at stake in the substance of the amendments, but I should like to hear the Minister's answers to our specific questions about the Government amendments and new clauses, and to hear something of the story that lies behind the extensive and radical group of amendments that has become necessary.

Mr. Fabricant: You will be relieved to know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I shall not consider the 100 or so amendments in the group, but speak to new clauses 11 and 12.

Although I welcome the measure in principle, I wonder whether it will work in practice, at least over the next few years. It just so happens that the Select Committee on Home Affairs, on which I have the honour to sit, is investigating the procedures by which the Criminal Records Bureau will be established. We met the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), two days ago, and the Director General of the Data Protection Agency yesterday, and learned some alarming facts, which imply that joined-up government is non-existent in this respect.

No accurate prediction has been made of the demand that might be placed on the CRB. That creates two problems. First, we do not know precisely how large the computer capacity will have to be, how many terminals will be needed and how many people will have to be available to answer the inquiries. Secondly, it is difficult to assign a cost to the service. That is of particular interest to people who, like me, live in cities where health services are declining. The hospital in Lichfield is under threat, as are the services that it provides. According to the local health authority, that is because there is not enough money.

When I asked the Minister how much it would cost the health service to make inquiries about those two matters, he could not answer. I do not blame him for that—he was right to say that he did not know because the Home Office had not yet decided what the scale of fees should be. That corresponded with the evidence that the Home Office Minister gave to the Home Affairs Committee two days ago—so there is a little bit of joined-up government. He was asked when he would be able to estimate when the fee scales would be available, but he could not say. That creates a budgeting difficulty for the national health service at a time when services in Lichfield—I know that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, are familiar with Lichfield—and other parts of the United Kingdom are under threat.

An additional difficulty concerns the accuracy of information held on the Phoenix database, which is maintained by the police national computer and to which the CRB will have access. About 65 per cent. of its records are inaccurate. Either people are detailed as having committed a crime when they have not or—

equally worrying—people are not listed as having committed a crime when they have been convicted. The Home Office is working closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers, local magistrates courts and the judicial system in general to try to ensure that the records are kept up to date or made more accurate. However, when I asked the Home Office Minister when the Phoenix database would be accurate enough to be of use to the NHS and organisations such as the Scouts and the Guides that will have to make use of it, he could not say.

We have a negative double whammy—if there is such a thing. The Bill has been brought hastily before the House and we have only three or four hours to discuss huge tranches of amendments. New clause 11 has an interface with section 115 of the Police Act 1997. They relate to the ability to access the CRB, but that will not have accurate information for some time. We do not know how much time; it seems that the Home Office Minister and the police are unable to say.

I asked the Minister earlier about provision for the national health service and others concerned with the new clause to access soft data. After a short pause, he said that the matter was covered by section 115 of the Police Act 1997. I am not sure that it is. I fully accept that the right hon. Gentleman is not a Home Office Minister. However, I ask him to consider the matter in more detail, with the necessary reference. I remind him that soft data, as they are known, are tremendously important, as they concern police intelligence.

Hamilton, who committed the massacre at Dunblane, had no criminal record. The enhanced criminal record certificate, even if it were up to date, would say that he would be all right to operate as one of the types of practitioner listed in detail in suggested new subsection (6C)(a) to (d) and so forth.

Intelligence information given by the local police force to the Scouts stopped the scouts from recruiting Hamilton as a Scout leader. That intelligence is known as soft data. I am not sure that there are mechanisms in new clauses 11 and 12 that would give the national health service access to such data.

On a day when newspapers are, rightly or wrongly, full of condemnation of the sentences that have been handed down by judges to known and convicted paedophiles, it is prescient to remind ourselves that now, much of the information on paedophiles is, before conviction, available only as soft data. The new clause is a worthy provision, but surely the Government would wish it to identify paedophiles and others who might not yet have a criminal conviction. That can be done only through the acquisition of soft data. As I have said, in the absence of a conviction, the enhanced criminal record certificate would produce a negative. The Minister has a duty to the House to ensure that we are satisfied that such soft data are made available.

I shall ask some specific questions. They may be slightly unfair because perhaps they apply more to the Home Office than to the Department of Health, but this is a Department of Health Bill. When does the Minister expect that the information held by the Criminal Records Bureau will be sufficiently accurate to be of real practical use to the NHS? When will the right hon. Gentleman next meet the Minister of State, Home Office to press for the information to be made available to him—assuming that it is accurate? When will he be able to say to the House with assurance, "This is how much the provision will cost the NHS"? What estimate has he made of the number of inquiries that the NHS will make to the Criminal Records Bureau under new clauses 11 and 12 in the next three or four years? When will he ascertain from the Home Office precisely what the charges will be for each such inquiry?

Mr. Denham: I shall reply as briefly as possible. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) deserves due credit for the extension from 21 days to 28. I apologise to him for omitting to say that in my earlier remarks. I am pleased that there is no argument in the House with the principle behind new clauses 11 and 12, and I am sure that means that we will be able to agree on those matters.

5.45 pm

To touch briefly on the main questions raised by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, new clause 12 introduces conditional inclusion for part II services. Consequential amendments provide for conditional inclusion in supplementary lists, personal medical services lists and service lists. The hon. Gentleman is simply wrong in his interpretation that the Bill originally provided for conditional inclusion in PMS lists. The new clause and the amendments are therefore necessary.

Mr. Hammond: Will the Minister therefore tell me why, under clause 26, proposed section 43D(3)(d) states that regulations may, in particular, include provision on

"requirements with which a person included in a supplementary list must comply"?

To me, that is a conditional inclusion.

Mr. Denham: I may be able to find the time to give an extended reply in due course. However, my initial response is that that covers matters such as the fact that someone should be suitably qualified to be a GP, rather than conditional inclusion in a list. It is desirable that the Bill should be clear, and that there be a specific power covering conditional inclusion in a list, rather than have such inclusion implied, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, in other parts of the Bill.

Amendment No. 59 would change the word "director" to the words "member of the body of persons controlling". The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge said that there was a perfectly satisfactory definition of a director in company law. However, there is a new arrangement: limited liability partnerships do not have directors as such, so to cover them, the Bill needs to include a separate identifier of persons in control. Those partnerships may well be suitable for some providers of health services—in pharmacy, for example.

The hon. Gentleman asked about "this group of sections" which is defined in proposed section 49F(5) in clause 27, and runs from proposed sections 49F to 49O. There is an apparent inconsistency between the terms "practitioner" and "person", but in context they are right. The word "practitioner" is used when it refers to a specific practitioner, such as a member of a medical list. The word "person" is used in the legal sense, and was used in the drafting to deal with a list that could include a corporate body, such as a dental list or a pharmaceutical list. There is a reason behind the apparent inconsistency: in fact, it is not an inconsistency.

[Mr. Denham]

The hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) asked about enhanced criminal records and soft information. Sections 115(6) and 115(7) of the Police Act 1997 are the relevant provisions which cover the information that he and I wish to see. Most of the other questions that he asked were touched on earlier or—I must, with respect, point out—are matters for my colleagues in the Home Office.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge tabled two amendments, with which I must deal. The first relates to local pharmaceutical pilot schemes. The hon. Gentleman is right about the issue, but wrong about the remedy. Amendment No. 31 would mean that if the relevant authority gave directions to terminate a pilot scheme because it was unsatisfactory, it would also have to direct the health authority concerned to make arrangements with all the participants under the national arrangements for pharmaceutical services instead. I accept that if we are to attract volunteers to local pharmaceutical services pilot schemes, especially if they involve the investment of a significant amount of new capital by the provider, we will have to have arrangements for what happens when pilot schemes come to an end.

Clause 39 provides powers to make regulations on the inclusion and reinclusion of premises in pharmaceutical lists. Our intention is that before people start providing LPS, they will be told whether and to what extent they will have a preferential right of return—or, in the case of new providers, transfer—to the national arrangements.

We will consult before we decide the precise criteria for preferential rights, but without prejudging the results of that consultation, I can say that there may well be rights of transfer even when the Secretary of State has to terminate a scheme by direction because it is unsatisfactory. However, that does not mean that we should go as far as the absolute right that would be conferred by the amendment. For example, I do not see why, if the Secretary of State were forced to close a scheme because the service provided had fallen below acceptable standards, the provider should have the right to continue providing the service under part II arrangements.

It would be much better to have the flexibility to tailor the arrangements made in particular cases or types of case to the needs of the health authority and the LPS provider. None of us would want an absolute right to be used as a way of getting round the established rules of entry. That is the main difficulty with the amendment.

Mr. Hammond: We are not disagreeing on an issue of principle, merely on the mechanics. The Minister said that he would rather rely on the discretionary power to deal with such a situation as it arose, but is not the problem that in order to attract capital investment into under-provided areas, there will have to be a right up-front? Unfortunately, that may mean that rights are given in advance to a provider who subsequently turns out to be the reason why the pilot fails. If the Minister cannot give the necessary guarantees up-front, surely he will not attract the investment that he seeks.

Mr. Denham: I agree that people will not come forward with money unless they believe the investment to be reasonable. However, the way to deal with the problem is not by writing an absolute right into the Bill. It would be best dealt with case by case, scheme by scheme—otherwise, we will be issuing an open invitation to exploit the situation, not because people want to provide pharmaceutical services in an innovative way, but because that seems like a way round the normal restrictions on rights of entry.

Finally, amendment No. 32 would require the Secretary of State to consult appropriate organisations of PMS or PDS practitioners before making regulations about the lists. We intend to mirror in those lists the conditions that apply to GMS or GDS lists. However, as I said in Committee, we do not believe that we should put into the Bill formal negotiating rights in respect of personal medical services, for example.

PMS pilots are voluntary contractual arrangements entered into at local level. The existence of a core contract does not alter the fact that the arrangement is voluntary. Although we discuss arrangements for PMS with representatives of the British Medical Association and a great many other organisations, both informally and through the PMS implementation group, we do not believe that writing formal legal negotiating rights into the Bill is the right way forward.

Of course, GPs entering PMS have every right to be represented locally by the local medical committee. No one is saying that they should not be represented in negotiations at local level, but there is a difference between that and extending formal legal negotiating rights over PMS through the Bill, as the hon. Gentleman seeks to do.

Mr. Hammond: The right hon. Gentleman is saying that because PMS is a voluntary scheme, people who enter it should not have statutory negotiating rights. In Committee, the Minister could not rule out the possibility that PMS would cease to be a voluntary scheme, with single-handed practitioners, in particular, being forced into it at some stage. Can he give an undertaking now that if PMS ceases to be a purely voluntary scheme, he will take measures to give statutory rights of consultation to those who are to be included other than voluntarily?

Mr. Denham: Clearly, we would have to examine the position if the contract were national rather than local. As the hon. Gentleman knows, our approach with regard to single-handed practitioners is through agreed changes to the national contract. We shall discuss that with the general practitioners committee of the BMA in the months to come. The concerns that have been expressed about single-handed practices can be addressed through appropriate changes to the national contract. That is our preferred way forward.

I hope that I have dealt, albeit briefly, with the substantive issues raised in the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 12

CONDITIONAL INCLUSION IN MEDICAL, DENTAL, OPHTHALMIC AND PHARMACEUTICAL LISTS.

'. After section 43 of the 1977 Act there shall be inserted—

"Conditional inclusion in medical, dental, ophthalmic and pharmaceutical lists

43ZA.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations provide—

(a) that if a person is to be included in a list referred to in subsection (3), he is to be subject, while he remains included in the list, to conditions determined by the Health Authority,

(b) for the Health Authority to vary that person's terms of service for the purpose of or in connection with the imposition of any such conditions,

(c) for the Health Authority to vary the conditions or impose different ones,

(d) for the consequences of failing to comply with a condition (including removal from the list), and

(e) for the review by the Health Authority of any decision made by virtue of the regulations.

(2) The imposition of conditions must be with a view to—

(a) preventing any prejudice to the efficiency of the services in question, or

(b) preventing any acts or omissions within section 49F(3)(a) below.

(3) The lists in question are—

(a) a list of persons undertaking to provide general medical services,

(b) a list of persons undertaking to provide general dental services,

(c) a list of persons undertaking to provide general ophthalmic services,

(d) a list of persons undertaking to provide pharmaceutical services.

(4) If regulations do so provide, they must also provide for an appeal by the person in question to the FHSAA against the Health Authority's decision—

(a) to impose conditions, or any particular condition,

(b) to vary a condition,

(c) to vary his terms of service,

(d) to remove him from the list for breach of condition,

and the appeal shall be by way of redetermination of the Health Authority's decision.

(5) The regulations may provide for any such decision not to have effect until the determination by the FHSAA of any appeal against it.".'.—*[Mr. Denham.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 13

APPLICATION TO THE CITY OF LONDON

'.—(1) The Common Council may establish a committee which has, in relation to the City of London, the powers which under section 021(2)(f) of the Local Government Act 2000 a local authority's overview and scrutiny committee has in relation to the authority's area.

(2) Sections 7(3) to (6), 8 and 9 and Schedule 1 apply as if such a committee were an overview and scrutiny committee and as if the Common Council were a London borough council.

(3) Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 applies as if such a committee were an overview and scrutiny committee and as if the Common Council were a local authority, but with the omission—

(a) of subsections (1) to (3), (5) and (9),

(b) in subsection (8), of "Executive",

(c) in subsection (11), of paragraph (b), and

(d) in subsection (13)(a), of the reference to members of the executive.

(4) In the provisions applied by subsections (2) and (3), references to functions under any provision of section 21(2) of the 2000 Act are, in the case of the committee established under subsection (1), references to its functions under that subsection.

(5) "The Common Council" means the Common Council of the City of London.'.—*[Mr. Denham.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Denham: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 141 to 143, 140 and 155 to 158.

Mr. Denham: Amendments Nos. 140 to 143, although essentially technical, are vital for the scrutiny arrangements across London and for authorities that operate alternative arrangements under the terms of the Local Government Act 2000. Alternative arrangements will exist where overview and scrutiny committees are not in place.

First, the amendments make it possible for overview and scrutiny committees to join forces with the authorities that are operating alternative arrangements to OSCs under the Local Government Act 2000. Secondly, they give the common council of the City of London the power to establish a committee to scrutinise the NHS, giving the common council responsibility for scrutiny of the NHS in its boundaries. The committee will have powers and duties similar to the OSCs of other local authorities and it will be able to enter the joint arrangements provided for by clause 8.

We have been talking to the common council of the City of London and agreed that, although it is not covered by relevant provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, it should still be able to carry out the same scrutiny of the NHS as other social services authorities. Although the City might not be the most populated part of London, people do live there and important NHS services are provided there, notably at Bart's, which is within the City boundaries. The health services in the City of London need scrutinising, as do other health services.

The Greater London Assembly has made positive representations to the Government about its potential role in supporting the London boroughs in their new NHS scrutiny role. There are examples of NHS services, such as the London ambulance service, where the London boroughs may wish to work with the GLA and its structures to facilitate pan-London scrutiny. The Bill provides powers for the establishment of joint committees which would enable a pan-London committee to undertake scrutiny.

We will carefully consider the ideas coming from the GLA to make sure that it plays a positive role in Londonwide scrutiny of the NHS. The GLA raised a number of issues concerning independent advocacy,

[Mr. Denham]

to which I will return when we discuss the relevant amendments. We shall examine ways in which the GLA can be appropriately involved, working alongside the legal scrutiny powers provided by the Bill.

Amendments Nos. 155 to 158 are technical amendments to ensure that schedule 1 provisions on exempt information apply consistently to all primary care contractors.

I commend the new clause and the amendments to the House.

6 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Although we are considering one Government new clause and 12 Government amendments, I feel that the House and the nation are awaiting our debates with anticipation. Given the timetable motion to which we are subject, I shall not dwell for too long—

Mr. Bercow: Oh!

Mr. Fabricant: Shame.

Mr. Swayne: I can only say that I share my hon. Friends' concern—"Oh!" indeed. Let me borrow a phrase from new Labour and political correctness, and say that I share their pain. If I am not mistaken, they will be unfamiliar with clause 8, to which four of the Government amendments apply. That would not be the case if they had been swatting up in the Library last night, but the record will show that they were, as always, in their places, holding the Government to account and giving their business proper scrutiny.

My hon. Friends will not have seen clause 8 before because it was not in the Bill on Second Reading. It was introduced on Thursday last week, at the end of the Committee stage. Three parliamentary days later—I am not sure whether we should count Friday as a full parliamentary day—

Maria Eagle (Liverpool, Garston): Some of us were here.

Mr. Swayne: I was here on Friday, but as there was no quorum and not even 40 out of the 659 Members of Parliament were present to secure the passage of a private Member's Bill, I am not sure whether it counted as a parliamentary day. Nevertheless, we are considering a significant number of amendments to a clause that was added to the Bill only in the final sitting of Standing Committee. If I were uncharitable, I might be inclined to say that that was owing to hasty and careless drafting on the hoof and that my noble Friends in the other place will doubtless take account of it. I am charitable, however, and I had been assured that, as one of the consequences of the new timetable motion regime, a new culture would descend not only on this place, but on the Departments—in this instance, the Department of Health. I had the impression that a Department would realise that it was no longer acceptable to table a raft of amendments at the last minute, because the timetable would not accommodate them. I am still looking forward to the arrival of that new culture. We have been promised it, but it has unfortunately not yet been delivered, even though we still have to live with the limitations of the timetable motion.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend has shocked me and, I suspect, my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). He is certainly describing a rum set of affairs, but can he diminish my pain and minimise the constitutional outrage that has been perpetrated by at least assuring me that the Government gave some advance notice of their intention to table the new clause at such a late stage?

Mr. Swayne: To be perfectly frank, I cannot remember whether they did so. I will say in the Minister's defence that he gave us notice of new clauses and amendments throughout the Committee stage; he was assiduous in warning us of their coming and providing details of them. However, there were so many that I lost count of which of his letters referred to which proposals, so I cannot specifically answer my hon. Friend's question.

I deal now with new clause 13, which tells us essentially that the Minister forgot the common council of the City of London, which is a rather significant thing to forget. I am sure that some of the Labour Back Benchers who appeared from time to time during discussion of the City of London (Ward Elections) Bill in the previous Session wish that he had not remembered it at all and were quite content for him to have forgotten it. Nevertheless, as it was forgotten, I should like to hazard a suggestion as to why that happened and how it might have been remembered. If we had not moved from Second Reading to Committee so swiftly—we did so at an indecent pace and with a severe shortage of elapsed time—the Department might have had time to think through the Bill rather more carefully. We would not then have been faced with the tabling of new clause 13 at the last moment on Monday night.

I do not want to detain the House, but I should like to ask two questions, the first of which concerns Government amendment No. 140. The Minister might tell me that I completely misunderstood the amendment when I wrestled with it and with the Local Government Act 2000 in the Library last night. I accept that that is possible, but I seek clarification. The amendment refers to "subsection (2)". Is that provision contained in section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 or in the Bill? I concluded that either might be the case, although the meanings that could be construed would be very different.

My second question relates to the exclusions contained in subsection (3) of new clause 13. Paragraph (a) of that subsection refers to the actions of the common council in respect of the omission

"of subsections (1) to (3), (5) and (9)"

of the appropriate section of the Local Government Act 2000. My principal concern relates to the exclusion of section 21(9) of that Act. Although I recognise that it would generally be unlikely for a member of the executive of a local authority to participate in the executive and scrutiny function of the health trust or authority, I can conceive of circumstances in which a local authority might want that to happen. Why is that exclusion made?

Similarly, subsection (3)(d) of new clause 13 excludes section 21(13)(a) of the 2000 Act. Again, I understand that the scrutiny function would not principally require

the involvement of members of the local authority executive, but I can envisage circumstances when such involvement might be desired. That might be especially likely in relation to aspects of the local authority's health policy that affect the proceedings or functions of the NHS trust that is under scrutiny.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman asked about the omission from the Bill of the common council of the City of London. I believe that I can say on reasonably sound ground that there is good precedent for such omission, but not for its being caught and put right in time. I seem to remember that Bromley was left out of the Health Authorities Act 1995, which was enacted under the previous Administration, and that it remained outside the remit of that Act for some four years. That did not appear to affect Bromley health authority's operation, which was probably illegal for those four years.

I seem to remember also that the Isles of Scilly were left out of the National Health Service Act 1977 for 22 years, but I am not sure about that. None the less, NHS services continued to be provided in the Isles of Scilly. I am glad that we are correcting the position on the common council.

I do not have a copy of the Local Government Act 2000 to hand, but I am reasonably sure that amendment No. 140 refers to section 21(2) of that measure. If I am wrong, I shall write to the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne).

Without debating new clause 13(3) in detail, I believe that we should erect the right sort of Chinese walls between the various roles that people play, to avoid a conflict of interest in scrutiny. We have sought to do that in the new clause. I accept that it is always possible to debate whether the dividing line is in the right place, but we have tried to achieve that.

The new clause enables the common council to establish a scrutiny role for health. The common council does not have an executive in the context of the Local Government Act 2000 because it is excluded from it. The arrangements are therefore different.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 1

PATIENT DATA

'.—(1) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such provision for and in connection with requiring and regulating the transmission, holding, processing or otherwise dealing with prescribed patient information as he considers necessary or expedient for the purpose of maintaining disease registers.

(2) In this section—

"disease registers" means those registers of incidence of specified diseases as the Secretary of State shall by regulation prescribe;

"prescribed patient information" means patient information specified in or determined in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State under this section;

"processing", in relation to information, means the use, disclosure or obtaining of the information or the doing of such other things in relation to it as may be prescribed by regulations.

(3) Regulations made under this section shall not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the regulation has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.—*[Dr. Fox.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 1, in page 58, line 17, leave out clause 62.

No. 33, in clause 62, page 58, line 18, at end insert "identifiable".

No. 34, in page 58, line 38, at end insert—

'(d) "identifiable patient information" in relation to subsection (1) means patient information in a form which allows the patient to be identified'.

No. 35, in page 58, line 38, at end insert—

'(e) regulations under subsection (1) may not prohibit or restrict the processing of patient information which is not identifiable patient information.'.

No. 15, in page 58, leave out from beginning of line 39 to end of line 26 on page 59 and insert—

'(3) The Secretary of State may by regulations make such provision for the collection, holding, processing, transmission and publication of patient information as he considers necessary for the purpose of maintaining disease registers.'.

No. 30, in page 60, line 3, at end insert—

'(8A) The Secretary of State shall establish an Expert Advisory Committee to advise him in connection with any regulations he proposes to make under this section, and shall consult the Expert Advisory Committee prior to making any regulations under this section.

(8B) The Secretary of State shall appoint a chairman of the Expert Advisory Committee established under subsection (8A) above who shall be empowered to appoint such persons as appear to him to represent relevant expert bodies to the committee.'.

Dr. Fox: The debate continues a discussion that we held in Committee. The question that we asked remains to be answered: do the Government aim to protect patients or the NHS and Ministers? Clause 59 in the original Bill is now clause 62, which allegedly clarifies matters but merely makes them murkier.

The Government claimed that new powers were needed to protect patients from abuse of the information that was held about them. They have not defined how such information could be used against patients or explained how the powers would affect its legitimate use, for example during drug trials. We tried to obtain clarification of the Government's arguments and assertions in Committee, but to no avail.

The Secretary of State's powers to divulge data at his discretion do not appear in the Government's national plan for the NHS. They have been included without consultation—surprise, surprise—as a method of restoring the attempted prohibition on the collection of anonymised data from retail pharmacists that the Court of Appeal rejected in December 1999. We debated that case at length in Committee. The Government claim that the Bill closes a legal loophole, without defining it. The court ruled that there was no loophole and the judge stated that

"the law of confidence cannot be distorted"

for the Department's purpose.

[Dr. Fox]

In the Committee's 12th sitting on 8 February, the Minister stated:

"The clause does not outlaw independent reports on NHS services and it is not an attempt to restrict medical research. A fundamental point is that it does not signal any change to the Government's view about the importance of patient consent. That is a key point in today's debate. Informed consent is crucial to the Government's view of how a modern NHS should work. We cannot move to a patient-centred service if patients are not informed, consenting participants in the services they receive."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 8 February 2001; c. 477-78.]

However, the Minister failed to respond to the point that the clause grants the Secretary of State powers that future Secretaries of State could implement in a manner that is far more hard line than the Government's intentions as outlined by the Minister. His constant defence was, "We may have the powers, but we will not use them." That is unacceptable.

The Minister found it difficult to accept that the Bill's contents are what matters. Once a power is established, it can be used. We want greater clarification of the powers and when they can be used. New clause 1 seeks to achieve that.

British pharmaceutical companies could be at a severe disadvantage because of restrictions on research. Many expressed that concern to members of the Committee and other hon. Members. Access to anonymised data is essential to their work in developing new drugs and monitoring the safety and effectiveness of existing drugs. The restrictions would especially affect their fulfilment of regulatory obligations, including those that deal with adverse event monitoring and product withdrawals. In Committee, I quoted the words of one firm; they bear repeating tonight. NDC Health Information Services stated:

"Commercial access to non-personal data provides considerable benefits to all concerned; the loss of this access will result in less efficient health care and less funding for medical research without any concomitant benefits to either government, health providers or patients."

If the Government continue to deny the effect of their decisions, it is incumbent on Ministers to explain why, not content with abolishing community health councils, they have introduced a clause that gives future Governments massive scope to prevent independent scrutiny of the NHS. It is part of a consistent approach by Ministers to running health care.

6.15 pm

Ministers must also explain contradictions. In a speech to patients groups in January, the Secretary of State said:

"The days have gone when the NHS could act as a secret society. It cannot operate behind closed doors. It cannot operate in the dark. It has to take patients into its confidence."

Yet clause 62 allows him to disclose identifiable information to third parties without patients' consent and despite their objections. The Minister can introduce as many regulations as he likes, but the decision ultimately lies with the Secretary of State. He has the right to produce identifiable data, even when that is not in the patient's interest, if he believes that it is in the public interest or the wider health interest. That is unacceptable. Explaining the provision's operation in practice is not the same as defining it in the Bill. New clause 1 attempts to make the provision more explicit.

A letter to *The Times* on 1 February was signed by Sir Donald Irvine, president of the General Medical Council; Dr. Ian Bogle, chairman of the British Medical Council; Robert Boyd, chairman of the Council of Heads of United Kingdom Medical Schools; Denis Pereira Gray, the chairman of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges; and James Johnson, chairman of the Joint Consultants Committee. They are top people, who are well respected and represent almost the whole spectrum of those who practice in medicine. The letter stated:

"We agree with Alan Milburn that we cannot accept the benefits of medicine, science or research regardless of the wishes of patients or their relatives."

No one would have a problem with that. It continues:

"However, Clause 59 of the Health and Social Care Bill threatens patient confidentiality by giving the Secretary of State for Health wide and ill-defined powers to determine what information should be disclosed in the public interest or for the improvement of patient care, without patients' consent.

We believe that any decision to override the citizen's right to privacy should be exceptional and must only be made—other than in an extreme medical emergency—after rigorous parliamentary scrutiny rather than by order of a Secretary of State. The Bill does not appear to provide for this."

We raised those issues in Committee. None of the Minister's assurances has persuaded us or, I believe, the groups that wrote to *The Times* that the provision makes for a better system. The fear of its use at the whim of a future Secretary of State provokes anxiety.

Perhaps our most important debate in Committee and tonight is on disease registries. We considered the Bill's impact on cancer registries in particular. Despite our reservations about the Secretary of State's power to require the publication of unanonymised data, we acknowledge the need for action to protect specific registries, including cancer registries.

No hon. Member should take disclosure of information without consent lightly. If the Secretary of State can do that

"in the interests of improving patient care",

or "in the public interest", he must justify granting such sweeping and unprecedented powers to override the cornerstone of patient confidentiality between health professional and patient.

We are concerned—as were hon. Members on both sides of the Committee—that disease registries, including those relating to cardiac disease and cancer, should be able to continue their valued work. The Government's acceptance that decisions regarding the application of the subsection should be subject to affirmative resolution in both Houses of Parliament was a concession, but it does nothing to alter the basic facts.

The clause establishes sweeping powers far beyond what is required to ensure the continued viability of disease registries. That point was also raised in the amendments tabled for the British Medical Association by the Liberal Democrats in Committee. By dealing with specific applications of the subsection on a case-by-case basis, the Government find themselves in the position of permitting everything pending future exclusions. Why not provide clarity by stating what is permitted, as we have done in new clause 1?

The Minister's comments in Committee appeared to be an attempt to establish procedure on the hoof. The proposals for the scrutiny of applications are at best

opaque and at worst obscure. That is particularly disappointing because there had been broad cross-party agreement on the necessity of maintaining disease registries. If the Government wish to develop and consult on proposals for wider measures, they should do so, rather than seek to rush through ill-thought-through ideas without any semblance of consultation. As I said, that is an unsatisfactory way to legislate.

Mr. Bercow: Does my hon. Friend agree that although the Government might not have devoted a great deal of thought to their proposals, they have thus far certainly devoted a great number of words to them? I am pleased to see new clause 1, which pithily sets out the basis of what Her Majesty's Opposition would like to insert into the Bill in only 151 words, in contrast to the two and a half pages of unreconstructed and inexplicable verbiage on pages 58 to 60 of the Bill.

Dr. Fox: It is becoming habitual for me to agree with every word that my hon. Friend says. He has encapsulated the simple idea that if the Government mean something by the legislation, they ought to say it in the Bill. This part of the Bill has been drawn far too widely. If the Government's intention is as the Minister explained in Committee, that should be in the Bill.

The Minister's comments in Committee demonstrated the lack of thought that had gone into the subsections of clause 62, formerly clause 59. Other hon. Members and I highlighted in Committee instances in which the law could either be unworkable or render existing practices unworkable. The Minister spoke frequently of the need to ensure that regulations were adequate and correct. The degree of thought that he now recommends should have occurred before the framing of the Bill rather than during the final days of Committee.

Adequate thought has still not been given to the matter, and no satisfactory response has been given to the concern of GPs that the powers in the clause could make it mandatory for them to pass on identifiable patient information against their will, or against what they believe to be their patients' best interests. Will the Minister explain how that provision is sustainable in the face of principle 10 of the NHS plan, which states that the confidentiality of individual patients must be protected? The two concepts do not sit side by side.

The definition of patient information provides the Secretary of State with the power to ban the use of important and beneficial non-personal data, yet it also allows him to share identifiable health data at his own discretion. The clause states that the Secretary of State will use his powers "in the public interest", but that could easily become an excuse for the suppression of politically inconvenient data.

The explanatory notes suggest, as an example, that regulations to prohibit the use of anonymised patient information that is being used for a purpose

"which is detrimental to the operation of the NHS"

could fall within this definition. That could lead to situations in which cancer charities, among others, would not be able to conduct surveys of postcode rationing. This attempt to squeeze the life out of independent criticism of the NHS is reminiscent of the matter of the community health councils, which we shall discuss with the next group of amendments.

Last year, the Government abolished the patients charter in favour of a glossy brochure called "Your Guide to the NHS". A Government who are willing to use public money to publicise their party's health policies are a Government who would be willing to use possible restrictions on data to suit their party political policies.

I can make no better summary of the problems that we are trying to address in new clause 1 than to quote a letter to *The Guardian* signed by the president of the Royal College of Physicians, Sir George Alberti, as well as by the chairman of the Royal College of General Practitioners, the director of the World Health Organisation Uppsala monitoring centre, the chairman of the Patients Association and the chairman of the Depression Alliance. I quoted the letter in Committee, but it certainly bears being put on record again. It was written by people who are well respected in their field, and who cover the whole spectrum of the practice of medicine, of patient groups and of those who have devoted their lives to patient care. They state:

"We wish to voice our serious concerns relating to Clause 59 of the Health and Social Care Bill, currently making its way through Parliament. It is the view of many in the medical community"—

I would say that it is almost a unanimous view—

"that this clause would seriously threaten the ability of patient organisations, academics and the pharmaceutical industry to undertake important research and analysis, based on anonymous healthcare data, to improve the quality of patient care.

As it stands, the Bill provides the Secretary of State with such sweeping powers as to allow him to curtail or prohibit the collection of anonymised patient information, however derived, and conversely require or regulate the release of confidential information, without the patient's consent, for reasons that he judges appropriate. Remarkable as it may sound, these measures have been barely raised either in or out of parliament and were not included in the Government's National Plan.

It is our view that independent collection of information on the NHS enables analysis of information that the NHS does not collect or cannot provide easily to patient organisations, academics, public health bodies and the pharmaceutical industry. We have witnessed the value of such data in scrutinising the performance of the NHS and improving healthcare.

We urge the Government, in the spirit of open government, to withdraw this clause until adequate consultation has taken place. Only then can we reach an informed consensus about what controls are required both to protect patients but nonetheless allow access to anonymised information so necessary in monitoring and improving patient care."

Despite our pleas in Committee, we have been given nothing that makes it clear that the Government will incorporate a better definition into the Bill, so that Parliament and the courts will understand exactly what this information is to be used for. We need a better definition that will allow us to ensure that the provision is not at some point abused.

New clause 1 tries to tie down this part of the Bill to the purpose for which most of us believed it was to be used, involving one of the most important aspects of maintaining disease registries. If the Government do not accept the new clause, we can only believe that they want wider powers for reasons that go beyond those they gave in Committee as the justification for this part of the Bill. I commend new clause 1 to the House.

Dr. Brand: I declare an interest as a clinical practitioner, in that I work as an independent contractor to the health service as a general practitioner. It is relevant to make that declaration, as I would not like to be in conflict with the Secretary of State.

[Dr. Brand]

Renumbered clause 62 gives the Secretary of State powers to override the wishes of patients on the control of clinical data. I can tell the Secretary of State that most of my colleagues would join me in saying that the wishes and desires of their patients far outweigh any powers that any Secretary of State may care to take to himself or herself. Even the theoretical powers that the Secretary of State may be adopting could be profoundly unsettling for a profession that cares for patients above all, and could make the work of clinical practice a great deal more difficult.

Dr. Fox: To make the point even more explicitly, does the hon. Gentleman accept that, under the Bill, he and other practising doctors could find themselves in conflict with the Secretary of State for not providing data about a patient, or with the General Medical Council for providing it? Does he agree that that would be an unacceptable position for any practitioner?

Dr. Brand: That illustrates the position fairly clearly—and it would be a brave Secretary of State who took on a doctor acting in the interests of his patient. I hope that such circumstances never arise, but the Bill contains the potential for them.

6.30 pm

We accept that there is a problem with the maintenance of existing disease registers, especially cancer registers. In the past, consent was assumed far too frequently. In my view, it would be impractical to refer to people on existing registers in order to obtain formal consent to enable us to continue the excellent work that has been going on for decades, and has done so much to help us to understand the epidemiology and treatment of cancers and other diseases. However, I do not think there is any justification now for not asking for patients' consent at the time of the onset of their illness, or when they may be entering a register. Even after the probing in Committee, I still cannot understand why the Minister must take potentially wide-ranging powers if the aim is to maintain an important register and to deal with the anxieties of the Data Protection Registrar.

A problem has been created by, I think, parliamentary draftsmen rather than Ministers. There was an opportunity to introduce a bit of legislation, and the Government clearly needed an NHS Bill before the election. They looked at what they should put in the legislation that they envisaged, and this is part of that. There is a real problem with, for example, the existing cancer registries, but rather than concentrating on that the Government said, "Here is an opportunity to create a few more sweeping powers". There was then a great outcry.

Dr. Howard Stoate (Dartford): As the House will know I, too, am a medical practitioner, and the regulations will therefore impinge on me to a large extent. Clause 62(5) states:

"Regulations under subsection (3) may not make provision requiring the processing of confidential patient information for any purpose if it would be reasonably practicable to achieve that purpose otherwise than pursuant of such regulations".

Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the power will be used under the Bill only if it is impracticable to obtain information in any other way—in other words, by patient consent?

Dr. Brand: This is fascinating—it is what the legislation says, but the judge of whether the condition is fulfilled will be the Secretary of State, who will consult both Houses.

The Government, almost shocked by their own temerity in wishing to take these powers, obviously felt that they must put the brakes on. I appreciate the fact that they have done something quite unusual in requiring affirmative resolutions from both Houses, but that has happened only because they recognise that the powers they have given themselves are so ridiculous. They are far too wide and they are totally unnecessary.

Mr. Bercow: I do not want to criticise the hon. Gentleman, who is making an important point and speaks with some medical expertise. However, although I understand what he says about the parliamentary draftsmen, there is no way in which we can exonerate Ministers on the basis of errors of commission or omission by draftsmen: the Minister of State is responsible for what transpires.

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that clause 62(2)(c) is a model of ambiguity? It blathers on about level five on the standard scale,

"or such other level as is prescribed",

and goes on to refer to

"other procedures for enforcing any provisions of the regulations."

Why on earth can we not be told about those arrangements in the Bill?

Dr. Brand: As often, that was a valuable intervention. I think that there is a shared responsibility. It was noticeable that the only people who showed any enthusiasm in Committee were the officials, who agreed with every word that the Minister said. The rest of us shook our heads in some surprise.

It is clear that the Minister should take a small step—an interim step—to deal with the concerns about existing disease registers. I cannot understand why the Minister has taken the opportunity to assume powers in a completely different issue, that of anonymised data. By definition, that is not patient-identifiable information. It seems that the Government want an opportunity to reverse a slight that they may have experienced when they lost a case in the High Court. [HON. MEMBERS: "Henry VIII."] My memory does not go back as far as Henry VIII, and I do not understand the exact purpose of the "commercial" clause.

In Committee, I asked the Minister for a definition of "commercial". He referred me to the Town and Country Planning Acts, but they concern commercial premises rather than commercial activities. This is an important point. A good deal of research in this country is funded by drug companies and others in the health care field—not for altruistic reasons, but because they hope they will gain some commercial advantage. I am not saying that commercial activities are always benign: I think it improper for a drug company to try to work out the individual prescribing pattern of a particular general

practice or a particular general practitioner in order to target its promotion. We have received briefing from some commercial organisations, and I can assure the House that their activity is not designed to drive down drug costs; it is designed to increase their share of the drug market, often through the prescribing of their expensive patented drugs as against generic drugs.

I can see that the Secretary of State might want to consider a way of dealing with the need for information on NHS activities to be made freely available. All audit and a good deal of local government information is dependent on access to anonymised information. However, I do not think that what we are discussing makes sense.

Dr. Stoate: I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's point about audit, but we are talking about "prescribed commercial purposes". Audit is not commercial; it is for the good governance of the national health service, and for allied purposes. The provision relates specifically to the use of anonymised patient data for profit.

Dr. Brand: It depends on how the data are collected. I do not know my medical colleague's practice well, but I know that he has long been concerned with medical education, postgraduate education and training, as I have. I know how many training activities depend on a degree of sponsorship, and it is important to ensure that sponsorship does not corrupt the activities of the practice; but we are talking about a commercial activity nevertheless.

I understand why the Minister might be tempted to take powers, but I think he has adopted the wrong route. The most important step that he could have taken, as a Minister responsible for national health information, would have been to say that non-patient-identifiable information should be covered under freedom of information provisions, and accessible to all. That would make narrow commercial interests disappear, because it would not be in the interests of companies to produce the information—but the overall trends relating to drug use would still be explored, because that would be in the interests of if not just one drug company, drug companies generally.

I am profoundly unhappy about clause 62. As I said in the debate on the programme motion, it is ludicrous for the Government to propose such a provision before their own working party on patient confidentiality and associated issues has even reported. Although I welcome the fact they are establishing a formal body to advise them, there is already such a body and they have not waited for its advice before rushing us into legislation.

I think that it would be sensible for the Government to rethink clause 62, and I am glad that I am not the only one who thinks so. At the last Committee sitting, I gave a list of people who feel as I do. Since then, however, the list has grown from four to 11 signatories, representing a wide range of patient interests rather than commercial interests.

Should the House not divide on new clause 1, I would certainly seek to press amendment No. 15 to a Division. As the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) said, that amendment is extremely elegant and cost-effective, with only 32 words.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): I hope that someone who is not a registered general practitioner may participate in the debate on this group of amendments.

Although the Government have tabled a very large number of amendments since the Committee rose last Thursday, they have not tabled any amendments to what was clause 59, now clause 62, which was the section of the Bill where I thought that they came under most sustained attack and were on the thinnest ice. I am very sad that they have not found an opportunity to meet some of those anxieties by tabling amendments of their own to new clause 62.

When I initially went through the Bill, before I went on to the Standing Committee, clause 59 was not one that immediately was drawn to my attention. At that stage, no one had written in about clause 59. Admittedly, it had not been in the NHS plan. It was only when the debates in Standing Committee began that letters came in.

The Government, in their definition of patient information, have managed to upset two wholly different groups of people. On the one hand, the Secretary of State has the potential power to ban the use of important and beneficial non-personal data, which has upset the pharmaceutical companies; on the other, the Government also allow sharing of identifiable health data without the subject's consent, which has of course upset the patient organisations.

Like the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand), I have received representations from the chairman of the Patients Association, the director of the BMA Foundation for Aids and the director of the National AIDS Trust. They say that they have continuing concerns that clause 62 gives the Secretary of State

"unprecedented powers to collect patient data without consent. It is an attack on patient confidentiality. The Government has not made a proper case for overriding patient consent, even for the cancer registries."

The chairman and directors also say, as my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, that the Government are

"embarking on legislation without a due process of public consultation."

They also criticise the Government for drafting clause 62 very broadly and allowing

"expedient use of identifiable patient information at the discretion of the executive, subject only to clawback safeguards",

which they find ineffectual.

Therefore, the Government are not only being attacked by patients' representatives for their definition of patient information, they are being criticised by the pharmaceutical companies for potentially prohibiting the use of anonymised data. Although those data are of commercial value, they are also of real benefit to academics, research institutions, consumer organisations, doctors, pharmacists and patients. In debate in Committee, the Minister, although he tried valiantly, never really justified the very wide definition of patient information in a manner that would allow him to forbid the use of anonymised data, which I believe are of wide benefit.

The assumption has been made that even the use of data without personal identification is, according to the explanatory notes,

"not in the interests of patients".

I ask the Minister to have another go at defining

"in the interests of patients" in a manner that will reassure the House that he does not seek to ban the use of anonymised information that could be of beneficial use by identifying drugs that have application but, for whatever reason, are not being prescribed in certain parts of the country.

6.45 pm

My final point is on rural pharmacies. Pharmacists receive additional revenue from commercial companies in return for anonymised data. That revenue is greatly welcomed by rural pharmacies across the country, which provide pharmaceutical cover to many housebound and many elderly patients through, for example, prescription delivery and collection and extended opening hours. The remuneration that pharmacists receive from the NHS has been reduced significantly in recent years. That has led them to look for new revenue sources. Income derived from prescription data can help provide additional employment, extend opening hours and be of broader use to the NHS.

I therefore ask the Minister to think again about that very wide definition and to see whether, even at this late stage, he cannot help the House by being more explicit about why he needs such very wide-sweeping powers.

Mr. Fabricant: On clause 59, which has become clause 62, the Bill's explanatory notes state:

"The existing legal framework concerning the control of information relating to patients is complex and contains some uncertainties."

If the Bill's aim was to try to limit the complexity and uncertainties, it has patently failed to do so. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) said, there could well be conflict between the current terms of clause 62 and his responsibility to the General Medical Council. I would state the case even more strongly. As things have not changed so much in these days of new Labour that doctors no longer adhere to the Hippocratic oath—they still do—I wonder whether there would be a conflict between the Bill and the Hippocratic oath.

There is no question but that the Secretary of State could find himself in conflict with the General Medical Council or with the British Medical Association. The hon. Member for Isle of Wight said that a Secretary of State who willingly engaged in such conflict would have to be a brave Secretary of State. I say that he would have to be not so much brave as foolish. Nevertheless, although it is most unfortunate, foolish Secretaries of State are not unknown, particularly in this Government.

It is important to gather such information, particularly in disease registers, for epidemiological purposes. However, as both my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, it is also important that we know where certain drugs are being used. I take the hon. Gentleman's point on generic drugs. Drug companies often push their own branded analgesics and other remedies that could be bought at one-tenth of the price as a generic product at Boots or another pharmacy. Paracetamol with codeine is available under the most marvellous names, pushed by drug companies at 10 times the price of a generic product. I can understand why the Government would be cautious in allowing that type of detailed information to fall into the hands of drug companies.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) said, anonymised information does not fall into that category. During the past few weeks, I have become aware of how the National Institute for Clinical Excellence—which was established not so long ago by Health Ministers—has made recommendations on drugs that should be available for doctors to prescribe free to their patients. In some areas, however, those drugs are still not available because of postcode funding. In some parts of the country, drugs are not available because the money for them is just not available. That has happened in the South Staffordshire health authority area, for example.

New clause 1 is still not as tight I would like it to be. It still gives considerable powers to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Bercow: I feel sure that the House will want to hear my hon. Friend expatiate on the subject of new clause 1. Before he does, would he turn his mind to clause 62(4)(c), which is part of the genesis of our objection to the Government's proposals? The subsection provides for regulations

for securing that, where prescribed patient information is processed by a person in accordance with the regulations, anything done by him in so processing the information shall be taken to be lawfully done despite any obligation of confidence owed by him in respect of it.

Does that not create a potentially hazardous and even sinister conflict of obligations? If not, would it not be better if the Government explained themselves more clearly?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend, as ever, has put his finger on the heart of the matter—if that is not mixing my metaphors. I think that doctors and the BMA have every reason to be alarmed by the far-reaching nature of clause 62. It is saying, in effect, that if the Secretary of State so decides, any question of confidentiality that might exist between a patient and his doctor can be swept aside and the information can be made public. Should we be surprised that so many august organisations acting on behalf of patients and people suffering from specific dysfunctions such as AIDS are concerned about the clause?

Dr. Stoate: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about the proposal, which does have potential problems. But surely he must accept that there have always been notifiable diseases that a doctor has a legal duty to notify, including patient-sensitive data. That even includes food poisoning. If a patient visits a GP with food poisoning, that doctor is under a legal obligation to notify the health authority, whether the patient likes it or not. We have always had the need for public health measures such as the notification of diseases and disease registers. Surely this is not a draconian and brand new measure; it is merely what has gone on for some time, but in a slightly different way.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman misses the point and does so because he is a doctor and not a lawyer. Of course he is right that this sort of data have always been collected for epidemiological purposes. That is tremendously important. When the Conservative Government introduced trusts—which the present Government are attempting to build on—we made sure that epidemiological research would continue nationally. Clause 62(4)(c) makes it clear that the information so provided may not now be anonymous. That is the difference. In the past, doctors would notify the NHS through its various agencies of a particular event

or dysfunction. However, there was no obligation previously to provide the name of the person suffering from such a dysfunction.

Dr. Stoate: This is an important point. The notifiable disease register contains patients' details; it must. If a patient of mine were to get tetanus, polio, typhoid, cholera, hepatitis or even food poisoning, I would have to identify that person to the local health authority by name, age and address, as the patient would have to be contacted and followed up for public health reasons. Patient-sensitive data have always been held.

Mr. Fabricant: But that data were always confidential. The point is that now they may not be.

Dr. Brand: I wish to clarify something said by the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate). Epidemiology can deal with anonymised data, and it is perfectly proper that it should do so. Notifiable diseases are notifiable because they may present a risk to the patient if not treated. More importantly, they present a direct risk to people coming into contact with the disease. That is not an argument that can be applied to most registers.

Mr. Fabricant: That is the point. *[Laughter.]* It is all very well people who have just walked into the Chamber laughing at this exchange—it demonstrates why time is needed for Members such as myself, who did not serve on the Committee, to explore the meaning of the clause. That is what this Parliament is all about, for God's sake. But the Government are saying that these important issues have to be terminated at 9 o'clock. It is all very well for Labour Members to laugh and say that the issues are not important, but the BMA and the other organisations to which my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire referred are worried. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, it is one thing to discuss notifiable diseases such as tuberculosis, or other diseases that can generate epidemics; it is another to talk about other forms of disease, details of which may now be placed in the public domain by virtue of the Bill.

Dr. Fox: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is not a question of what has happened in the past—even in specific cases, such as notifiable diseases—or even what is likely to happen with the use of data, but what could happen under the wide powers in the Bill?

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend is right; that is why there is concern among organisations such as the BMA. We recognise that some form of register needs to be kept—that is why my hon. Friend has tabled new clause 1, which still gives considerable powers to the Secretary of State. Subsection (2) says that

"'disease registers' means those registers of incidence of specified diseases as the Secretary of State shall by regulation prescribe."

The Secretary of State will be free to prescribe, but by regulation which requires the scrutiny of this House; that is right and proper. The definition of "prescribed patient information" is of great concern to some doctors inside this House and to the BMA. In the new clause, the definition is

"patient information specified in or determined in accordance with regulations made by the Secretary of State under this section."

Again, we are giving the Secretary of State latitude but, first, the Secretary of State must prescribe that information in legislation or regulation, which needs to be scrutinised by the House. The same definition applies to "processing".

There is clearly concern among the medical profession about confidentiality. It is one thing to provide information to the NHS about those dysfunctions that may produce an epidemic in this country; it is another to give far-reaching powers to an unscrupulous Secretary of State to require personal information given by patients to doctors or learned by doctors from their patients to be given to him, and for that information then to appear in the public domain.

It is no surprise to me that the BMA should be concerned. What surprises me is that Labour Members do not share that concern.

Mr. Denham: This is an important debate on an important matter. It is a shame that, so far, it has not lived up to the importance of the subject.

I think that the characterisation of the clause that has been advanced is not justified by what is in the Bill or by the Government's intentions. As I hope to make clear, the debate has not assessed properly the debate outside the House about the use of patient information. Contributors to that debate have said that the Bill should not contain the proposals that it does contain, or that the proposals should be different, or that they should not be introduced now, and so on.

7 pm

As I said in Committee, the Government are starting from a position in which the use of non-anonymised patient information in the NHS is widespread, and has been so for years. The problem that we must tackle is to establish the principle of informed consent on the use of patient information from a starting point that has not made the use of informed consent the principle by which the NHS is guided.

The Government's task with this clause is to find the best way to move as quickly as possible to deal with a problem that was never tackled by the previous Government. They tolerated it, and never criticised its existence, but everyone accepts that the situation is different now. I do not entirely blame the previous Government, because there has been a sea change in attitudes towards the handling of patient information, both among the public and members of the medical profession. I could criticise the previous Government for many things, but it would not be fair to judge Ministers of 10 or 15 years ago by the standards of today. The standards applicable to a lot of the issues to do with patient consent were different then.

I have described the Government's task with the clause. It had to be accomplished at a time when we were not entirely in control of the time scale. That is why the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) was wrong to say that we should have waited.

As everyone knows, the General Medical Council, exercising its responsibilities as a professional self-regulatory body, last summer issued guidance that had an immediate impact on the collection of data by cancer registries. As I said in Standing Committee, it issued

[Mr. Denham]

further guidance in November in response to the ensuing debate. That guidance appeared after the publication of the NHS plan, and said that the professional obligation would not be asserted until October 2001.

If the Government had not taken the earliest possible opportunity, represented by this Bill, to put a proper statutory framework around the use of patient information, I have every reason to believe that the GMC would have felt under a professional obligation to carry through its advice. That would have had an immediate impact on the operation of cancer registries and other activities. The Government are therefore not in control of the time scale, which is why I believe that we are right to go ahead with the proposal and why it would have been wrong to wait.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight referred to work in the Department on the use of patient information. That work is part of a different exercise looking at all the changes that need to be made across the NHS to put our use of information on a satisfactory basis. We will not have the results until later this year, but it is right for us to get right the statutory framework contained in the Bill.

Dr. Fox: I understand that the Minister is genuine in what he says about what the Government's wish for the Bill, but why has the clause drawn so much criticism from such a wide range of bodies? They cannot all have misinterpreted what the clause is capable of, so surely this is a fault in the drafting. It is not the intention of the Government but the use to which the provisions could be put that has caused such widespread anxiety among the many groups mentioned in the debate.

Mr. Denham: There is disagreement outside the House, as well as in it, about the relevant issues. For example, Professor Martin Vessey of the department of public health at Oxford university wrote to me about the work that he carried out with Dr.—now Sir—Richard Doll in the 1960s investigating the links between leg vein thrombosis, pulmonary embolism and women who had been using oral contraceptives. He wrote about the necessity of using patient data at the time.

I have received a letter from Leslie Davis of the National Perinatal Epidemiology Unit, in which he states:

"I support clause 59 in providing support for the continuation of important transmission of health information. It will give the NHS and other key agencies guarding the health of the public the temporary ability to maintain critical flows of public health information."

We have received correspondence from Dr. Monica Roche and Professor David Foreman of the United Kingdom Association of Cancer Registries. The letter states:

"We are writing on behalf of the United Kingdom Association of Cancer Registries to ask for your support in ensuring that clause 59 of the Health and Social Care Bill is passed. Without this enabling legislation the national system for monitoring cancer will have collapsed by the end of the year."

The attached briefing note goes on to explain why the approach adopted in the Bill is necessary. Sir Richard Doll from the clinical trials service unit and the epidemiological studies unit at the university of Oxford has written to state:

"It is, we believe, important for the future health of people in this country that a legislative framework should exist that ensures that public health surveillance and medical research can continue when they require information that is available in patients' medical records, without the need to obtain individual patients' consent for their use when this is impractical. In so far as clause 59 will permit this for bona fide research workers on a confidential basis, we strongly support it."

I could continue with examples from other correspondence, but the point is not simply that the correspondence illustrates that there is a debate in the medical profession about how to approach this matter. I do not think that there is a debate about informed patient consent, but there is a debate about how we move from where we are, and the practices that have been developed over many years, and reach a better system in the future.

I chose the correspondence that I did because, with the exception of the cancer registries, they referred to activities that fall outside the definition of cancer registries. I gave other examples in Standing Committee. That is why I believe that the approach adopted in the Bill, which has many built-in safeguards, is better than attempting to list or predict in a narrow way in the Bill all the acceptable uses of information.

Dr. Brand: The Minister has used very valid examples, and they all involve bits of research where problems can be overcome by anonymising the clinical data. That is why it is so relevant to say that the outcome of his own working party's research on confidentiality and the processing of clinical data should be available before we decide about what should be the proper legislative proposals that the Minister needs. If the Minister would accept amendment No. 15 or new clause 1, his anxieties over cancer registries would be overcome and he would have time to reflect on whether he needs to take powers that are as wide as those contained in the Bill. We have no doubts about the Minister's intent, but we have great worries about what is in a Bill that does not mention patient confidentiality anywhere.

Mr. Denham: I think that the hon. Gentleman has simply—and inadvertently, I am sure—not really looked at the Bill and the safeguards that it contains. He asserts that all the examples that I gave involved work that could be undertaken with anonymised patient data. I do not have confidence that the hon. Gentleman is right about all the research that I mentioned, or about other legitimate, important and pressing research that might be undertaken.

I hope that, in the not too distant future, the NHS IT systems will be fully in place, so enabling electronic patient records to be kept and anonymised patient data to be used routinely. However, I am not sure that we have reached that point yet. That is why the Bill contains two important safeguards that have been included from the outset.

First, the Bill limits the use of the powers to medical purposes where there is a benefit to patient care and public health. Secondly, it limits their use to circumstances in which there is no reasonably practical alternative. The latter is not a once-and-for-all test, and does not mean that once a particular activity slips past the test it is there for ever and a day, because the Secretary of State is required by the Bill to review each set of regulations every year.

Therefore, any activity will have to pass the "practical alternative" test and, as I explained in Standing Committee, it must be looked at by an advisory group. That group will involve organisations such as the GMC, the BMA, research councils, patients' organisations and

others. If they advise the Secretary of State that there is no reasonably practical alternative, the Secretary of State then has to make regulations. He then has to consult on the regulations.

That is not an end to the matter because those regulations have to come before Parliament, not, as is so often the case, through the negative resolution procedure, but under the affirmative resolution, which requires a positive vote by both Houses of Parliament. Even if that is achieved, the following year and every year after that, the Secretary of State has to satisfy himself, no doubt by taking advice, that the conditions that led him to believe that anonymised data should not be used no longer apply.

That is a pretty robust set of safeguards, but the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) painted a picture of the Secretary of State getting out of bed one morning and making up his mind on this matter, as if that were an end to it. That is so far from the truth that it is outrageous. Such caricatures are one of the reasons for the amount of concern about the Bill.

On the second issue, which was raised by several hon. Members, including the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young), I suspect that there is simply a difference of opinion in the House, as there was in Committee. We were concerned about the activities of a company called Source Informatics. We believed that its processing of anonymised patient information led, or was likely to lead, to a targeted marketing effort that was not beneficial to the NHS, so we sought to restrict its activities. We lost that case in court on the basis that there had been no breach of confidence, and we are not attempting to overturn that judgment in the Bill. However, we are, as the judge invited us to do, taking the necessary powers to restrict such activity in future.

It is clearly ridiculous to suggest that this Government, who have published more information about the NHS than any previous Government, are engaged in an exercise to suppress information or criticism. I accept that the hon. Member for Woodspring thinks that in the distant future he might be Secretary of State and that he would use the legislation differently. He invited me to use the precautionary principle to deny him that power. However, it is necessary to take action to protect the interests of the NHS, and with the amendments that were made in Committee, the Bill is a proportionate response to that need.

Since the debate in Committee, the Association of Medical Research Charities has written to us to say:

"We welcome the Government amendment to subsection two of this Clause which has addressed some serious concerns about the application of the law. AMRC believes that there is merit in including in the Bill a Clause that allows the appropriate use of anonymised patient data for the purposes of research but also makes provision for clear and robust safeguards."

That is what I believe we are doing.

Dr. Fox: As I said in opening the debate on the new clause, we believe that in its major provisions this Bill is centralising and authoritarian. Clause 62 is such a provision, and that is why we tabled new clause 1.

There are two main objections to clause 62. It allows the Secretary of State to control anonymised data for reasons that he may determine in future, and rather than detailing when information can be used, the Bill says that the Secretary of State knows best and will exclude its use where he sees fit.

As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) pointed out, the Bill will force doctors to divulge identifiable patient data against patients' will, which is entirely unacceptable. My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir G. Young) rightly said that in Committee the Government came under sustained attack on clause 62. The Minister gave us a long explanation of the mechanics that he believed would provide safeguards, yet nothing has been added to the Bill to make it more explicit or enforceable.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) said that what matters is not what happened in the past or even the Government's intentions, but what could be done within the scope of the Bill. That is what worries Members of the House and the many outside groups who have written to us. As the hon. Member for Isle of Wight said, we are legislating even before the end of the Government's consultation process on patient information. That is a bad way to make law; the Bill is bad law, and at some point Ministers will return to the House to reconsider it. It is nothing less than the nationalisation of patient data, and we oppose it. I should like to press new clause 1 to a vote.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 167, Noes 306.

Division No. 124] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*

Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith,
Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. James Gray and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny
(Wolverh'ton SW)
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin

Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Mike Hall.

Question accordingly negatived.

New Clause 2

COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS: SCHEME FOR REFORM

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall lay before Parliament within 12 months of the date of coming into force of this section regulations setting out a scheme for the reform of Community Health Councils in England.

(2) The scheme set out by the Secretary of State in regulations under subsection (1) above shall extend to all parts of the health service (including the provision of Part II services under the 1977 Act).

(3) The Secretary of State may make regulations providing for access by members of a Community Health Council to premises from which services under Part II of the 1977 Act are provided.

(4) The scheme set out by the Secretary of State in regulations under subsection (1) shall provide for the proper representation of the population in the area served by a Community Health Council on that Council.

(5) Regulations under subsection (1) may not be made unless a draft of the statutory instrument containing the regulations has been laid before, and approved by a resolution of, each House of Parliament.'.—*[Dr. Fox.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

7.30 pm

Dr. Fox: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 7—*Community Health Councils: additional functions*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall make regulations providing in relation to Community Health Councils ("Councils") in England for—

(a) the delivery by Councils of support and advocacy services to patients and others with complaints about health services;

(b) Councils to advise and make recommendations to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee, health authority and trust about matters arising from complaints;

(c) reports on the operation of the complaints support service to be compiled by Councils and provided to the Secretary of State to the relevant overview and scrutiny committee, health authority, trust, and other appropriate organisations;

(d) annual reports to be published by Councils detailing the arrangements maintained in that year for obtaining the views of patients;

(e) the establishment of sub-committees of each Council to be known as Patients' Forums, for each NHS and primary care trust in the district of the Council, made up of representatives of the Council, and co-opted representatives of the local authority overview and scrutiny committee, patients, carers and the wider community, with duties to—

(i) monitor and review the operation of services provided by, or under arrangements made by, the trust to which it relates;

(ii) obtain the views of patients, carers and the wider community about those services and report on those views to the Council and the trust;

(iii) provide advice and make reports and recommendations about matters relating to those services to the Council, the relevant Health Authority, and the trust to which it relates,

(iv) make available to patients, carers and the wider community advice and information about those services;

(v) in the case of primary care services carry out the functions as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State;

(vi) carry out such other functions as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State;

(f) the appointment of representatives from the Patients' Forum as non-executive directors to the board of the trust to which the Forum relates;

(g) for functions of Patients' Forums to be performed under joint arrangements between Councils, where such arrangements are appropriate to meet the needs of their communities;

(h) the extension of Councils' rights of inspection to all premises from which services as defined in subsection (3) are provided and;

(i) matters of concern which Councils may refer to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, the Commission for Health Improvement, the Audit Commission and the Secretary of State.

(2) References in subsection (1) to "services" are references to—

(a) services provided as part of the health service (within the meaning of the 1977 Act) in England;

(b) services provided in England in pursuance of arrangements under regulations under section 31 of the Health Act 1999; and

(c) services provided elsewhere in pursuance of such arrangements with a local authority in England.

(3) In subsection (2)—

(a) "relevant overview and scrutiny committee", means the committee of the council or councils whose district corresponds, or is included within, the community represented by the Council.

(b) "relevant Health Authority" in subsection (1)(e) in relation to a Patients' Forum for a Primary Care Trust, means the Health Authority whose area is, or includes, the area for which the trust is established.

(4) Before making regulations under this section the Secretary of State shall consult with Councils and such patients' and carers' organisations as he shall consider appropriate.'.

New clause 8—*Community Health Councils in Wales*—

'. The National Assembly for Wales may, by order, in relation to Community Health Councils in Wales, make provision corresponding to the provision which the Secretary of State must, by regulations, make in relation to Community Health Councils in England under section (*Community Health Councils: additional functions*).'.

New clause 9—*Patients' Councils*—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall by regulations provide for the establishment of bodies to be known as Patients' Councils (referred to in this section as "Councils") the members of which are to be appointed in each case by two or more Patients' Forums.

(2) The regulations shall provide for determining—

(a) the Patients' Forums by which the members of a Council are to be appointed, and

(b) the area in relation to which the functions of a Council are exercisable.

(3) The functions of a Council are—

(a) to facilitate the co-ordination by member Forums of their activities;

(b) to make reports to health authorities, local authorities and their committees and to the Secretary of State in accordance with the regulations;

(c) to carry out such arrangements as may be made with the Council under section 19A of the 1977 Act (independent advocacy services);

(d) such other functions as the regulations may prescribe.

(4) The "member Forums" of a Council are the Patients' Forums by which its members are for the time being appointed.'.

New clause 10—*Independent advocacy services*—

'. After section 19 of the 1977 Act there shall be inserted—

"*Independent advocacy services*

19A.—(1) It is the duty of the Secretary of State to arrange, to such extent as he considers necessary to meet all reasonable requirements, for the provision of independent advocacy services.

(2) "Independent advocacy services" are services providing assistance (by way of representation or otherwise) to individuals making or intending to make—

(a) a complaint under a procedure operated by a health service body or independent provider,

(b) a complaint to the Health Service Commissioner for England or the Health Service Commissioner for Wales,

(c) a complaint of a prescribed description which relates to the provision of services as part of the health service and

(i) is made under a procedure of a prescribed description, or

(ii) gives rise, or may give rise, to proceedings of a prescribed description.

(3) In subsection (2)—

"health service body" means a body which, under section 2(1) or (2) of the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993, is subject to investigation by the Health Service Commissioner for England or the Health Service Commissioner for Wales;

"independent provider" means a person who, under section 2B(1) or (2) of that Act, is subject to such investigation.

(4) The Secretary of State may make such other arrangements as he thinks fit for the provision of assistance to individuals in connection with complaints relating to the provision of services as part of the health service.

(5) In making arrangements under this section the Secretary of State must have regard to the principle that the provision of services under the arrangements should, so far as practicable, be independent of any person who is the subject of a relevant complaint or is involved in investigating or adjudicating on such a complaint.

(6) Before making arrangements under this section in respect of complaints relating to the provision of any services, the Secretary of State shall consult—

(a) any relevant Patients' Council, and

(b) such other persons as he considers appropriate.

(7) A Patients' Council is, for the purposes of subsection (6)(a), a relevant Council if the services concerned are ones to which functions of a member Forum of the Council relate.

(8) The Secretary of State may make payments to any person in pursuance of arrangements under this section.".'.

Amendment No. 2, in page 9, line 6, leave out clause 11.

Government amendments Nos. 144 to 150.

Amendment No. 3, in page 10, line 18, leave out clause 12.

Amendment No. 4, in page 10, line 30, leave out clause 13.

Amendment No. 5, in page 10, line 38, leave out clause 14.

Amendment No. 24, in clause 14, page 10, line 39, at end insert "and Patients" Councils ("Councils").".

Government amendment No. 151.

Amendment No. 25, in clause 14, in page 11, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (2) applies in relation to a Council as it applies in relation to its member Forums.'.

Amendment No. 26, in clause 14, in page 11, line 36, at end insert—

'( ) The regulations must include provision as to the use by member Forums of a Council, and by the Council, of shared facilities and staff.'.

Amendment No. 6, in page 12, line 7, leave out clause 15.

Amendment No. 19, in page 12, line 34, leave out clause 16.

Government amendment No. 159.

Dr. Fox: This is likely to be the most controversial of the debates today. The strength of feeling aroused must have come as a shock to the Government; it must have come as a lesson to them that, although they may be able to muzzle criticism inside the House, it is much more difficult for them to do so in the real world. We look forward to whatever climbdown from the proposals the Minister of State is going to make.

Under the Government's proposals, the current functions of community health councils will be divided up into patient advocacy and liaison services, patients forums and local authority scrutiny committees. During the debates in Standing Committee, the Government did nothing to dispel our fear that the replacement of CHCs with a fragmented system will mean that there will no longer be an overall body that can span many care providers to oversee the whole of a patient's experience. The example was used of a patient who, in a single episode of illness, had a problem with his GP, a problem with the ambulance service and a problem with the acute trust. Under the new system, to whom would such a patient complain about each of those bodies? Will the patient find the new system more difficult or easier than the current one?

Similarly, the separation of scrutiny and complaints procedures undermines the work of CHCs in understanding the broader patterns of health provision. The Government have tried to argue that bringing scrutiny closer to trusts will mean that there will be speedier action. However, the loss of an independent perspective may result in no action at all. Attempts to solve those problems will necessitate further quangos. The new clauses proposed by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) would create even more confusion. The Government are creating a system in which patients will have to shop around for their rights.

I am sorry that no apology was offered in Committee for the way in which CHCs have been treated by the Government during the progress of this matter. The Government have still to apologise for the lack of consultation that has left their employees in the dark as to the future. In the House, the Prime Minister famously claimed to have consulted the CHCs, but they denied it and the right hon. Gentleman was forced to backtrack. As Richard Gordon QC told the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales:

"in my opinion, the consultation process over the new NHS plan was . . . legally flawed."

That is a severe indictment of Ministers. What was the ministerial response? In a letter, the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who is not in the Chamber at present, replied:

"We do not accept that the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales or CHCs had any legitimate expectation to be consulted in relation to the proposals that CHCs should be abolished in primary legislation to be introduced in parliament in due course."

So, the association was felt not to have "any legitimate expectation"—yet the Prime Minister went to great lengths to point out how extensively the Government were consulting over the proposal. The Minister let the cat out of the bag: the Government never believed that there was any legitimate expectation that CHCs would be consulted. That is the definitive version of the Government's policy.

Mr. Fabricant: My hon. Friend says that the Government saw no reason to expect the CHCs to wish to consult. I suspect that he will not be surprised to learn that I received a letter from the South East Staffordshire community health council that states

"the Government has consistently refused to consult on this issue, and has still not produced substantive detail on our proposed replacements, even at Committee Stage."

In a short intervention, I might just go on to say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think perhaps the hon. Gentleman might not go on to say anything.

Dr. Fox: My hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant) is right—the House will not be shocked to learn that I am not surprised at the information that he imparts.

In Committee, the Government also failed to answer some of the questions on funding in respect of CHCs. Will the Minister tell us whether the Government continue to reject the claims of the association that, by 2004–05, the new bodies that are to replace CHCs will cost £114 million, compared with the current CHC budget of £23 million? If the Government reject those sums, will the Minister tell us how they expect hospitals to fund the additional bodies?

On Second Reading and in Committee, the Government argued that the presence of patient advocacy and liaison services in hospitals will lend more immediacy to the complaints of patients. However, to steer patients towards the complaints system where necessary is greatly different from the proactive advocacy role currently played by CHCs. Independence will undoubtedly be lost, not gained—to the detriment of patient care.

The Government have also tried to argue that patients forums will be able to remove PALS from the control of trusts. That just might prevent a gross distortion of the system, but it would do nothing to stop PALS employees from feeling beholden to trusts; they might take decisions different from those that they would have taken had they enjoyed full independence.

The Government have failed to explain how conflicts of interest on the part of councillors scrutinising care trusts will be dealt with. Such conflicts will arise when councillors are increasingly called on to scrutinise services for whose funding and provision their authority has joint responsibility. They will thus not be independent of the services that they scrutinise. Many such councillors will be of the same political persuasion as the non-executive directors, and even chairmen, of the local trusts. We do not need to go back over the ground about appointments to trusts under the Labour Government—of which Dame Rennie Fritchie gave such a damning indictment. An alternative scenario might pertain, in which such councillors were of a different political colour. What we would then see would not be cronyism but the use of the situation as a political football, in a way that does not occur at present. That cannot be to the advantage of patients.

The Government have been unable to confirm that the lone member of the patients forum appointed to a hospital trust board will be selected by the relevant patients forum.

[Dr. Fox]

Perhaps the Minister can offer us that assurance tonight. In a Labour party briefing, the Government have also tried to portray patients forums as mini-CHCs. This is the line that goes out: "Don't worry about it because the patients forums are really mini-CHCs". If that is so, why are the Government abolishing CHCs? That makes no sense whatever.

In Committee, the Minister of State said:

"It is our expectation, however, that patients forums will undertake specific or general monitoring activity. That is important as an allegation has been made—and repeated this morning—that the aim of the exercise has been to remove from the system of scrutiny in the NHS any organisation or body that could play that role. That is not the case. Patients forums will be able to carry out that role, as CHCs have in the past."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 30 January 2001; c. 235.]

If all that the Minister said in Committee is true, why do the Government want to abolish CHCs, which are currently performing those tasks, in many cases—as the Minister pointed out—excellently?

Ministers have conspicuously avoided public discussion of these issues. The Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales held a seminar on 4 December last year, but the Minister who was to respond wrote in advance that she would be unable to answer questions about the Government's proposals to abolish CHCs. In other words, the Minister with responsibility for the abolition of CHCs tells a conference of CHCs that she is unable to answer questions on that very issue.

The Department of Health arranged a meeting in Fulham on a day when the Standing Committee was discussing many of those issues. A junior Minister took the place of the Secretary of State, but there was no sign of the promised guidelines. That is not surprising, given the confusing signals coming from the Government.

As we noted in Committee, the Prime Minister's agent wrote to his local CHC in Durham to say that, on the anniversary,

"Tony would certainly like to add his congratulations to the work the CHCs have done over the last 25 years and wishes them every success in the future."

The Prime Minister's implementation of the concept of "every success" is the success we wish for the Government in the coming general election. A short time after that letter, the Government announced the abolition of CHCs. Indeed, on 4 December, the South Durham and Weardale CHC, which covers the Prime Minister's constituency, wrote:

"We are concerned that the Government have announced the intention to abolish CHCs as a cynical attempt to silence any negative publicity . . . What better way to deflect attention away from any shortcomings than by silencing the only independent monitor that the public has for the NHS."

Interestingly, neither the Labour-dominated Scottish Executive nor the Labour-dominated Welsh Assembly has made any plans to abolish CHCs. What have patients in England done to deserve such special silencing treatment from the Government?

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): My hon. Friend has quoted the Prime Minister's agent wishing CHCs well in the future and cited the Prime Minister saying on the Floor of the House that there had been consultation on their abolition. Has any Minister from Department of Health acknowledged on the Floor of the House that there has been no consultation? If no Minister has yet done so, will the Secretary of State do so now?

Dr. Fox: I very much look forward to Ministers being open about the fact that there was absolutely no consultation on the abolition of CHCs, either before it was announced in the national plan or subsequently. They have consulted only on what should replace CHCs. To suggest that proper consultation on abolition has taken place is to define the concept in a way that the rest of us would not understand from reading an English dictionary. That shows that the Government's interpretation of consultation is very far removed from that which anyone else would regard as meaningful.

Under new clause 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield, CHCs would not be retained, and we simply cannot accept the complex mechanism that he proposes as an alternative. What has been suggested in that new clause constitutes a tool for limiting the damage that the Government's proposals would cause, rather than an attempt to stop the damage being done in the first place. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has departed from his position, which involved a robust defence of CHCs; he is now trying to ameliorate the damage. That is a case of crusader turned collaborator, and it does the hon. Gentleman no justice.

Mr. Fabricant: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Dr. Fox: I will not. I hope my hon. Friend will forgive me.

We make a strong case in new clause 2 for reforming CHCs to make them more effective. For example, there could be more standardisation of CHC work, reform of the appointments systems and better resourcing. No one can deny that CHCs have done good work—for example, in the Harold Shipman and Rodney Ledward cases, in preparing and publishing "Casualty Watch" and in highlighting the many instances of poor performance in our hospitals. It should never be forgotten that CHCs represent the entire public, not just patients in the NHS. There is a growing feeling among politicians, CHCs and patient and medical bodies that Ministers are making up all the new systems as they go along. No doubt, they will make up a new version on the hoof during the debate.

Some CHCs do work well, and we all accept that. Ministers have said that some are excellent, and we also all accept that. Our logic suggests that we should bring the standard of the poorest up to the standard of the best. The Government's logic suggests that everyone should be judged by the standard of the poorest—then let them be abolished. I should love to see them try to apply that Mandelson test to Ministers.

The Opposition will accept nothing less than reform and retention of CHCs. If we are defeated on new clause 2 tonight, we shall carry the fight to the other place. The Government are running out of time as they come to a general election. We look forward to carrying into the general election our proposal to maintain and reform CHCs, whereas the Government want to abolish organisations run by many people who have not only done sterling public service in the past and helped many patients, but who support their own party. Government

Back Benchers should be warned that if they vote to abolish CHCs, they will inflict deep hurt on many people who may well have been willing to help them in the forthcoming general election. Given that the Government have treated CHCs with contempt by failing to consult, and given that they are now treating them with disdain, Labour Members may not receive that help in the future.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): The Liberal Democrats want to make it clear that we stand on a ticket of reforming CHCs, not of abolishing them. I want to outline our views on the amendments that my hon. Friends and I have tabled. I want to make it clear that if a Division takes place on new clause 2, we will join the official Opposition in the Lobby to advocate the case for retaining CHCs and building on what is good about them, not throwing out the baby with the bath water as is proposed at the moment. We believe that an effective watchdog is needed, so we must look at the good practice that exists in CHCs, which Ministers acknowledged in Committee.

7.45 pm

The new arrangements will fragment the watchdog rule. They will shatter the complaints handling system and inspection and overview. They will scatter those matters around to a range of new bodies. The new system—which is being gradually revealed, piece by piece—is more centred on the interests and needs of care providers than on those of the patients who receive that care. The reality is that people's experience of the NHS is gained not on a piecemeal basis of what individual trusts provide, but on the care pathway that they take through the NHS, which includes visits to their GPs and the services provided by community NHS trusts and acute trusts. To end up with a system in which different patients forums deal with different aspects of patients experience misses the point of trying to create a patient-centred NHS. That is what the Government say in their NHS plan they want to do, but the new system will not deliver it in practice.

As the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) has said, the new arrangements will leave community interests out in the cold. We are specifically dealing with patients experience of the services provided, so it is essential that we do not lose the wider view of the interests of the local community being served by the local health care economy, the NHS and other care providers. The powers and other aspects of the proposals show, time and again, the confusion between customer care and advocacy on behalf of patients and the community and the effective oversight and scrutiny of the NHS.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): I think we would all applaud what the hon. Gentleman says about the needs of the community, but does he not accept that the role of the proposed patient advocacy and liaison service is an entirely new one, especially for patients in hospital, which is not currently addressed by CHCs?

Mr. Burstow: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the role of PALS is entirely new, but it is a customer-care role, not a customer advocacy role. Indeed, the Bill contains no specific proposals about setting up independent advocacy services. New clause 10, tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), tries to deal with that, and the hon. Gentleman has our support in that respect because proposals that establish genuine, independent advocacy services for patients are needed.

Dr. Fox: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that even if we accepted that PALS were good in itself, there would be nothing to stop that being introduced alongside CHCs, as an additional measure rather than as a substitute?

Mr. Burstow: I entirely agree. The proposals on PALS should be viewed completely outwith those on patient advocacy and the ability to scrutinise how the NHS works on behalf of local community and patients. PALS are separate matter, but the proposals, although useful, are more about customer service than about anything else. Although PALS are a good idea, we do not view them as part of the watchdog role that we need to retain and develop. Many outside the House, including many of those who lobbied hon. Members today, view PALS as poodles rather than effective watchdogs.

Dr. Brand: Does my hon. Friend agree that the real value of PALS is to encourage the internal resolution of complaints in trusts and that they will be very useful vehicles for doing just that, but that they cannot be a substitute for supporting people who have genuine problems with the care provided by trusts and who have lost faith in them?

Mr. Burstow: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is worth stating that the Government still have to produce the details of the complaints procedures. They are designing the systems to operate a new complaints procedure before we have seen them. They are putting the cart before the horse.

The overview role, which is to pass to local authorities, will be handicapped if we do not have the benefit of the insight provided by inspection and individual complaints. The independent local advisory forums that health authorities will set up are neither independent nor particularly local—and, not least, they lack statutory backing. As a result, they will be the creatures of the Secretary of State. I hope that they will be independent, but they will be very much at the beck and call of individual Secretaries of State in terms of the directions that will be used to set them up.

The Government have so far failed to make the case for abolition. The CHCs, as they stand, are underpowered and under-resourced. As has been said in this debate and in Committee, their performance is variable across the country. However, surely we should raise the standards of the poorest performers to match those of the best. We should examine what is good in the system and build on that instead of casting the whole system aside. The Government's reasons do not sustain the case for abolition; they are reasons for reform and for properly resourcing CHCs, not for getting rid of them.

If we are unable to persuade the Government tonight of the merits of new clauses 7 and 8, my colleagues will not accept the case for abolition when the Bill is considered in the other place. They will not vote for abolition and will want the Government to embrace the case for reform before they accept any attempt to take the Bill through the Lords. To that extent, we welcome the fact that Members in both Opposition parties support that approach.

[Mr. Burstow]

The Government have failed to make their case. In Committee, several Labour Members told us that CHCs had not fulfilled their role as the bodies that deal with complaints in the NHS. Unfortunately, that is a bit of misconception. Although CHCs undertake complaints on behalf of complainants and help them navigate their way through the complaints system, there is no statutory duty on them to do such work. Despite the fact that no funds had been specifically earmarked for that purpose, CHCs saw a gap, recognised a need and undertook that responsibility and it is only because of that that they carry out the role at all. That is another reason for considering how we can ensure that they are properly equipped. We should pay tribute to the work that CHCs have carried out, for example, in the Alder Hey case. The work that they did in supporting parents should not be neglected when we consider the case for keeping them.

Our new clauses 7 and 8 show how CHCs could be reformed to become the delivery mechanisms for the proposals set out in the NHS plan. The new clauses address the need for independence and co-ordination. They are about stitching together the pieces in the NHS plan and in the scheme for consultation and the empowerment of patients. Quite rightly, they would extend the remit to primary care and they would locate the independent advocacy services in the new reformed CHCs. They would establish patients forums as sub-committees of CHCs and allow co-ordination, sharing and the following of patients care pathways to take place more effectively. They would also require the Secretary of State to consult on the detail.

I do not believe that the Government have demonstrated that their proposals, as they currently stand in their various pieces, will enhance the patients voice. New clause 9, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield, will not do that, either. It does not go far enough. Although I understand the intentions behind it, it fails to deal with the fragmentation of the proposals in the Bill and in the NHS plan. It would add an extra tier without being clear as to what that tier would do for the management of patient advocacy.

The Government have overlooked the wider community, but one of the questions that has been asked tonight and in Committee is how much their proposals will cost. When the Bill was in Committee, I tabled a written question to ascertain from the Government how much the proposals would cost and I received a reply from a Minister telling me that it would not be appropriate to provide that information because we were not at the right stage of the Bill's passage through the House. Does that mean that there can be no scrutiny of the Government's proposals for the abolition of CHCs and their replacement, or does it mean that scrutiny must occur once the Bill has become an Act and the details have been worked out in regulations? What on earth does it mean when a Minister tells the House in a written answer that it is inappropriate to provide the costings that should be the basis of examination, scrutiny and debate in this place?

The proposals in the Bill were unmodified in Committee and I suspect will remain unmodified after the Report stage. The arrangements are nothing more than a dog's breakfast. We need a decent watchdog on behalf of patients and the wider community, and unless we get that, we will not accept this part of the Bill.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I wish to speak to the new clauses that stand in my name and in those of my hon. Friends.

I have listened with interest to the two previous contributions, and the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) appears to think that I have performed a U-turn. He must have been absent when I spoke on Second Reading. I said that I had been a member of a CHC for 10 years and served as its vice-chair, but added:

"I hold no particular brief for community health councils . . . Some are excellent, but some have not done the job required of them, and the voice of patients has not been heard. Such CHCs have been the poodles of local trusts and health authorities. They have not stood up to be counted on occasions when patients' views should have been expressed loudly and clearly at local level."—[*Official Report*, 10 January 2001; Vol. 360, c. 1106.]

That comment was not reflected in what the hon. Member for Woodspring said about my personal position.

On Second Reading, I said—and I repeat it tonight—that the provisions in the Bill, as it stands, do not offer a better alternative to the CHC system, and I tabled my new clauses in the hope that we could improve the Bill in a constructive fashion.

Mr. Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman has suggested that there is nothing in the Bill that would make CHCs better. Does he agree with me and other Opposition Members, including those in the Liberal Democrat party, that the Bill will make the position worse?

Mr. Hinchliffe: There are positive aspects in the Bill that I wish to mention, but I think that we can improve it. I hope that by the end of the debate we shall have a new structure that will represent patients' interests in a more effective way.

As I argued a moment ago—and as I argued on Second Reading—the effectiveness of CHCs varies considerably. Every hon. Member knows that. Some are excellent, but some are anonymous and some are invisible. I picked up that point when the Select Committee on Health conducted a major inquiry into adverse incidents and considered some serious problems. I asked several patients who had been affected—in some instances they had lost relatives—and some of them had never even heard of the local CHC. We must address that point.

In other areas—the Alder Hey case is a positive example—CHCs have played an important role and there is a different picture. We need to get consistency, and I hope that my new clauses will introduce a degree of consistency.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman has said, as the Minister has said before, that some CHCs are excellent—so is not the logic to bring the standards of the poorest up to the standards of the best, if necessary by plugging the gaps that the hon. Gentleman mentioned by introducing services such as patients advocacy and liaison services? Would that not be better than going down the route of abolition, and introducing other bodies to ameliorate the damage, as is suggested in his new clauses 9 and 10?

Mr. Hinchliffe: I hope that the new system will build on the excellence of some CHCs. That is precisely what

I want to see the new clauses achieve. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members listen, I shall explain what the new clauses mean.

On Second Reading, I made the point that, arising from the work that the Health Committee did on the scrutiny of complaints in our adverse incidents inquiry, we picked up directly from patients the clear principle that they wanted to be included in any changed system. I mentioned the details on Second Reading, and I shall not repeat them now. However, the two key areas that patients were concerned about were independence and having a comprehensive system.

My concern about the Bill echoes one or two of the points that have been made in the two previous speeches. The PALS—patient advocacy and liaison services—system is, indeed, trust based. It focuses on the work of a single trust, be that a hospital or a primary care trust. Therefore it is neither independent nor comprehensive. However, I have no problem with a system that offers an effective customer services department in my local hospital or my local primary care trust where I, as a patient, can go to resolve issues face to face with the trust. As I understand it, that is the purpose of PALS, so I am happy for that system, as proposed in the Bill, to remain.

The concern that I raised on Second Reading about patient advocates was that the Bill was not explicit about the location of the advocacy function. We were initially advised that that function might be commissioned by health authorities. I was worried about that because I have dealt with complaints that relate to health authorities. It struck me as wrong that any system that purports to be independent could be funded by a party to a complaint, that is involved in the problem. It was suggested that we might locate advocates within the remit of the local authority scrutiny panels, but those panels will be scrutinising the work of the new care trusts.

8 pm

Dr. Brand: The hon. Gentleman knows that I have much respect for his views. Is he not surprised that we are being asked to decide on the Bill tonight, before we know of the outcome of the Government's review of the complaints system? Perhaps he has greater knowledge of what is in the minds of Ministers, but is he not alarmed that we are being invited to adopt a framework without knowing what it has to deliver?

Mr. Hinchliffe: If the hon. Gentleman reads my speech on Second Reading, he will see that I referred to that matter. However, the principles that we can establish tonight will relate to the review's conclusions.

The Bill also provides for the patients forums. I am concerned that the new arrangements will focus primarily on one aspect of the system and will not enable a complaint or problem to be considered comprehensively. We all know that the patient's pathway through health care often starts in primary care, and moves on to secondary and tertiary care before going back into the community. The system needs to reflect the need to look across the board at the comprehensive issues that affect patients when they have a complaint.

I want to thank a number of people who have been involved in many discussions with me and others in the past few days and during the Committee's proceedings. The Clerk was extremely helpful, because he attempted to pick up on some of our concerns. I am also grateful to the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales and, in particular, Donna Covey. The hon. Member for Woodspring said that I had sold out on CHCs, but I was with Donna Covey immediately before I tabled my new clauses and amendments on Monday, and she did not give me that impression—nor do representatives from my local CHC, who have been here today. They recognise that we are proposing a positive way forward, on which we can build.

Dr. Stoate: My hon. Friend knows that I support what he is trying to do. I met my CHC earlier today and its members, too, were happy with the new clauses and amendments. They believe that they will strengthen the position of CHCs rather than make it worse. I urge the Minister to accept my hon. Friend's new clauses and amendments.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. The new clauses and amendments have drawn a wide range of support from Labour Members, and have also received positive comments from the Opposition. I am proud to have got both my hon. Friend the Member for Houghton and Washington, East (Mr. Kemp) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) to support the same new clause. That is quite an achievement—I think I have discovered the third way.

I pay tribute to my right hon. Friends the Minister of State and the Secretary of State for the work that they have done on this issue in the past few weeks and today. They have taken the concerns that we have expressed seriously, and listened to them.

Let me explain my proposals, because Conservative Members obviously do not understand them. I am suggesting that the PALS system should remain. The customer services role is valid and reasonable. It will be genuinely helpful in resolving many—possibly most—of the issues that affect patients in local hospitals and local primary care trusts. I have also included patients forums in new clause 9, because it is logical for them to be closely involved in considering the detail of individual trusts at a local level.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) said that I would introduce an extra tier. I am probably more intimate with the detail of his new clause than he is—he knows the background to that, and I do not wish to embarrass him. There would be no extra tier. Instead, my proposed arrangements would occupy the same tier as the CHC would represent in his new clause on the retention of CHCs. I want patients councils to be established as umbrella bodies that will collectively draw together the individual patients forums to address the issue that worries me—the lack of a comprehensive overview of the work of the trusts. That function will create a better system.

I am proposing to establish a common secretariat to service the individual forums and the patients councils. The councils functions would not be dissimilar to those discharged by CHCs. However, the significant change, which reflects the Select Committee's views on advocacy, is that they would, in most instances, host the independent advocacy services set out in new clause 10. The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam is wrong to say that CHCs already have that advocacy function, because many

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

do not. A major weakness of the health service, which the Committee has noticed several times, is the lack of advocacy services.

In my dialogue with the Government, I have recognised that basing advocacy services within every patients council may not be the most appropriate arrangement. There are geographic differences in the areas to be covered. I believe that patients councils should be consulted by the Secretary of State, in accordance with new clause 10, about where the advocacy function should be placed.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I thank the hon. Gentleman for explaining his proposals so carefully. Will he elucidate a little further on how they will affect CHCs in Wales? Wales is covered by new clause 10, but CHCs are to be retained in Wales—[HON. MEMBERS: "You support that."] Indeed, I do, but surely it would be better for the Government to go back to the drawing board, forget about their current proposals and return to the House with fresh suggestions.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I support devolution and believe that if the Welsh wish to retain CHCs they should have that right. I look forward to a time when there is devolution in Yorkshire, and I no longer have to mix with some of the people that I meet here.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): Representatives from my local CHC told me today that they were concerned about how representatives on patients forums and patients councils might be appointed. Does my hon. Friend agree that great care will need to be taken to ensure that representatives are genuinely independent? That might be easier with trusts that have an on-going relationship with patients—such as mental health trusts—than acute trusts, where patients are often involved with the hospital only for a short time.

Mr. Hinchliffe: My hon. Friend will understand that I have not proposed to amend the Bill as it relates to the new NHS Appointments Commission, which was established after the publication of Rennie Fritchie's report. I accept that the issue needs to be considered carefully, and I make no bones about the fact that I am proposing a framework that needs to be examined in more detail.

New clause 10 is especially important. The Select Committee noticed—

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No, I am sorry but I must conclude; I have given way several times.

The Select Committee picked up on patients concerns that when something has gone badly wrong in the NHS—fortunately, that does not happen very often—the experience has been worsened by the inability to get an appropriate response, help in complaining, and someone to rectify the damage. I hope that the advocacy services as proposed in new clause 10 would help to deal with that.

My proposals will improve the system proposed in the Bill. Patients councils will be independent and comprehensive. They will bring together the various patients forums. They will cover primary care. Community health councils do not co that, which is a huge weakness. I am surprised that those who are defending the status quo do not recognise that. Moving to the idea of patients councils reflects the work that they will do better than does the term "community health council".

In my constituency—as in the constituencies of some of my hon. Friends, perhaps—there is a community health trust. I would bet that 99 per cent. of my constituents have not the least idea about the difference between the community health council and the trust. I hope that the name "patients council", which will reflect so much of the positive contributions of the CHCs, will have an impact.

Dr. Fox: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hinchliffe: No.

I accept that the new clause and the amendments should be reconsidered in another place. However, I hope that we have a framework on which we can build. We must consider continuity between any change and the new system. I genuinely hope that some of those who have served so well on CHCs will make a major contribution within the new system. My proposals offer a framework for improving patient representation. I hope that the Government will accept them. If not, I intend to put the issue to the vote.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The debate characterises all that is worst about the Government, and particularly their management of the national health service. Earlier, we had the disgraceful spectacle of the Prime Minister refusing to admit how many people had written to him in support of his proposals to abolish community health councils. He did not have the courage or the candour to recognise that it was only a handful of people, or none. We know that there have been numerous representations in favour of the retention of CHCs. They have been articulate and well argued. I have received no representations in favour of the proposal to abolish them, as announced in the NHS White Paper.

That was typical of the Government. There was a fanfare of political trumpets in favour of the proposals in the White Paper for increased resources for cardiac care and thoracic medicine, for example. However, in the small print it was seen that the CHCs were to be abolished. People realised that yet again they had been conned. They were unimpressed and, as a consequence, opposition to the proposals to abolish CHCs grew to the point where Parliament was lobbied by many people this afternoon. I am talking of individuals who have given many years of service, dedication and professional expertise to helping to resolve patients' complaints and representing the interests of their local communities through the health service.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) was right to stress the importance of the representational role of local communities, which CHCs fulfil. It is the arrogant and soviet-style management of the NHS which is so abhorrent to many of our electors. There is the feeling that decisions are taken on high in Whitehall that

have no relationship to the situation in particular community areas. CHCs fulfil a crucial lightning-conductor role in trying to dissipate the feeling of impotence, fury and frustration within many local communities against decisions that they believe to be entirely wrongheaded and against their interests.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Wilkinson: No, I will not. I will amplify my point.

In the part of Middlesex that I represent, proposals have been imposed by the Government to move one of the best burns and plastic surgery units in the country from its present location at Mount Vernon hospital. To its credit, the CHC provided the impartial chairmanship of consultation meetings. It answered the questions and it sought to resolve the difficulties. Above all, it provided a mechanism, as it has for the proposed closure of Harefield hospital, for objections to be lodged with the Secretary of State, upon which he will have to make a decision. The crucial function of official objection is one which needs to be maintained. It gives the public at least some hope that they have an opportunity of redress against wrongheaded public policy.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) gave me the impression, with all his bluster, that he had been bought off politically. New clauses 9 and 10 may be verbose but they are not clear. Patients councils, which he is advocating, seem to offer a bureaucracy which gullible people might believe to be a genuine alternative to an effective system provided by CHCs, in which the public already have great confidence.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Will the hon. Gentleman explain the difference between what I have proposed and existing CHCs that have sub-committees? The only difference, as I see it, is independent advocacy and the title.

Mr. Wilkinson: I leave that judgment to the Secretary of State. If he and his Department are impressed with the proposals of the hon. Gentleman and his numerous friends who have similarly been bought off, the right hon. Gentleman will show himself to be more amenable to rational argument than he has in most of his direction of the NHS. I shall applaud the event. I am sure that some Labour Members will, too. However, I do not believe that it will happen, any more than I believe that I shall see pigs airborne tonight.

We have heard about local government being a forum within which complaints can be addressed. Usually, local people fail to regard local authorities as impartial. Instead, they regard them as party political institutions. Local government is not genuinely objective. The joint responsibility that it has with the NHS in the social services sector gives it a vested interest that CHCs do not possess.

We have heard, too, about the patient advocacy service. If patients are to have confidence and feel that their complaints are properly addressed, NHS hospitals need a clear line of command. There should be one chief executive, to whom complaints should be addressed. He should address them properly, answer them and meet any failings in the service with the necessary changes, and, if necessary, alterations of style and method of service. However, this does not happen.

All too many hospitals have a shared boss. In the part of London that I represent, one section of Mount Vernon, a major hospital, has, in essence, a head who is the boss of three other hospitals. How will that give confidence to patients? How does it give staff the authority to know to whom they should refer? It is a recipe for chaos. That is why even a patients advocacy service in a hospital is not the right mechanism. One wants a clear line of command, and the man or woman in charge at the top to take full responsibility for everything that goes on in the institution.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Does not the difference between existing practice and that advocated by Government Members as a replacement centre on the fact that the existing system is well tried and tested, well understood by many people and involves many good people who are already giving service? If it is working, why change it? If it ain't broke, why fix it? Is that not the difference between what my hon. Friend is proposing and what was proposed by Government Members?

Mr. Wilkinson: As so often, my hon. Friend is right, and he makes his point succinctly and clearly. I suspect that there is a malign motive: CHCs, by and large, do their job so well that they show up the deficiencies of the NHS and reflect the foolishness of many public policy decisions taken by the Government.

Mr. Dawson *rose—*

Mr. Wilkinson: I shall now give way to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson); I accept that I ought to have given way to him earlier.

Mr. Dawson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that CHCs are not powerful enough? They often end up making their point by shouting from the sidelines. Does he further accept that putting a representative from a patients forum on the board of every trust undermines all the pejorative remarks that he has made about the new system of representation?

Mr. Wilkinson: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely wise point, with which I have considerable sympathy. If he studied new clause 2, he would see that we propose that there should be 12 months from the enactment of the Bill for the Secretary of State to consider appropriate reform of CHCs. The Secretary of State would have time to get it right. The Government bounced abolition of CHCs on an unwitting public, with no consultation or prior notice.

Under subsection 4 of the new clause, the Secretary of State would be bound to

"provide for the proper representation of the population".

It is therefore essential that he appoints individuals with qualifications, impartiality and commitment to public service, which are all attributes that would give confidence to local communities and those whom they would represent. Last but not least, Parliament itself

[Mr. Wilkinson]

would have to consider whether proposed reform was wise. We would have to judge it, with debate on a statutory instrument giving effect to the proposed reform.

To conclude, the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre suggested that the CHCs were not powerful enough. As I said, I am sympathetic to that view. However, the problem also lies with Whitehall and Secretaries of State who believe that they know best. The official objections lodged against proposed changes to the NHS—such as the closure of Harefield hospital, to which my local CHC, along with Brent and Harrow, have lodged official objections—should be taken seriously by the Secretary of State and acted upon through modifications of policy and changes to bring public policy into line with the wishes of local communities. Because the Government seek to impose their will, Soviet-style, on local communities, there is frustration and a feeling of impotence, which can be best addressed by the retention of CHCs and their intelligent reform, as proposed by new clause 2 and the Opposition's related amendments.

Dr. Stoate: We have now had CHCs for about 25 years. Listening to Opposition Members, one would think that everything in the garden was rosy and that there was no cause for concern whatever. Even on the admission of Opposition Members who have spoken, the service provided by CHCs is at best patchy. There are some excellent ones: the CHC serving Dartford and Gravesham is a good one, and I have an excellent relationship with it. I have been a doctor for a long time and, time and again, I hear of cases in which CHCs have failed patients or been unable to help them in the required way. I shall give some examples.

CHCs have no role in primary care. Opposition Members talk about CHCs as if they were wonderful. However, although the Tories were in power for 18 years, they never addressed the fact that CHCs have no role at all in primary care. My practice is immune to CHC interference, which is illogical. If everything was so wonderful, why is performance so patchy, why do CHCs have no role in primary care and why are they unable to investigate when primary care services fail or when premises are substandard and patients consequently get a bad deal? That is an illogical situation.

There is no consistent advocacy role across the country. Some CHCs, including my own, provide an advocacy service. Others, however, do not. There is no requirement for them to do so, so patients in some parts of the country have no access to advocacy. If CHCs were uniformly wonderful, surely that sort of thing would be provided by all CHCs? Given that the Opposition were in power so long and did not address those issues, one wonders what was their understanding of what was going on in the community and the health service.

Mr. Burstow: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that he is making a case for reform to drive up standards to the best standard? Has he considered new clause 7, which my hon. Friends and I tabled, which specifically extends the role of CHCs to cover primary care and deal with advocacy?

Dr. Stoate: The hon. Gentleman makes valid points, and I agree with some of them. However, the bottom line is that doing nothing is not an option. For far too long, CHCs have provided a complacent service in some parts of the country, which has not worked. We need radical reform; how that reform is carried out is a subject for debate, and which proposals we accept are a legitimate concern for the House.

Making the advocacy service uniform across the country is the right way forward. Patient advocacy and liaison services, which will provide a point of contact in every hospital, are the right way forward. If wards are dirty or showers are not working, there will be somebody on site who can call the management to account then and there. Recently, the House heard how the mortuary in Bedford hospital had rusty hinges on its doors. PALS could pick up and sort out that kind of thing, avoiding some of the tragedies that have occurred. We have to have that radical reform.

It is equally important that we make sure that patients feel as if they are at the centre of the NHS. Although it is important that patients get a good deal, it is also important that they feel they are getting a good deal. In too many parts of the country, they do not feel that. The Government's proposals on patients forums go a long way towards dealing with that. However, there is clearly a problem.

Some patients and some people in the community feel that patients forums might be too close to the health authority, the trust or the local authority. The umbrella organisation—the patients council—suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) is surely the way forward. That could give a sense of overriding impartiality and independence, and would encompass all the reforms under one umbrella.

When I discussed the idea with members of my CHC earlier today, they were reassured by the proposal and think that it would go a long way towards addressing their legitimate concerns. I do not want to belittle CHCs. They have done a marvellous job, they are a well-intentioned group and they include some excellent people, but the service is not uniform. For far too long, patients have been sold short because they have not received the uniform, guaranteed level of service that they have a right to expect in the 21st century.

Opposition Members tell us that everything in the garden is rosy, when clearly it is not. They failed to address the problems for 18 years. *[Interruption.]* I do not mean the Liberal Democrats; I am referring to the previous Government. I believe that the Liberal Democrats have honourable intentions on the matter and I do not dismiss what they say. I do not believe that they have the right ideas, but I do not belittle what they do.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is the height of hypocrisy for the Conservatives to complain about postcode rationing, as they do so often in their rhetoric, when they are prepared to continue the system of community health councils which leads to that?

Dr. Stoate: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. Effectively, there is postcode rationing through CHCs. There are excellent ones in some parts of the country, and others that are unacceptably poor. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and I are asking the Government to consider how we could get the best of all worlds—

a truly uniform service under the umbrella of patients councils, which will ensure that patients get a good deal, wherever they live.

Mr. Fabricant: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman's rant, but he clearly has not read new clause 2. The Opposition recognise that everything in the garden is not rosy, despite what the hon. Gentleman says. That is why we propose in new clause 2 that there should be reform. He proposes throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Dr. Stoate: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening. That is precisely what I suggest we should not do. His party was in government for 18 years, and has finally come round to the idea that there ought to be reform. That is laughable. The Conservatives had a long time in which to do something, yet they did nothing. We are proposing radical reform and, more important, reform that brings benefits to patients, uniformity of service, an advocacy role and the guaranteed impartiality of the umbrella suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, which I hope Ministers will accept.

8.30 pm

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Let us start at the beginning and not lose sight of how the issue arose; perhaps then it would be proper to ask about the motivation behind the Government's summary decision to scrap community health councils.

There was a consultation exercise on the NHS, which was not well responded to. It is rumoured—we do not have the findings—that the few respondents who referred to CHCs generally did not know much about them. Let us consider why that might be. Although they were not originally expected to deal with complaints, CHCs have grown to be the body in which patients have confidence and which they trust to deal with their complaints, because CHCs are seen to be independent.

One of the reasons for the success of CHCs is that patients, who are often vulnerable at this stage, or their relatives, have been able to engage with them in trust, because CHCs have tended not to trumpet what they do. With their knowledge, expertise and volunteer spirit, CHCs have sought to resolve problems, and only when a resolution was not possible, after exhaustive efforts, were formal procedures initiated to take a complaint forward and ensure that it was properly resolved in accordance with the patient's rights.

It is not right to think that because CHCs are not generally known, they should be abolished. Surely a Government using the rhetoric—but not the substance—of meritocracy would look at the worth of CHCs, not seek to abolish them because they were not known.

I was more hopeful about what the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), would say, and I eagerly awaited his comments. I found his speech disappointing and not as dispassionate as I had hoped. It brought to mind Churchill's remark when he was told that there was a new hon. Member in the House called Mr. Bossom. He said, "Oh dear, poor man. Neither one thing, nor the other." That was very much my reaction to the speech of the Chairman of the Health Committee. It is not possible to argue for independence and at the same time to trumpet the potential benefits of structures whose purpose is to expose the difficulties of the very institutions of which they are part.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman is arguing that the existing structure of CHCs is independent. Does he understand the current make-up of CHCs, particularly the fact that one third of their members are members of local authorities? How would they monitor independently the work of future care trusts?

Mr. O'Brien: I hope that the hon. Gentleman would be surprised if I were not aware of the make-up of CHCs, as I have made a study of the subject. The members currently nominated by local authorities are in balance with the other interested parties on CHCs. One of the difficulties with the Government's proposals is that that balance would shift towards much more political involvement at local authority level. That is an important point to recognise, even if the Chairman of the Health Committee believes that the Government are proposing something different. Like him, I have had discussions with the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales. It was keen to support new clauses 9 and 10, but that support was expressed before the association had seen new clause 2. Today I had a meeting with CHC representatives who were specific about the fact that they regard new clause 2 as the better option and that they would prefer it to win through on Report.

The decision to abolish CHCs appeared shortly before the summer recess, tucked away in page 95 of the Government's NHS plan, in paragraph 10.35. It was a decision, not a proposal for consultation, and it had been made without any prior consultation. The staff of Chester and Ellesmere Port CHC and of Cheshire Central CHC came to see me almost immediately. They learned through the internet of the threat to their jobs and to what they realised were regarded as voluntary organisations. That is no way for any Government to handle the morale and expertise of people who have given dedicated service and who, above all, have demonstrated that they are in it not out of careerism, but to ensure that patients get the best out of the NHS. It was a ghastly shame on the workings of the Government that they informed CHC staff through the internet that their jobs were under threat.

Of course, the decision caused massive consternation. No prior consultation had taken place. I have had regular contact with my local CHCs, which are generally acknowledged to be excellent. However, I know that strong feelings have built up not only within them, as would have been expected—the decision has also been hugely controversial among patients and NHS staff who have found CHCs to be a worthwhile and important aspect of the broad delivery of health care services.

I raised the matter in Prime Minister's questions on 15 November last year. I asked the Prime Minister whether he was aware that his proposals to scrap community health councils were bitterly opposed. He answered:

"I am aware that there is bitter opposition, which is why the proposals are being consulted on."

He went on to say:

"It is precisely because we want to consult that we have issued the health plan. We will report back to the House in due course on the consultation."—[*Official Report*, 15 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 937.]

[Mr. O'Brien]

Surprise, surprise—I received a letter on the following Monday. It began with the words "Dear Stephen", which, surprisingly, appeared in the Prime Minister's handwriting. In the letter, the Prime Minister states:

"I thought it would be helpful if I clarified the nature of the consultation on which we are currently engaged"—

in relation to the abolition of CHCs. He goes on to state:

"Our proposals mean that Community Health Councils are to be abolished".

The letter continues for a further two pages, without adding anything of substance, but the Prime Minister concludes:

"This better describes the consultation I alluded to in my answer during Prime Minister's Question time."

It is important to put those matters on record.

The letter, which the Prime Minister's office placed in the Library, showed that despite all the claims about prior consultation, even the Prime Minister was caught out and had to correct the direct answer that he gave to me during Question Time.

I cannot tell the House how many calls, e-mails, faxes, letters and other representations I received from CHCs and others who were concerned about the issue in the days between the Prime Minister's answer on the Floor of the House and the day I received his letter. They were delighted to see that there was a chink of light after all and that CHCs might not be abolished. However, we found a few days later, when I received the letter, that that assurance had been cynically removed. I sought to question the Secretary of State for Health the following day—21 November—but he said that he would not give an answer. In my view, that was an outrage and a gross abuse of parliamentary accountability.

I was then fortunate enough to secure a debate on the matter in Westminster Hall. The debate had an unusually high attendance, but it was notable because it was well attended not only by Opposition Members, but by Labour Members. One displayed a touch of "careerismitis" during the debate, but none spoke in favour of the Government's decision—I wish that I could say "proposals", but I cannot. We were presented with a summary decision at the end of July last year.

Second Reading and a Committee stage have occurred to no avail, despite the strength of feeling that was expressed on the subject. It is fair to put it on record that, in terms of consultation and process, the proceedings constitute a travesty and a sham. The Government should be deeply ashamed of that. They owe an apology to the hard-working staff in CHCs across the country and to the volunteers and nominees from local authorities.

Mr. Hayes: Does my hon. Friend acknowledge that the sham continued this afternoon at Prime Minister's Question Time? Although the Prime Minister knew that we were considering the Bill later, he pretended at the Dispatch Box that consultation on the abolition of CHCs, not the new arrangements, was continuing. The sham went on. We heard weasel words from the Prime Minister, and weasel words from Dr. Stoate and other Labour Members.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman does not help the debate by using those terms, and he did not observe the forms of the House in the way in which he referred to another hon. Member.

Mr. O'Brien: I noted the Prime Minister's answer, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr Hayes) referred quite properly. The Prime Minister attempted to paint a picture of genuine consultation. It was claimed that consultation, as it is defined in English, would take place and that people could make representations, which would be taken into account when a decision was made. We know that such consultation has not occurred. The Government have already made their decision on the abolition of CHCs. The process has been a sham. The fact that we have reached that point reflects shame on the House

My constituency of Eddisbury is in south-west Cheshire, and it is important to note that in Cheshire, where genuinely good CHCs exist, local Labour Members of Parliament have been challenged in the press to state whether they support abolishing them. Notwithstanding a hiccup from the hon. Member for City of Chester (Ms Russell), who pulled back from issuing a specific press release, nothing has been heard. No attempt has been made to justify the Government's actions.

Representatives of CHCs who came to see us today are rightly proud of their service to local patients. They are proud not only of their knowledge and independence but of their lack of careerism. The Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales has rightly asked whether patients are better served by lapdogs or watchdogs. The association has earned a reputation for being a watchdog.

Trust and confidence are vital. The Government have the audacity to make a distinction in Wales. As it is a properly derogated matter, it has been decided to maintain CHCs in Wales. Why should England be different? We should all question CHCs' abolition in England.

The replacements could be more costly, more complicated and less trusted by vulnerable patients who need them. Ministers have said nothing to justify abolishing CHCs, to efface the shame of their lack of prior consultation or to show that they have listened. They have had the brass neck to resist all representations, logic and the need to retain trust and confidence. Let us hope against hope that, for once, this arrogant Government will stick their brass neck out far enough to accept that they have misjudged the matter, climb down with grace and support new clause 2.

8.45 pm

Mr. Denham: A patient-centred NHS is central to the vision that we set out in the NHS plan. Lip service has been paid for years to the idea of a patient-centred NHS, without bringing about any real change. As the NHS plan acknowledges, services are all too often not organised around the needs and lives of patients, and when things go wrong patients find inadequate safeguards and little help available to them.

During the consultation on the NHS plan, patients across the country complained that no one listened to them, that there was no one there when they needed help, and that there was no one to turn to for advice. Patients organisations stressed, throughout the consultation, that patients need to have real influence in every part of the

NHS. That is why, during our consultations on the NHS plan, we decided that there was a case for real change. The NHS plan set out radical proposals to strengthen the voice of patients in the NHS. It also sought to address the lack of democratic scrutiny at local level by involving local government elected councillors. The Bill introduces the legislative change to deliver the plan.

I want to make it clear that the starting point for the proposals was not—and still is not—the abolition of community health councils. We have designed a new system based on the need to increase and improve patient representation in the NHS. The functions of CHCs will be taken forward by new more powerful or more appropriate organisations. It is for that reason, and no other, that the plan proposed the abolition of CHCs. Some CHCs have undoubtedly done good work, given their limited structure and remit. However, that has too often depended on the undoubted merits of the individuals involved, rather than on the structures in which they were working. The case for radical reform has been made, and it is a case that cannot be answered with piecemeal changes.

Dr. Fox: Will the Minister answer a question that has often been asked during this debate? Was there any consultation with the CHCs about their potential abolition before the national plan was introduced?

Mr. Denham: Prior to the national plan, there was consultation with everybody who had an interest in the NHS. That included CHCs and patients. We introduced the plan in response to what patients said about what had happened to them, and about what they thought was available to them when things went wrong.

In the debate over the past few months, there have been three distinct voices. First, we heard the complacent and conservative voice of those who will not recognise the scale of the changes that need to be made if we are really going to put the patient's voice at the heart of the NHS. Those are the ones who advised us to tinker with this or that problem.

Secondly, we heard the voice of those who have suddenly discovered an interest in patients' rights that was never evident before. They are happy to jump on a bandwagon to make the Government look temporarily uncomfortable, without making a real commitment.

Thirdly, and more importantly, we have heard the constructive voice of those who have considered the Government's proposals, and asked whether the proposals are right and how they could be improved. This debate has involved many people inside and outside the House, and I welcome the contributions that my hon. Friends have made tonight. We should listen to that third voice.

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): I do not know whether my right hon. Friend received any Valentine cards today. I received one from some residents in Bexley, asking me to support their request for independent monitoring and independent advocacy in the national health service. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) would give a guarantee of such provisions?

Mr. Denham: I shall come to those amendments in just a moment. The issues that my hon. Friend mentions are very important.

I shall set out briefly what we shall put in place. There will be a patient advocacy and liaison service in every trust and primary care trust. Patients want someone to sort out their problems when things first go wrong, before they need to make a formal complaint. PALS are not a replacement for CHCs because that is a role that CHCs have never played. PALS will be a powerful part of each trust, but patients forums will have the power to ensure that PALS remain influential and effective.

There will be a patients forum for each trust, monitoring its work, inspecting premises, electing a non-executive director and reporting on the quality of patient services of each trust. The patients forums will also have the power to take action if PALS fail to provide an effective service. They will have independently appointed members, representative of individual patients, patients groups and carers organisations. Establishing a patients forum for every trust and PCT is key, because that will bring the voice of the patients to bear on the individual building blocks of the NHS—that is, on each chief executive, each medical director, each nursing director, each clinical governance lead.

We have also recognised the importance of co-operation by patients forums in each local area. One of our findings from consultation and debate was the need to institutionalise such co-operation. As a result of amendments, the Bill already supports the idea of joint committees between patients forums to enable that to happen. We have already made it clear that forums in each area should share administrative and professional support, so that expertise can be located in one place.

The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) take those issues a step further. I shall say more about that shortly, but first I want to say something about another issue, which was in the NHS plan and has been stressed throughout the consultation. We need an independent advocacy service for patients in every part of the country, because however good the system is in each trust things will go wrong and will not be sorted out, and someone will not then be able to rely on a part of the NHS to take them through the complaints procedure and ensure that they are looked after.

We are talking about a service that has never existed uniformly in the NHS. Some community health councils have provided it, but others have not. As we have made clear, we will ensure that independent advocacy services exist in every part of the country. That represents a major step forward in patient rights in the NHS, but my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield seeks to go further by enshrining it in the Bill.

The NHS has long lacked any democratic scrutiny at local level. The Bill provides for overview committees to scrutinise the service locally, and to scrutinise joint work between the NHS and local authorities, in exactly the same way as the work of local authorities is scrutinised.

I want to leave time for the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), so I shall be brief. During consultation, organisations stressed the need for a national body representing patients' interests—a body that could represent patients, while also supporting those whom we want to volunteer to serve on patients forums. We are already working on a study, instigated by patients organisations, on the best way to set up such a body.

From the outset, we have stressed our wish to ensure that the experience and expertise of CHC members and staff can be retained in the NHS. We expect local health

[Mr. Denham]

communities to help CHC staff to find new employment. As I think my speech should make clear, in future there will be more rather than fewer opportunities to work in patient empowerment and scrutiny in and around the NHS than there are at present, backed up by our commitment of an additional £10 million of investment—a sum that builds on the funds already available for CHCs.

What we have already done has greatly strengthened the voice of patients in the NHS. The Opposition amendments tie us to a system that, however hard people have worked, is not right for the modern NHS. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield has raised an important point. We have already said—indeed, we have said it in the Bill—that patients forums should work together; my hon. Friend says we should go further and legislate for a patients council capable of facilitating the co-ordination of the work of patients forums as well as other functions.

I think that the case has been made very clearly that there are people whose problems begin in primary care, continue in the ambulance trust and end up in the hospital trust, perhaps then returning to primary care in a long stay context. We need co-ordination across the system. My hon. Friend is, I think, right to want the Bill to include provision for a patients forum.

I have said that we will provide a common secretariat to support patients in each area. Amendment No. 26 would enshrine that responsibility in the Bill and extend it to providing support for the patients councils. That would ensure that the new organisations had a coherent structure at local level.

Although we have made this commitment from the outset, a case has been made that it would be a big step forward to include—for the first time in the 50 or more years since the NHS was founded—the provision of independent advocacy in NHS legislation. New clause 10 will do just that. It also places a responsibility on the Secretary of State to consult with interested bodies, but particularly with patients councils, on the best location of those services.

Nevertheless, although we accept the amendments in this group tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), which will enable us to create a better structure, much of the necessary action is not purely legislative. We must have clear signposting to the new advocacy services. Additionally, the telephone number, like that for NHS Direct, should be the same in every part of the country so that people are routed to the service.

I have again set out our proposals and stated very clearly how we have already responded to the issues raised in consultation. I have also dealt with and accepted the new clauses and amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. I know that the hon. Member for Woodspring would now like to reply to the debate.

Dr. Fox: I am so grateful for the crumbs that the Minister has seen fit to leave the Opposition to reply to the debate.

Very many questions remain completely unanswered. Despite repeatedly asking the Minister, we still do not know how much the new system will cost. We still do not really know what will happen to CHC staff and to CHC medical records. CHCs keep a huge amount of confidential information. Will that be returned to patients doctors or go to hospital trusts? What about cases in which patients have complained about those very hospitals or trusts? Who owns the information and where will it go?

The Government's approach of abolition is illogical. As the Minister and some Labour Members said, some CHCs are excellent. An argument made repeatedly today by Opposition Members is that we have to bring the standards of the poorest up to those of the best. If it is possible for CHCs in some parts of the country to be excellent and to provide the standards and services that many hon. Members and very many members of the public claim they offer, that should be an argument for reform.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said—he quoted it himself today—that the abolition of CHCs and scrutiny were an "afterthought" in the Government's plan. I am sure that most hon. Members agree that if his new clauses are accepted, that would diminish the damage that would be done by the Government's original proposals. However, I am sorry that he did not throw his considerable weight in the House behind new clause 2 and fight for proper reform of CHCs.

The hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) said that the provision is just an extra tier on top of the Government's proposals, and I have much sympathy with that comment. It certainly means more complexity and a more labyrinthine structure. I wonder about the whole concept of a single point of access. As was mentioned in the debate, what about a patient who, in a single episode of illness, has several complaints about different bodies? Where is his or her single point of entry to the system? I am not sure that the new clauses tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield identify that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) described local examples of CHCs working well and the need for reform. My hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) started the ball rolling with his exposé of the Prime Minister's cynical use of the term "consultation". He gave the House a very good example of how the culture of this Government operates.

It is sad that the Labour Back Benchers who spoke at length on Second Reading about their opposition to the principle of abolishing CHCs have been absent from this debate. Notably missing have been those Labour Members who have been going around Westminster telling us privately how much they hate the Government's proposals. We did not hear much from them in the debate.

It has been a genuinely sorry tale. There has been a refusal to apologise for claiming consultation when there was none, and a refusal to be properly accountable to those who are most involved—the CHCs. Despite knowing that he was going to change the system at the end of this debate, the Prime Minister refused to give a straight answer to straight questions at Prime Minister's questions today. The Minister could not even give us a straight answer to the straightest question of all—was there consultation with the CHCs before their abolition was announced in the national plan? If they were thirsty, they could not ask for water.

New clause 2 does not tie us to a failed system; the only thing it ties anyone to is reform. The new clause would bring the standard of the poorest up to that of the

best. We did not want CHCs to be abolished. We will continue to fight to thwart the Government's plans beyond this House in the other place, so that these proposals go into the general election—

It being Nine o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *proceeded to put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The House divided: Ayes 163, Noes 301.

Division No. 125] **[9 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek

Foulkes, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Don Touhig and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With the leave of the House, I shall put together new clauses 9 and 10.

New Clause 9

PATIENTS' COUNCILS

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall by regulations provide for the establishment of bodies to be known as Patients' Councils (referred to in this section as "Councils") the members of which are to be appointed in each case by two or more Patients' Forums.

(2) The regulations shall provide for determining—

(a) the Patients' Forums by which the members of a Council are to be appointed, and

(b) the area in relation to which the functions of a Council are exercisable.

(3) The functions of a Council are—

(a) to facilitate the co-ordination by member Forums of their activities;

(b) to make reports to health authorities, local authorities and their committees and to the Secretary of State in accordance with the regulations;

(c) to carry out such arrangements as may be made with the Council under section 19A of the 1977 Act (independent advocacy services);

(d) such other functions as the regulations may prescribe.

(4) The "member Forums" of a Council are the Patients' Forums by which its members are for the time being appointed.'.

New Clause 10

INDEPENDENT ADVOCACY SERVICES

'. After section 19 of the 1977 Act there shall be inserted—

19A.—(1) It is the duty of the Secretary of State to arrange, to such extent as he considers necessary to meet all reasonable requirements, for the provision of independent advocacy services.

(2) "Independent advocacy services" are services providing assistance (by way of representation or otherwise) to individuals making or intending to make—

(a) a complaint under a procedure operated by a health service body or independent provider,

(b) a complaint to the Health Service Commissioner for England or the Health Service Commissioner for Wales,

(c) a complaint of a prescribed description which relates to the provision of services as part of the health service and

(i) is made under a procedure of a prescribed description, or

(ii) gives rise, or may give rise, to proceedings of a prescribed description.

(3) In subsection (2)—

"health service body" means a body which, under section 2(1) or (2) of the Health Service Commissioners Act 1993, is subject to investigation by the Health Service Commissioner for England or the Health Service Commissioner for Wales;

"independent provider" means a person who, under section 2B(1) or (2) of that Act, is subject to such investigation.

(4) The Secretary of State may make such other arrangements as he thinks fit for the provision of assistance to individuals in connection with complaints relating to the provision of services as part of the health service.

(5) In making arrangements under this section the Secretary of State must have regard to the principle that the provision of services under the arrangements should, so far as practicable, be independent of any person who is the subject of a relevant complaint or is involved in investigating or adjudicating on such a complaint.

(6) Before making arrangements under this section in respect of complaints relating to the provision of any services, the Secretary of State shall consult—

(a) any relevant Patients' Council, and

(b) such other persons as he considers appropriate.

(7) A Patients' Council is, for the purposes of subsection (6)(a), a relevant Council if the services concerned are ones to which functions of a member Forum of the Council relate.

(8) The Secretary of State may make payments to any person in pursuance of arrangements under this section.".'.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clauses be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 335, Noes 124.

Division No. 126] **[9.17 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin

Livsey, Richard
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Touhig and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arness, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Clauses read a Second time, and added to the Bill.
Question put, That the remaining Government amendments and amendments Nos. 24 to 26 be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 338, Noes 118.

Division No. 127] **[9.31 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive

Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Don Touhig and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Luff and
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Order for Third Reading read.

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Minister to speak on Third Reading, I should announce that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you think it adequate for the mother of Parliaments to give a Third Reading of just 15 minutes to an important Bill?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It must be adequate because I am proceeding according to the rules of the House. I call the Minister to speak.

9.46 pm

Mr. Denham: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Had the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) been here earlier, he would have heard his colleagues argue that an hour was far too long to spend on Third Reading of a Bill of this sort. The House would welcome a little bit of co-ordination by Opposition Members.

As we approach the end of the Commons stage on the Bill, I want to make a few points. The Bill is vital to implement the NHS plan. As a Government, we inherited a fragmented and under-resourced NHS; buildings were crumbling and there were too few staff. We have already acted to end the internal market, to get the biggest ever hospital building programme under way, to set up primary care groups and trusts and to expand the training of staff. We are now seeing unprecedented investment in the NHS which, however, must be investment for modernisation. The measures in the Bill make sure that that will happen.

First, it is a decentralising and devolving Bill, which underpins the principle of earned autonomy for the best run parts of the health service, together with the principles of less performance management and greater financial freedom. It gives new powers to the NHS and local councils to work together at local level. They already have partnership powers; now they have the ability to create new joint organisations and a new level of partnership to provide a seamless care service for the elderly, the mentally ill and children. Those powers have been widely welcomed and sought. Unfortunately, not all right hon. and hon. Members have taken a close interest in the Bill, but it is no less important for that.

Dr. Lynne Jones: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Denham: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I should like to make a little progress.

As we have just discussed, the Bill provides more power for patients and increased democratic local scrutiny. It also enables us to tackle variations. The best of the NHS is extremely good, but the variations in the service are too wide. As we develop earned autonomy for the best parts of the system, we have more effective means to support and intervene in any part of the system in which performance is poor or trusts are failing. The Bill underlines the new performance management system and the performance fund that will be worth £250 million in two or three years' time. It gives us the power, if needed as a last resort, to tackle failing trusts.

The Bill gives us the power to tackle variations in primary care. The new unified budget will make it easier for health authorities to determine the expansion of GP numbers, attract more GPs to deprived areas and enable them to work in better premises. The Bill makes possible a new partnership to invest £1 billion in primary care premises and one-stop primary centres, starting in deprived areas. It therefore helps our commitment to tackle health inequalities.

The Bill also enables us to protect the quality of patient services. All GPs will be on health authority lists; there will be a new system of suspension, removal and appeal which means that, in the small number of cases in which it is needed, there will be a faster and more effective system to safeguard patients and a fairer system for GPs. It enables us to honour the agreement with the British Medical Association that, as GPs move on to lists, all of them will be able to join the NHS pension scheme. It will take some months to get the lists into place, but our aim is to backdate them to April this year. We rightly extend the list system to other health professionals.

The Bill protects patients and improves the quality of care in other ways, for example, by ensuring tight controls over the use of patient information and by enabling patients to have more information about their own personal care. The Bill backs innovation: it provides for new ways of providing pharmaceutical services, establishes new groups of health professionals able to prescribe prescription drugs, and creates new powers to ensure that the NHS can benefit properly and fairly from its own research and innovation.

The Bill brings new fairness to health care for the elderly. For the first time ever, NHS nursing care will be free wherever it is delivered. It ends the means test of health care in nursing homes. That is a huge step forward, which goes with the investment by 2004–05 of £1 billion in new and improved health and social care services for the elderly.

That means turning our back on Tory privatisation, on the cuts that they promised in social care, and on the cuts that they promised in health care to make up for the money that they would not raise from tobacco, and the money that they would waste on subsidising private health insurance. It reverses Tory plans to make people pay for hip operations, knee operations, cataract operations and hernias. It is an important Bill, which underpins the Government's commitment to the long-term future and modernisation of the NHS.

9.50 pm

Dr. Fox: I begin by correcting the first of a remarkable list of inaccuracies in the Minister's speech. He said that we did not want as much time as was allocated for Third Reading. The point that we made at the beginning of the day was that we had very little time for all the remaining stages of the Bill, including the Government's new clauses and more than 120 amendments. It is a sad reflection on the new procedure in the House that we have been able to give so little consideration to the remaining stages. The one correct thing that the Minister said was that the Bill was extremely important.

The Bill must be judged by whether it will improve the overall health care in this country and the running of the national health service. Almost any medical or nursing group that we speak to throughout the country speaks about morale in the NHS being at an all-time low, more people leaving the service than ever before, more doctors taking early retirement than ever before—

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is talking down the NHS again.

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady says that I am talking the service down. Her Government have been in charge of the NHS for the past four years. More people are leaving the service than ever before. That is one thing for which she cannot blame the previous Government. This is the fourth winter that the Government have been in control of the health service, where morale among staff is clearly very poor. I wonder when the Government will take responsibility for anything that they are getting wrong.

Increased numbers of people are waiting to be treated in the service. The Government talk about the number by which they have reduced the in-patient waiting list. The Minister deprecates the private sector, but it is worth pointing out that since the Government came to office, 450,000 people have left the waiting list of their own volition to purchase treatment in the private sector with their savings. Had it not been for people being forced to use their savings by the waiting times overseen by the Government, the waiting lists would have risen by even more than they have.

Notwithstanding that huge reduction, as a result of the fact that people have been willing to pay, often for life-saving treatments, with their life savings, the total number of patients waiting in our system has gone up, if one adds together the in-patients and the waiting list for the waiting list, which has soared since the Government came to power.

Perhaps worse than that are the distorted priorities in the system. In the short time available to me, I will not go over the catalogue of horrors that we have heard in recent debates and which have been raised in the House during Question Time. When surgeons are asked to cancel waiting lists for surgery for cancer patients so that they can treat more minor cases, we must wonder about the ethical basis for our system. Under the Government's bizarre and distorted waiting list initiative, we have reached the point when we are debating whether to treat the sickest patients first. That is the background to the debate, and the level of distortion that now exists in the system.

Ministers have failed to tackle the most important thing of all—not the number of patients waiting, but what the service does. There is nothing in the Bill about outcome-based targets for a system and a country that has just slipped behind Turkey in life expectancy—down to 19th place in the world. In many priority areas, the NHS

[Dr. Fox]

fails to deliver outcomes that we might rightfully expect for the fourth wealthiest nation in the world, yet patients with in-growing toe nails and impacted wisdom teeth are being removed from the waiting list simply to make the figures look better for Ministers. That is a disgraceful way to run a service.

Against that background, we are faced with the NHS plan and the Bill. The NHS plan is not a plan in the sense in which most people would understand that word. It is more of a wish list, as we see when we consider some of its particular aspects and scrutinise them in detail. Such aspects include the number of staff required. Medical bodies such as the British Medical Association and the royal colleges tell us not only that the Bill does nothing for the provision of staff, but that the numbers are greatly underestimated in the first place.

The Minister tells us that the Bill is a decentralising measure. He has many talents, but he has only recently turned his hand to comedy. The Bill could not be described as decentralising by any stretch of the imagination. It will reinforce all the micro-management tendencies of the current Government, who genuinely believe that a service that employs a million people can be managed from behind a single Minister's desk in Whitehall. There is constant interference with management and the Department is continually distributing circulars that make it impossible for anyone to set budgets for any length of time and which force those in NHS management to go chasing after packets of money for which they must compete by investing huge amounts of their time and energy. We need depoliticisation and decentralisation, but the Bill gives us increased centralisation.

That is not to say that the Opposition do not welcome some parts of the Bill. We welcome the extension of nursing care, which the Minister mentioned. We also welcome proper control of locums. From my personal experience, I think that that is long overdue in the NHS. We do not pretend for a minute that every aspect of the Bill is undesirable, but three major issues make it completely unpalatable.

The first issue is the abolition of community health councils, which we have recently addressed. Let me make the Opposition's position perfectly clear. We think that the new clauses introduced on Report will reduce the damage caused by the abolition of CHCs, but we do not accept them because we do not accept that policy. We will continue to press for retention and reform of CHCs as the Bill proceeds through the House of Lords. I believe that we will have the support of Liberal Democrats in the other place in carrying that process forward. There is no doubt that the abolition of CHCs is a completely unacceptable policy, as it removes an independent voice for patients, as well as their ability to use a single point of access into the system.

None of the questions that we asked earlier were answered. We had no answer about cost or about what would happen to the staff or to confidential information. We have debated the ownership and confidentiality of patient information, and have considered where it should rest. A huge volume of information about patients is contained in the records of CHCs throughout the country. Having spent time debating those matters, however, we have reached Third Reading and we do not yet know where that information will go. As it may contain complaints about specific doctors or hospitals, it could potentially return to those doctors or hospitals.

Mr. David Maclean (Penrith and The Border): My hon. Friend's point about CHCs worries us all, but what concerns the doctors and surgeons in my constituency and those of other Opposition Members is the fact that the Government are taking away their clinical freedom. Will he give an absolute assurance that after the election, when he is in charge of health policy and the Conservative party is in government, the distorted priorities imposed from the centre by Labour Ministers will be swept away and doctors will have the freedom to treat the sickest first?

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I beg to move the amendment standing in the name of Liberal Democrat Members.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot allow that on a point of order. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) is on his feet and has the Floor.

Dr. Fox: At least two hon. Members who have spoken today would benefit from reading "Erskine May". You mentioned one earlier, Mr. Speaker; I offer you another candidate.

I give my right hon. Friend the Member for Penrith and The Border (Mr. Maclean) the assurance that he seeks. In a few months, when the electorate have decided that they need a change of Government, we shall return to a system of proper clinical priorities that treats the sickest patients first.

Another unacceptable aspect of the Bill is the interventionism in hiring and firing trust board members, and the ability of the Secretary of State to set terms and conditions of employment. That will allow greater manipulation of and further controls over information for which clause 62 provides. The Secretary of State will be able to perform unacceptable actions, including publishing patient information if he chooses to do that.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [7 November and this day].*

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 168.

Division No. 128] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Bennett, Andrew F
Benton, Joe
Bermingham, Gerald
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen

Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Ms Roseanna *(Perth)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Mrs Fiona *(Newark)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Eddie
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Mrs Diana
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter L
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Kevin Hughes and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Ashdown, Rt Hon Paddy
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie

Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and
Mr. Peter Luff.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

AGRICULTURE

That the Pig Industry Restructuring (Capital Grant) Scheme 2001 (S.I., 2001, No. 251) dated 1st February 2001, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.

( ) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

( ) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Community Transport Schemes

10.17 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I am grateful for the chance to present a petition on behalf of more than 2,000 of my constituents. It was collected on the streets of Thornbury and Yate and in the *Gazette* newspaper on behalf of the community transport schemes in my area. Community transport schemes have been a great success in recent years, but they are now threatened and could cease within months.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of the citizens of South Gloucestershire sheweth:

the great value which is attached to the work of South Gloucestershire Community Transport schemes.

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House will take such measures as lie within its power to end the uncertainty over their future funding and to make an immediate commitment to supporting such schemes over the long term.

And your petitioners, as in Duty bound, will ever pray etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Endometriosis

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

10.18 pm

Mr. John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): It is a cruel irony that the subject of endometriosis has been timetabled for debate today, on St. Valentine's day. It is ironic because, for many women sufferers of endometriosis, lovemaking can be extremely painful. It is cruel because, for some women, the condition prevents them from bearing the children they so lovingly wish for. I have sought this debate to draw attention to a condition that not only has heart-rending consequences, but is underestimated in its incidence and effects; under-publicised, resulting in widespread ignorance of its symptoms among women and general practitioners alike; and under-resourced, leading to delays in diagnosis, inappropriate treatment and a postcode lottery for patients seeking to gain access to the relevant expertise.

What is endometriosis? It is probably one of the most complex gynaecological conditions, and it is the second most common such condition. It occurs when the endometrium—the cells that line the interior of the uterus—are found in other parts of the body. The endometrium is most commonly misplaced on the outside of the uterus, on the Fallopian tubes, the ovaries, the bowel, the peritoneum—the lining of the pelvis—and elsewhere, usually in the pelvis. Cyclical bleeding of these fragments can lead to chronic pelvic pain and the formation of adhesions and cysts. The symptoms are known to vary widely. This affects the ability to diagnose the condition because of the similarity with the symptoms of other diseases. Symptoms associated with endometriosis include: dysmenorrhoea, or painful bleeding; chronic pelvic pain; deep dyspareunia, or painful sexual intercourse; and infertility.

A recent study by the Northern Endometriosis Centre found that endometriosis causes both disturbing local symptoms and also profound effects on the general health, personal life and well-being of sufferers. Apart from the physical manifestations of this condition, the chronic pain suffered by its victims can place strain on the woman's relationships and career.

A survey by the National Endometriosis Society conducted last year asked whether endometriosis had ever affected women's employment. Some 65 per cent. said yes; 30 per cent. had not been able to keep the same job and 16 per cent. had stopped working. The cost to the economy has yet to be calculated, but must run into hundreds of millions of pounds.

The causes of endometriosis are not known for certain. However, there are several theories, including retrograde menstruation; metaplasia theory, or incorrect cell development; vascular theory, under which endometriosis tissue may travel through the bloodstream; and immune theory, linking the condition to an immune dysfunction. As diagnosis can only be confirmed surgically, it is difficult to establish accurate figures for the incidence of this condition in the UK.

The organisation Women's Health UK suggests that between 3 and 10 per cent. of women have endometriosis. For women having difficulty conceiving, the figure rises to between 25 and 35 per cent. As more diagnoses are

[Mr. John McDonnell]

occurring, we are having to revise our estimates upwards. It is now suggested that between 1.5 million and 2 million women suffer from endometriosis, giving an average of between 500 and 2,000 sufferers in every constituency.

The NES survey demonstrated that, contrary to past belief, the age range of sufferers is across all ages, but there is a high incidence among young women. Some 17 per cent. of endometriosis sufferers were found to be under 16, and 35 per cent. were in the age range of 20 to 29.

The diagnosis of endometriosis is difficult. Its variable presentation and its overlap with other conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome and pelvic inflammatory disease has contributed to an average eight-year delay between onset and a surgical diagnosis in the UK. For some, the time between onset and diagnosis can be decades.

The surgical procedure of laparoscopy is the standard diagnostic test, but non-invasive diagnostic methods such as ultrasound and magnetic resonance imaging have also become available.

The choice of treatment depends on a number of factors, such as the woman's age and her fertility plans, previous treatments and their effects and the nature and severity of the disease. The most common medical approach is the continuous use of oral contraception. Other approaches include the use of androgen-like drugs and the use of analogues.

Although all these treatments have been shown to provide some control of mild or minimal disease, they each carry a side-effect profile. It is clear that moderate and severe endometriosis cannot be managed by drug therapy alone. For these sufferers, surgery becomes the preferred option. Minimal surgery is commonly by laser. Other forms used are cauterisation, ablation and excision. In the most extreme cases it may be necessary to remove the uterus, ovaries and Fallopian tubes in order to remove all the active disease. Tragically, a significant proportion of women who undergo radical surgery report the recurrence of symptoms.

Given the extent of this condition and the potential severity of its effects, there is a need for a comprehensive programme to address the needs of endometriosis sufferers. For too long there has been no comprehensive response to the disease. Local planning, campaigning and pressure have not contributed to an overall approach—only to a limited approach in particular geographical areas. If men were suffering in this way, I doubt whether we would need today's debate.

First, we need to tackle the level of ignorance about this condition. Widespread ignorance of the condition and its symptoms results in women delaying their first consultation with their general practitioner or health practitioner. In the NES survey, women were asked whether, when they first experienced the symptoms, they thought they were normal. A staggering 46 per cent. said yes; they accepted the pain that came with the condition almost without question. When asked whether they suspected that they might have endometriosis before they sought medical help, 81 per cent. of women said no. That is a reflection of the lack of awareness of the condition, and of the lack of information disseminated about it. When women were asked where they had gained the information about the condition, 54 per cent. said that they had discovered the information from the media, and only 8 per cent. said they had found out from official sources, medical leaflets, and so on.

Unfortunately, some women's conditions are still veiled in stigma, and this condition can be one. It can lead to difficulties of disclosure, anxieties and distress, especially among girls and young women. We need a national programme to raise awareness among the general public and among women of all ages, but especially among young women and girls. That would also assist in identifying the needs of women from the range of cultures that make up our multicultural society today. In raising awareness among the general public, we must also facilitate early diagnosis and more effective treatment.

The National Endometriosis Society survey found that in only 9 per cent. of cases was the condition diagnosed when a sufferer first went to her doctor and discussed the symptoms. It found that 43 per cent. of women received a non-gynaecological diagnosis, usually of irritable bowel syndrome or appendicitis. A further 11 per cent. were told that they were suffering from painful periods, and 15 per cent. were told that there was nothing wrong.

We desperately need a new initiative to reduce delays in diagnosis and ensure that GPs are more informed about recognising the disease. That could be done by featuring the condition more prominently in medical training, and by emphasising it in in-service training and in information provided to GPs.

Greater recognition needs to be given to specialists already working in this field, but we also need to establish a wider base of expertise among primary carers. That could be an ideal area in which to develop the proposals in the Government's NHS plan for the training of GP specialists. Mentoring could be provided by consultant specialists in particular hospitals around the country, and it might be possible to use distance learning to develop the specialism among those working in the field.

Although some of the world's leading researchers and clinicians in this condition work in this country, access to treatment can depend on which GP a woman encounters and on the area in which she lives. Often, our limited NHS resources are wasted by inappropriate treatments and diagnostic delays.

The NES survey asked sufferers which treatments the GP recommended after their first visit. It found that 47 per cent. were given pain killers, 32 per cent. were provided with non-endometriosis-relevant treatment, and 22 per cent. were prescribed an oral contraceptive—which at least went some way towards some form of treatment. A further 9 per cent. were given antibiotics, while 7 per cent. were recommended to get pregnant and 16 per cent. were given nothing. Among those who saw a specialist regarding their symptoms, 32 per cent. saw a non-endometriosis specialist first, and 25 per cent. of sufferers saw a gynaecologist only after having seen two other specialists. The survey found that 54 per cent. of sufferers were told that there was nothing wrong with them before they were diagnosed.

Those terribly stark statistics demand a response. We need a systematic approach to treating this condition. That should include support and ring-fenced funding for the development of a network of national centres of excellence for endometriosis, capable of providing a range of treatments. We also need a review of the specialist referral procedures to ensure equity of access across the country.

Endometriosis is not an acute disease that generally disappears with treatment. Most women with endometriosis suffer in the long term. It may not be a life-threatening disease, but many sufferers will say that it can destroy a woman's life, and her family life.

Endometriosis sufferers and their families need greater support in coping with, and managing, the condition. The NES has been successful in developing techniques for support and in running self-management courses for endometriosis victims, but that superb provision is limited by lack of funds.

The national society provides a comprehensive range of services to address the unmet needs of patients, and its services are used about 100,000 times a year. It does all that on a shoe-string budget of £200,000. Most of those funds are raised by charitable donation, with limited grants from the Government.

We need to launch a fresh initiative to support the NES in promoting self-management schemes for women with endometriosis, led by lay people. That would follow the Government's lead in placing greater emphasis on patient-centred approaches to illness. At present, endometriosis sufferers feel that they are not at the centre of care, but on the circumference.

It is feared that, as national frameworks for the treatment of acute conditions are rolled out, because endometriosis is not life-threatening it will be ignored. That situation will be reflected in the pharmaceutical industry's priorities in researching and developing other forms of treatment. The severity of the pain of endometriosis sufferers and the scale of suffering by the vast number of women affected means that there is a strong argument for developing a national framework for the treatment of the condition as a matter of urgency.

Is the Minister willing to meet me, a group of my parliamentary colleagues and representatives from the NES to discuss how we might take forward that programme of support for endometriosis sufferers? The issue is too important to too many women for us to ignore their pain. Later this year, on Wednesday 4 July, we will be organising a lobby of Parliament as part of an endometriosis awareness day. At that time I hope that we will be able to report a record of action to give hope to sufferers of this debilitating condition.

Finally, I want to thank and pay tribute to three women. Candice Pires is a brilliant young woman who researched the report that I published on this subject last year. If I can convince her about the future of socialism, I hope that one day she will use her talents in the Chamber. Angela Barnard, from the NES, has doggedly and with courage, determination and commitment ensured that the issue will not be ignored. My constituent Tracey Holliday has, throughout the pain of her condition, worked hard to support other sufferers and to develop the campaign for recognition of the need for the Government to act. Without them, we would not have had the opportunity of this debate tonight. I give them this undertaking: we will not let them down.

10.32 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (Mr. McDonnell) on securing this debate on endometriosis services. This is a subject in which I know he has a great personal interest and to which he is devoting considerable time and energy, and I welcome that. I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to reply to the debate because this is a complex and often ill-understood disease that affects many thousands of women in this country.

Endometriosis is the second most common gynaecological condition in this country, and it affects up to about 2 million women. It is estimated that between 3 and 10 per cent. of women aged between 15 and 45 have endometriosis. In women who have difficulty conceiving, the rate rises to between 25 and 35 per cent.

My hon. Friend has ably described endometriosis and its effects. It is a condition that remains with a woman intermittently throughout the reproductive years of her life. For many women, the continuing recurrent pain and other symptoms make life difficult or even intolerable. The condition can have lasting effects on a woman's self-image, sexuality and fertility. The widespread effects are felt not only by the woman herself but by family and friends trying to cope with the problems that can result. We should not underestimate the importance of endometriosis and the effects that it has on so many people.

Outdated ideas about who is likely to have endometriosis are unfortunately still common. There remains a belief in some quarters that it is the illness of goal-oriented career women over the age of 30. That misconception has now been well and truly disproved. Women in their 20s are increasingly coming forward with endometrial symptoms, and the condition is being diagnosed and treatment offered. The sooner the condition is diagnosed and treated, the better, because that can prevent women from experiencing unnecessary suffering and developing more complex problems that will need more radical treatment.

Endometriosis is not always easy to diagnose because it can mimic or even accompany other causes of abdominal pain. That leads to many women facing uncomfortable, difficult and frustrating delays in diagnosis. Laparoscopy is the only sure way of diagnosing endometriosis. Often in the past, and even today, the pain experienced by sufferers has been dismissed as psychological, while the damage to the pelvic organs continues from the condition.

It is important that at all stages of treatment, medical practitioners discuss the disease and possible treatments fully with the patient. It is vital that each woman understands the options for treatment and understands and agrees with the way in which the condition is handled.

Treatment options can include management of symptoms, medical management of the disease, conservative surgery and radical surgery. Most drug treatments for endometriosis are based on suppressing ovarian activity and hormone release, which abolishes a woman's normal cycle. Generally, such treatments can only suppress endometriosis. I know that many women have found some improvement in their symptoms through using complementary therapies.

For more limited surgery, minimally invasive surgical techniques are increasingly used, allowing a woman to be up and about much sooner following the operation. The radical treatment for endometriosis is a hysterectomy. However, that is appropriate only for women who have completed their families or in cases in which the disease is showing itself in a particularly severe form.

[Yvette Cooper]

With hysterectomy, it is vital that a woman feels psychologically prepared for the impact of such a radical move.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists has produced guidelines on the investigation and management of endometriosis. The guidelines bring together the latest knowledge and best practice, based on clinical evidence of the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis. They also examine options for treatment in the light of presenting symptoms and associated infertility. The guidelines have been distributed to all the royal college's fellows and members, and I welcome that piece of work.

My hon. Friend has raised a series of concerns, issues and proposals. I will be happy to discuss them with him and with any delegation that he chooses to bring. There are many areas in which we could have a positive and constructive discussion about some of his proposals.

My hon. Friend referred to increasing awareness among women about endometriosis. Work on that is already done through the National Endometriosis Society. The Department of Health funds the society by giving it a grant to help with its core costs, and a further grant for employing an information officer. The NES is a long-standing, effective organisation that can target information about endometriosis at relevant audiences. We look forward to continuing the close working relationship with the society over the range of its activities, including raising awareness of this serious condition.

There may be other areas that we can explore. There are, for example, new ways of making information available. A section on endometriosis is now included on the NHS website and there may be other ways, particularly using new technology, that could help to raise awareness. However, I recognise that as we use new technology to raise awareness, we must also be conscious of the limitations that it can have in reaching all parts of society. We must ensure that our means of communication do not perpetuate inequalities.

My hon. Friend mentioned improving the awareness and training of general practitioners. I should certainly be interested to discuss that issue further with him. Options in that respect may include taking advantage of the new technologies, such as the electronic health library. This may be an area in which more work can be done. My hon. Friend will be aware that the NHS plan sets out proposals to expand continuing support and training for doctors and general practitioners across the board. This is certainly an aspect that we would be interested in considering further.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is undertaking the referral practice project on advice to GPs about referring common conditions. Endometriosis is not included in the project, but the results of the project may give us a guide on an effective way of offering referral guidance to GPs on a range of common conditions including endometriosis. That may be another area to explore.

My hon. Friend raised issues about increased specialisation, especially as regards centres of excellence. When we meet, I should be interested to hear further from him on that subject, although I express a note of caution: given that endometriosis is so prevalent, managing and treating it should be part of the routine work of every gynaecology department. We want every area to use the evidence-based approach, to ensure that gynaecologists are following the guidelines issued by their governing body, the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

My hon. Friend referred to the importance of a patient-centred approach. That is crucial. Right across the board, patients, rightly, expect to receive more information about their health. The NHS must provide that; it must respond to that expectation. It is not enough to leave the provision of information about medical conditions to voluntary organisations and support groups. It is essential that the NHS—whether through consultants, GPs or specialist nurses—can provide patients with the support and information that they need about their condition.

Individual patients need proper discussion of the problems from which they are suffering and of the options that are available. That patient-centred approach and self-management are very much part of the new NHS plan and the work going on at present. Endometriosis is a good example of a condition where that approach can work effectively to the patient's benefit. There are a variety of options for treatment of the condition, but the right treatment will be that which suits a particular woman's own condition and needs. That will be achieved only by the woman discussing her needs fully with her doctor.

There may be further work on self-management which could be pursued. Work is continuing on expert patients groups—supporting patients to help them to manage their own conditions. That may be another aspect that could be developed to provide support for women who suffer from endometriosis.

I welcome the points made by my hon. Friend. I look forward to discussing them further with him and with any delegation that he chooses to bring. More can be done. The RCOG guidelines and the work already under way have improved matters for women suffering from endometriosis. Decades ago, the condition was often less recognised and sufferers experienced many difficulties in having their condition taken seriously; there has certainly been an improvement since then, but I am sure that there is more we can do. When I discuss the matter with my hon. Friend, I hope that we can come up with a constructive way forward.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eighteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 15 February 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CITY OF LONDON (WARD ELECTIONS) BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for further consideration, as amended, read.

To be further considered on Thursday 1 March.

COLCHESTER BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*

Read a Second time, and committed.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

Civil Aerospace Projects

1. **Mr. John Wilkinson** (Ruislip-Northwood): How much launch aid for civil aerospace projects in the United Kingdom was invested by his Department over the past 10 years; and what royalties on sales in the civil aerospace sector were received by the Government in this period. [148999]

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): The Government receive a return on their launch investments through levies on the sales of engines and aircraft.

In the financial years 1990–91 to 1999–2000, £999 million was awarded in launch investment; in the same period, £915 million was received. Further returns will be received from launch investments. The details of individual investments remain commercially confidential, but the Government expect to receive a substantial real rate of return on all launch investments made in the past 10 years.

Mr. Wilkinson: Does the Minister agree that those returns are broadly satisfactory? The programme of launch investment in the Airbus series of aircraft initiated by Baroness Thatcher, with some £220 million for the A320, is now to be followed by Government investment of some £250 million in the engine sector for the Trent 600 and 900 power plants? Does that not show that Governments of both persuasions recognise the strategic importance of the British aircraft industry as a whole to the United Kingdom, and that the money is well invested and well spent?

Mr. Johnson: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman's comments—it has been a great success. Money is still being received for the A320, which was introduced in 1988, which shows that the aid was a good investment for the British taxpayer.

Mr. Peter L. Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend accept that launch aid has been crucial to retaining aerospace jobs resulting from the Airbus work in Burnley and north-east Lancashire? It is welcome, and we want it to continue. Aerospace is an important part of the local economy and the British economy as a whole.

Mr. Johnson: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This is a great British success story. The aerospace industry has contributed an average of £2 billion to our balance of trade over the past 21 years. The venture that my hon. Friend mentions—the A380, previously known as the A3XX—will create 22,000 new jobs and safeguard 62,000 existing jobs.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Welcome as the news was, it was unfortunate that on the "Today" programme the Secretary of State did not pay tribute to the previous, Conservative Government. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) made clear, a Conservative Government looked carefully at the A320 programme and decided that, even though politicians were not generally the best at making commercial decisions, a decision could be made. The result was that all launch aid for the A320 was repaid with interest by December 1999. The Government are now receiving dividends on Britain's most successful post-war civil aircraft programme.

Mr. Johnson: On the issue of aerospace, the whole House can unite in supporting a great British industry. As for the previous Government's record, even a broken clock is right twice a day.

Trade Tariffs

2. **Mr. Harry Cohen** (Leyton and Wanstead): What representations his Department has made to the European Commission regarding the everything but arms proposal. [149000]

The Minister for Trade (Mr. Richard Caborn): My Department has made many representations to the European Commission about its proposals, urging rapid implementation while at the same time taking account of the legitimate concerns of those such as the non-ACP less-developed countries that might be affected.

Mr. Cohen: Does the Minister agree that the everything but arms proposal, which provides tariff-free access for 919 products, is a welcome initiative? Will he put his weight behind it so that it is approved by the Council of Ministers as swiftly as possible? Will he point out to its critics that it will cost the EU less than £5 million a year—a small price to pay, considering the substantial prosperity that it engenders in developing

countries and the poorest countries? Does he recognise that, as well as helping the poorest countries to strengthen their economies, it sends out a strong message that it is better to trade in civilian goods than in arms?

Mr. Caborn: I completely agree. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made this country's position clear in his Mansion House speech. Indeed, we are taking the issue to the European Union, where we hope to be able to reach an agreement that will assist the least developed countries. We are talking about 0.5 per cent. of world share—of economies in which the gross domestic product is less than $1 per person a day. We have a responsibility to those countries, and we shall push very hard indeed on that matter in the EU.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): There is fog of Government confusion on this matter. Why, in referring to the everything but arms proposal on 22 November last year, did the Prime Minister say, in terms, "We are concerned about the proposal", when, on the same day, his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said that the Government strongly support the proposal? Which of them was off-message?

Mr. Caborn: We strongly support it; the Prime Minister made that clear in his Mansion House speech. Indeed, we have led in the EU on the issue, to ensure that we push hard for the inclusion of the three items that, as the hon. Gentleman knows, have created difficulties—bananas, rice and sugar. The Prime Minister and the Government are as one on that.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): This initiative is likely to result in only small gains for less developed countries. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, if the agreement does not come off as a whole, it will seriously call into question Europe's commitment to competition? Will he urge all his European colleagues to agree to the initiative in full, so that, at the next World Trade Organisation negotiations, our motives on trade liberalisation and competition are shown to be serious and in everybody's interest?

Mr. Caborn: That is a fair question. My hon. Friend is right: the EU must show leadership, especially as we approach another round of WTO negotiations. The vast majority of the 140 WTO countries are developing countries that look for a lead from developed countries. It is incumbent on the EU to take a lead.

Climate Change Levy

3. **Mr. Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What recent discussions he has held with the steel industry about the effects of the climate change levy. [149002]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): My ministerial colleagues and I have held regular discussions with the steel industry about the effects of the climate change levy.

Mr. Loughton: It sounds as though Ministers have not listened. How does the Secretary of State think that he is helping to combat global warming—let alone supporting British manufacturing industry—by his insistence on imposing an additional £10 million energy tax burden on the UK steel industry, which is already under great pressure, even though it is one of the most efficient in the world and has halved its carbon dioxide emissions since 1970? The loss of capacity in the UK will be taken up by our European competitors, many of which exempt their steel industries from energy tax altogether; or, worse still, will go to countries that now account for more than 40 per cent. of world production and are not covered by Kyoto emissions targets and where control of harmful emissions is a low priority?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that a balance needs to be struck between the desire for environmental protection and ensuring that, in achieving that objective, we do not affect the competitive position of British business. If the hon. Gentleman studies the evidence given by the chairman of Corus to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry yesterday, he will see that for Corus—the major steel producer in the United Kingdom—the climate change levy has had, or will have, very little impact.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Is my right hon. Friend aware that about £8 million of the £10 million to which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) referred is accounted for by Corus? The rest of the British steel industry accounts for the remaining £2 million. When the CCL was first mooted, the figure was to have been more than £120 million. As a consequence of negotiation with my right hon. Friend's officials, it was reduced to about £8 million. The last thing on which Corus can blame the redundancies is the impact of the CCL.

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point; £8 million of the amount relates to Corus. The company has pointed out that an issue of the greatest concern is that, if the exchange rate between the pound and the deutschmark changes by just one pfennig, it is the equivalent of an £8 million difference. That is why we need currency stability in the UK—one of the benefits that we would receive from joining a successful single European currency.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Does the Secretary of State believe that he is making a contribution to British industry by levying a charge on it? A company in my constituency will see the price of its gas rise next year from £300,000 to £600,000—its third largest cost after materials and salaries. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that the Government need to tell that company to try to reduce its energy costs?

Mr. Byers: Manufacturing industries, in particular, welcome the economic stability that the Government have created. Inflation is now 1.8 per cent. and interest rates were reduced last week. We now have the lowest long-term interest rate for some 35 years. That is the economic stability that manufacturing industry craves. If the hon. Gentleman looks at the gas and electricity figures, he will see that over the past few years the price

of gas has gone up in real terms by 4 per cent. for industrial users, but that that has been more than compensated by reductions in electricity prices.

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): Will my right hon. Friend consider an aspect of the steel industry—the foundry industry? Although not on the same scale as the major steel producers, foundries suffer from the climate change levy, and throughout the country they are working to very tight margins. Has he had any discussions with representatives of that industry? Will he consider its predicament?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend makes an important point about specific issues affecting the foundry sector, and we have been carefully considering the support that we can give it. The exemption arrangements that we are putting in place give due regard to the position of the foundry sector of the steel industry.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): In the Secretary of State's statement on the 6,000 steel industry job losses at Corus earlier this month, he explicitly denied that the climate change levy was a factor. Is he aware that, on the very same day, the chairman of Corus said:

"Direct and indirect taxes on business such as . . . rising energy costs and the climate change levy have all eroded our competitiveness."?

That is a direct quote from the management. Is the right hon. Gentleman so out of touch with manufacturing industry that he does not know that damage is already being caused by that £1 billion extra tax, or does he know that damage is being caused but is too weak to stand up to the Treasury and simply denies it? Which is it?

Mr. Byers: The right hon. Gentleman clearly did not follow the evidence that the chairman, Sir Brian Moffat, gave to the Select Committee yesterday, when he was quizzed very carefully on exactly those issues. I trust the evidence that the chairman of Corus gave to the Select Committee. He made it very clear that the climate change levy was not an issue for Corus. That is on the record; it is exactly what he said yesterday before the Select Committee. I much prefer to rely on evidence given to a Select Committee than on any quote in a national newspaper.

Renewable Energy

4. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): Which of his Department's funds support the creation of new businesses in the renewable energy sector. [149003]

The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce (Ms Patricia Hewitt): New businesses in the renewables energy sector, as in other sectors, may be eligible to apply for enterprise grants, regional selective assistance, smart awards, help from the small firms loan guarantee scheme and so on. However, businesses in renewable energy are also directly supported by the non-fossil fuel obligation, the proposed renewables obligation, capital grants and an increasing research and development budget.

Mr. Kidney: I thank the Minister for that answer. Does she share my belief, and that of my ever-enthusiastic constituent, Mr. Bob Talbott of Talbott Heating Ltd., that the growing demand for renewable energy sources in this country and around the world genuinely offers the prospect of a new generation—excuse the pun—of manufacturing jobs, making the things that generate the energy? Will the Minister and the Government be alert to opportunities to promote United Kingdom manufacturing jobs in those new industries?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend and with his constituent. The renewable energy sector already employs some 4,000 people in about 800 companies across the United Kingdom. We have set a target that 10 per cent. of overall generation will come from renewable energy in the next 10 years, which will require a threefold expansion in generation from renewable energy. We want to ensure that that benefits British high-tech manufacturing industry and creates more jobs in Britain.

Mr. Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): The Minister's comments on renewable energy firms are very encouraging, but will she recognise the fact that 4,000 new firms start every year and that such a big sector needs support? The incubator scheme proposed in the White Paper, which has just been announced, is designed to assist 2,500 firms. and another scheme is designed to help 1,000 firms over three years, but many other firms will clearly need support and new firms are coming through. Does the hon. Lady believe that it is also important to offer continuity of support to firms, as nearly 50 per cent. of them fail within two years?

Ms Hewitt: The Small Business Service that we have created and the new business links network throughout the country are designed to provide exactly that high-class support to businesses at every stage of their life cycle, including pre-start-up and growth. We are also making available in the renewable energy sector £89 million in capital grants, introducing a new renewables obligation and providing additional help for R and D, all of which will help to create more businesses specifically in that sector.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my hon. Friend share my view about the enormous potential that lies in the development of offshore wind energy? As well as providing a supply of renewable energy free of some of the obstacles of the planning system, it offers firms in the offshore oil and gas sector, which is declining at the moment, opportunities to diversify. Will she join me in welcoming the proposal by SLP, a firm in my constituency, to build a wind turbine and a renewable energy centre at Britain's most easterly point, Lowestoft?

Ms Hewitt: I certainly welcome that and I congratulate SLP on its initiative. The £89 million of capital grants to which I referred are available specifically for offshore wind energy projects, which have enormous potential. We are also supporting demonstration wave energy projects, which can help to stimulate the growth of the offshore energy market.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will the Minister seek to ensure that relevant Departments and planning authorities are fully aware of Government policy on, and support for, renewable energy? Does she agree that

consultation between promoters of renewable energy projects, planners and environmentalists is a better way of resolving disputed planning applications than expensive public inquiries and appeals procedures?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Planning concerns are expressed about many proposed renewable energy projects, and his suggestion that these matters are best resolved through sensible dialogue within local communities is exactly right.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): In view of the record profits announced this week and in recent weeks by some of the world's leading non-renewable energy companies, does my hon. Friend think that if the Chancellor could be persuaded of the merits of a windfall tax on oil companies it would provide a revenue stream for investment in the development of renewables that would enable the United Kingdom to be a global leader in renewable energy technologies, exactly as it is in the climate change strategy?

Ms Hewitt: Oil companies are making substantially increased investment in the North sea fields. They are also investing in new sources of renewable energy. Any other issues to which my hon. Friend referred are of course a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): It is interesting to note that the hon. Lady has taken over responsibility for renewable energy from the new Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe. However, she shares with the hon. Gentleman an important task in trying to put together a coherent energy policy, which both their predecessors spectacularly failed to deliver over the past four years, particularly on the issue of rising CO_2 emissions as Magnox stations are decommissioned.

At the moment, only 2.8 per cent. of electricity generation is from renewable sources, so the general view in the industry is that the Government's target of 5 per cent. from renewables by 2003 is completely unrealistic. How confident is the Minister that the target will be met? If it is not met, what will be the consequences for the CO_2 emission figures and energy policy generally, which are both based on the assumption that it will be met?

Ms Hewitt: We are working actively with the sector to achieve that target, which is more than the previous Administration did. The non-fossil fuel obligation—the existing obligation—and the proposed renewables obligation have led to an increased demand from energy users for energy that is generated from renewable sources. The fact that the climate change levy has been carefully designed to give an exemption for energy that is generated from new renewable sources is further stimulating that demand. I am confident that we will work successfully with the industry to achieve our targets.

Manufacturing Industry (Gas Prices)

5. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What assessment he has made of the impact on manufacturing industry of the rise in the price of gas. [149004]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Government are very much aware of the impact that the rise has had on manufacturing. We are addressing that by pressing for greater liberalisation in Europe and working for improvements in the United Kingdom market. We shall also refer any evidence of anti-competitive behaviour to the appropriate competition authorities. I particularly welcome the Commission's announcement on 1 February that it has agreed to my request for a Commission competition inquiry into the operation of the interconnector.

Mr. Grogan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Given that the price of industrial gas has doubled in the past year, does he agree that there is a strong case for encouraging the Office of Fair Trading to take a look at the gas industry, especially as the interconnector, which is often blamed for the rise, accounts for less than 6 per cent. of total consumption by British industry?

Mr. Byers: The Government are doing three things. First, we are tying to make a reality of the single market in Europe with regard to energy. Secondly, we are trying to ensure that the UK market functions properly. One way to achieve that is by securing greater price transparency, and I hope that the industry will agree to that. Thirdly, to reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend, we have to ensure that competition works effectively. If there are examples of anti-competitive behaviour in the sector, we will move quickly and refer them to the relevant competition authorities.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State says that if the European Union is to mean anything, the single market must work properly. The fact that energy is not fully liberalised within the EU, but is generally liberalised within the UK, is putting us at a considerable competitive disadvantage. What is he doing to press the commissioner to complete his inquiry? Is it not wrong that a fully French-owned company should be able to take over London Electricity when British companies cannot take over French energy companies?

Mr. Byers: Eléctricité de France's takeover of London Electricity did not raise any competition concerns, but we do need to make a reality of the single market in energy. I agree with the hon. Gentleman that that is an important prize. We are pushing that agenda forward, have secured a commitment in Lisbon for a timetable on it and will raise that important item at the Stockholm Council in a couple of months.

There is no doubt that we stand to gain enormously if we make a reality of the single market. At the moment, it is not acting in the interests of the UK, which is why the interconnector and the way in which it operates are particularly significant and why I am pleased that the Commission has agreed to open the inquiry to ensure that it is operating competitively.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): Does my right hon. Friend agree that a major cause of the increase in gas prices is the fact that gas suppliers are pushing more gas down the interconnector to chase higher prices on the continent, which has pulled UK prices into line and squeezed our market? If he agrees

with that analysis, does he also agree that it is time to consider putting more resources into the research and development of clean coal technology?

Mr. Byers: I was waiting for that final question. My hon. Friend makes a good point, which I shall address. As for the reasons for the price increase, there is often a tie between the price of oil and the price of gas. Contracts, especially in continental Europe, are related to the two prices. As a result, when contracts were renegotiated last autumn, the very high oil prices at that time led to a significant spike in gas prices. That should not necessarily affect the United Kingdom, but the way in which the interconnector has operated gives cause for concern. As my hon. Friend said, UK gas now chases higher prices in continental Europe, even when demand in the UK is very strong.

If hon. Members have time, I invite them to consider how the interconnector operated on 15 January. When the market was tight in the UK and a good price was being paid, the interconnector suddenly switched from import mode to exporting. That is one of the issues that the Commission will investigate, because it appears that the operation of the interconnector is not truly competitive.

On my hon. Friend's final point, we are interested in considering clean coal technology. He will be aware that we are discussing with the sector how we can develop pilot projects in this area.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Will the Secretary of State confirm that wholesale gas prices have doubled over the past year and that they will go up again from April as a result of the new energy tax? Will he also confirm that retail prices are starting to be affected? They are due to go up by nearly 5 per cent. shortly, with more rises in the pipeline. Why is the Department's only response to blame the increases on the interconnector and the lack of liberalisation in the European energy market? The Government say that they have much influence in Europe, so why have they done nothing about the problem for the past four years?

Why do we have a Secretary of State who does not know what the problem is? He will not do anything about it and he is simply reduced to the role of spectator while the damage is done. As a spectator, he makes a stopped clock—as mentioned by the Minister for Competitiveness—look like a positive model of energy, activity and accuracy.

Mr. Byers: That sounded very much like a Tory demand for renationalisation of the gas and electricity industries, and that may well be supported by some of my hon. Friends. The right hon. Gentleman clearly was not listening, but we must make sure that the market works effectively. He has considered the issues, so he will know that we inherited from the Conservative Administration a market that was not working effectively.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the figures for gas and electricity prices, so let us consider what we have been able to do. Industrial consumers pay 4 per cent. more for gas than they did in 1997, but they pay 12 per cent. less for electricity. According to the latest figures, domestic consumers pay 14 per cent. less for electricity and 12 per cent. less for gas. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. When the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) asks a question, I expect him to allow an answer.

Mr. Byers: The difficulty, Mr. Speaker, is that the right hon. Gentleman does not like the facts getting in the way of his own prejudice. However, the facts for domestic customers are clear. The latest figures show that they pay 14 per cent. less for electricity and 12 per cent. less for gas. That is what we have done. The right hon. Gentleman needs to reflect on those figures. He asked what the Government had done, and I have told him what we have achieved—we have taken the prices down.

Industrial Diseases

6. **Mr. John Cummings** (Easington): What progress has been made to date in settling claims for vibration white finger and chronic bronchitis and emphysema; and if he will make a statement. [149006]

The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mr. Peter Hain): We have settled more than 20,000 claims for vibration white finger and made a further 23,000 interim payments, together totalling nearly £220 million in compensation. For lung disease, progress has been much slower, but payments are now starting to flow, with about £113 million having been paid out. In recent weeks, we have been paying out about £1 million per day across Britain for both.

Mr. Cummings: I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for that reply and wish him well in his endeavours to break through the logjam that is causing so much misery and distress to tens of thousands of seriously ill ex-miners.

Will my hon. Friend examine, as a matter of urgency, the possibility of accepting paper assessments of desperately ill ex-miners who find themselves unable to undergo the full medical assessment process? Is it not ironic that the Department should accept paper assessments in relation to deceased claimants but not in relation to living claimants who are desperately and woefully ill?

Mr. Hain: I shall examine my hon. Friend's suggestion afresh, although it has been considered before. Respiratory consultants prefer to see claimants in person because they can often provide a better deal as a result. That was the view of Mr. Justice Turner in his court judgment. I acknowledge my hon. Friend's long involvement with the mining industry and his strong commitment to justice for miners. That is a principle to which I am committed as the new Minister with responsibility for energy. I will work with my hon. Friend and anybody else to achieve justice for miners.

There have been delays, and we are putting the system right. Each day, £1 million is being paid out. The Conservative Government denied justice to miners year after year, and we are now delivering it.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I wish the Minister well in the vital task that is before him. As part of it, will he reconsider the invidious clawback—a bureaucratic nightmare, which does not bring much financial relief to the Government and causes great distress to miners'

families. Will the hon. Gentleman talk again with his colleagues in government about relieving the clawback for miners' families?

Mr. Hain: Discussions are taking place to ensure that the system is as fair as possible. We are committed. Last week £1 million was paid out in compensation to miners in Wales. The system has been too slow and there have been too many problems. There have been faults on all sides, including the Government's. Healthcall, IRISC—the claims handlers—and solicitors have all been responsible for delays. We are driving through improvements and I call on the hon. Gentleman and his party, instead of sneering from the sidelines—I welcome his earlier comments, which go against that—to work with us to ensure that the system delivers what it is intended to deliver.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): I am sure that my hon. Friend will be doing everything that is possible because he, like me and many other hon. Members, has constituents who are directly affected by the issue. What other steps does he think could be taken to speed up the process? Will he speak to the solicitors, who in some cases have been holding papers for more than five months? Ex-miners have contacted me about the slowness of progress with their claims.

Mr. Hain: In the Bridgend area alone, £5.5 million has been paid out in miners' compensation. That is an important contribution to the welfare of miners in my hon. Friend's constituency and in the surrounding area. This afternoon, I am meeting the solicitors' group representing claimants and I will discuss these matters with them. We have given a clear priority, and urged everybody to go with it, which is that the oldest and illest miners must come to the top of the queue, even if younger and fitter miners find their appointments rescheduled as a result.

I have identified several categories, including asthma cases and widows' cases, which have not so far been subject to quick payments. I have identified those categories and others so that we may get the money flowing as quickly as possible. That is being achieved. Much more needs to be done, but we will get there.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Does my hon. Friend agree that a satisfactory system for settling claims depends, at least in part, on the accessibility of test centres? In a written answer to me yesterday, my hon. Friend said that sick, ill and injured miners in Leicestershire should attend the centres at Cannock, Coventry or Nottingham. Without their own transport or public transport, these places are about as accessible to them as the dark side of the moon. Will my hon. Friend again review the location of test centres, to make them more convenient for miners in my constituency and in the neighbouring constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd)?

Mr. Hain: I know of my hon. Friend's concern. I shall certainly look again at his proposition. Of course there are domiciliary services for the most infirm. In the context of driving forward prioritisation for the oldest, illest miners, we are looking at ways in which we can help with their travel needs to get them into centres as quickly as possible. They deserve attention, assessment and compensation in the shortest possible time.

Aerospace Industry

7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): What steps he is taking to safeguard employment in the aerospace industry. [149007]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Mr. Stephen Byers): We have taken a number of steps, for example launch investment in BAE Systems to develop the wings for the A380 aircraft. On Tuesday, I announced launch investment in Rolls-Royce for further development of the Trent aero-engine. As a result of the action taken by the Government, employment in the aerospace industry has increased since 1997, with the latest figures showing more than 15,000 more people being employed in the sector.

Mr. Prentice: I extend my hearty congratulations to my right hon. Friend on his wisdom, perspicacity and foresight—you do not often hear that, Mr. Speaker, so savour it—for putting £250 million in launch aid into Rolls-Royce, which is an important company in my constituency and that of my next-door neighbour and hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

This week, Rolls-Royce said that the £250 million grant will sustain 7,000 jobs in the company and the supply chain. I am worried that some of those jobs in the supply chain may be overseas. What conditions were attached to the grant to Rolls-Royce to ensure that as many jobs as possible stay in the United Kingdom, and do not go to other places such as Canada and eastern Europe?

Mr. Byers: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. The 7,000 jobs which have been safeguarded are in Rolls-Royce and the supply chain here in the United Kingdom, hopefully bringing benefit to my hon. Friend's constituents and people in neighbouring constituencies in Lancashire.

I also understand my hon. Friend's concern about the restructuring on which Rolls-Royce has embarked, especially its intentions on its research and development work. We need to do all that we can to encourage Rolls-Royce to regard the United Kingdom as a good place to continue its research and development. Even at this late stage, I hope that Rolls-Royce will think again, consider that item for a few more weeks, and perhaps see what the Chancellor may announce in the Budget. We know from the pre-Budget report that my right hon. Friend is looking at the whole area of research and development support for large businesses as well as small and medium-sized enterprises.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating Boeing on the inward investment that it has announced in Yorkshire and the Humber—the homeland of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition—as recently as last week? Will the Secretary of State be particularly robust in standing up against any aggressive or protectionist standards from

the United States authorities, especially in any contest between Boeing and Airbus Industrie over the future of aerospace in this country?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Lady touches on an important point—how we can make sure that the trade disputes that have blown up between the European Union and the United States over the last few years do not occur under the new US Administration. We have already made very good contacts with the new US trade representative, and I know that he is acutely conscious of the need to ensure that we have mechanisms in place that will ensure that we can move in quickly and stop those disputes developing into the sort of problems to which the hon. Lady referred.

Boeing's decision to invest, with the university sector, in state-of-the-art facilities in Yorkshire, is a good demonstration of how universities and businesses can work together. The fact that world-class companies such as Boeing are coming to Yorkshire is a demonstration that, under this Government, Britain is a good place to do business and research. As a result, we are creating British jobs.

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble): May I tell my right hon. Friend that many of my constituents working for BAE Systems have welcomed the launch aid and the various military orders that the Government have announced in the past few years? Despite that, they have seen round after round of redundancies in Lancashire and the threat of further redundancies in the months ahead. As for BAE Systems, the company seems to have no clear strategy for the future. In discussions with the company in the weeks ahead, will my right hon. Friend make clear to it the concerns of Lancashire MPs and their constituents about the future of BAE Systems and its commitment to the UK aerospace industry?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend has been a powerful advocate for the interests of BAE Systems workers in Lancashire. I understand the concerns that he has expressed and I shall certainly raise them with the company's management. Global competition means that BAE Systems is going through a period of restructuring. It is not the job of the Government to try to stand in the way of that, as the company must make commercial decisions in its interests to ensure employment opportunities. Our task must be to help individuals through this period of change. One of the things that we are trying to do with BAE Systems is to ensure that it can secure more contracts in export markets. I hope that there will be some good news in the near future on the securing of major contracts by the company.

Electricity Trading Arrangements

8. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): What has been the cost to consumers of the delay in implementing the new electricity trading arrangements. [149008]

The Minister for Energy and Competitiveness in Europe (Mr. Peter Hain): We have no evidence that consumers' contract or tariff rates for the period April 2000 to March 2001 have been revised upward since the delay to NETA was announced.

Mr. Chope: This is a serious issue. Yesterday, Sir Brian Moffat told the Trade and Industry Committee that electricity prices in this country were 40 per cent. higher than on the continent. The Minister did not answer my question directly, but he knows jolly well what has happened. If he speaks to Dynergy, which has the authority and confidence of Ofgem, the regulator—I spoke to the company, as I anticipated that the hon. Gentleman would not give a straight answer to my question—he will find that the delay has cost consumers no less than £1,200 million. That is an average cost of £45 per electricity consumer. Is that not appalling, and why do the Government not admit the failure of their policies in that regard?

Mr. Hain: The hon. Gentleman speaks of policy failure, but since we came to office, electricity prices have fallen by 14 per cent. in real terms for individual consumers and by 12 per cent. in real terms for industrial consumers. That is a policy of success, not of failure. In respect of NETA—[Hon. Members: "Ah!"] Hon. Members may indeed say "Ah!" As gas contracts are negotiated a year in advance for most consumers, let us compare the third quarter of last year with the third quarter of 1999. In that time, prices fell by 4.5 per cent. for industrial consumers and by 10 per cent. for individual consumers. That shows that the new trading arrangements that we are introducing have produced in anticipation circumstances in which there are lower prices. We intend that to be driven forward and we want ordinary consumers, whether in industry or in the home, to benefit as a result.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): My hon. Friend must know that for the steel industry, which depends so heavily on electricity, prices in Europe are significantly lower. The difference is not at the level mentioned yesterday by Sir Brian Moffat, whose figures are slightly out of date. In 10 days' time, I shall meet my hon. Friend with a delegation from the industry to discuss the matter. Will he consider it seriously between now and then? Will he put his officials in an electric chair and, if he cannot deliver, in 10 days' time, electricity prices that are equal to those of our competitors in Europe, let me pull the button on them?

Mr. Hain: I am not sure about the electric chair option, but I shall consider seriously and listen carefully to my hon. Friend's representations. As a result of NETA we expect prices to be at least 10 per cent. lower than they would otherwise have been. It is precisely because we were concerned about the relatively high electricity prices that we inherited from the Conservative Government under the pool system that we are introducing NETA, which will ensure a better deal for the steel industry, as well as industrial consumers and household consumers in general.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I welcome the Minister to his new job and I hope that we will have some straighter answers from him than we did from the Secretary of State on gas prices. Will he confirm that the new electricity trading arrangements, with all their supposed benefits, have been delayed from last autumn and may well be delayed again, and that that breaks a

specific promise given to the House on 31 January 2000? On Second Reading of the Utilities Bill, the Secretary of State said:

"In 12 months, we will be able to debate the matter knowing exactly what has happened as a result of the changes."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2000; Vol. 343, c. 784.]

Since that has not happened, will the Minister now accept that the Secretary of State misled the House on that occasion? Is the hon. Gentleman happy to have joined a Department with such little influence on real events and with an energy policy which is an obvious shambles?

Mr. Hain: I am happy to have joined a Department which, unlike our Conservative predecessors, has a clear energy policy, and which is led by a Secretary of State who is presiding over a clear programme to bring down gas and electricity prices and to provide a decent energy supply throughout Britain.

The delay to the introduction of NETA was on the recommendation of Ofgem and its head, Callum McCarthy, with whom I am in weekly contact. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the pre-production phase, to trial the system before it is due to come in at the end of March, started a week ago last Monday, and I have been receiving daily reports on how it is going. Depending on how that eventually turns out, the button will be pressed on the full introduction of NETA as planned on 27 March. I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman would want us to bring in new trading arrangements which were in any way flawed, as looked to be the case when the delay was announced last year.

Export Control Bill

9. **Mr. Desmond Browne** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): When the draft Export Control Bill will be published. [149009]

The Minister for Competition and Consumer Affairs (Dr. Kim Howells): Work is continuing to prepare the draft Export Control Bill for publication and the Government will publish the Bill as soon as it is ready. It is not possible at this stage to give a precise date, but we will be in a position to publish the Bill in the spring.

Mr. Browne: I recognise that the Government have done much to improve the transparency and accountability of arms export deals, and that there are potential practical difficulties, such as delay and commercial confidentiality, in their prior parliamentary scrutiny, but does my hon. Friend accept in principle that prior parliamentary scrutiny of arms export deals would improve accountability and transparency?

Dr. Howells: We continue to believe that the best way forward is to strengthen retrospective scrutiny of the Government's export licensing decisions. However, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said that he will look constructively at any further proposals from the quadripartite Committee on this issue.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): But is it not the case that the Foreign Secretary, when he was in opposition, continually attacked the Conservative Government over the Scott report? The Government have had four years to introduce this legislation. Is it not the case that, as with the electricity trading arrangements and the consumer White Paper, such things are trumpeted but nothing ever happens? There is more trumpeting than in Duke Ellington's orchestra. Is it not the case that the Department, like the rest of this shambles of a Government, as my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) would say, is all spin and no delivery?

Dr. Howells: Unlike the Conservative party, the Government are entirely in harmony.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does my hon. Friend accept that there is real urgency about achieving parliamentary scrutiny of arms exports, and that the decisions of the quadripartite Committee are important in that regard? Is not the Government's decision to export arms to Morocco, which can only be used for internal repression against the Polisario front, just one more example of why there should be public parliamentary scrutiny of what happens to arms exported from Britain to countries that are under no threat of external aggression?

Dr. Howells: I do not agree with my hon. Friend. I know the process that resulted in the refurbishment of some guns in Morocco and I understand that that had permission from the United Nations in New York.

Post Office (New Technology)

10. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West): What recent representations he has received on the introduction of new technology by the Post Office. [149010]

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received a small number of representations in recent weeks on the introduction of the Horizon computerised system at post offices, including correspondence from the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), the right hon. Member for Caernarfon (Mr. Wigley) and the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson)

Mr. Amess: Will the Minister confirm that the Horizon system, which was introduced at a cost of more than £1 billion, is already out of date and will not be able to meet the challenges that post offices will face in the future? Will he reassure worried postmasters and postmistresses in my constituency, a third of whom will have to close in July this year as a result of the introduction of automated credit transfer? When will this rotten Government stop attacking the most vulnerable people in our society—our senior citizens—who love to have a chat in the post office, and are not all that keen on communicating via e-mail or the internet?

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is always at his most persuasive when he whispers to me so seductively. I should be interested in the views of those on the Conservative Front Bench, because Horizon is not outdated technology. We are wiring up 40,000 serving positions at 18,500 post offices at a rate of 300 a week. It has been extremely successful, and the work will be completed by the end of March. Number of post offices

computerised under the previous Government—nil. Number of post office computerised under this Government so far—17,560.

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): Mrs. Jennifer Hayden, the sub-postmistress in Houghton in my constituency, will have to resign her post because, given the overheads placed on her by the Post Office, her income is less than the minimum wage. Would the Minister please look into that matter to ensure that the Post Office is not exploiting sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses, who do valuable work for our communities?

Mr. Johnson: My hon. Friend raised this matter with me last evening, and I have written the letter as promised during our conversation. [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Labour Members do converse. I am interested in hearing about examples from hon. Members on both sides of the House. We want to find out why sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses resign, so that we can implement practical measures to do something about it. Now that the spotlight is on the network, we should consider issues such as that raised by my hon. Friend. I shall give it urgent attention, and I shall speak to her about it in due course.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Mrs. Rimmer, the sub-mistress at Ashton post office in my constituency, and her family have suffered armed robbery twice in the past nine months. What new technology do the Government and the Post Office propose to provide to ensure that sub-post offices can be securely protected against the evident rise in violent crime? Sub-postmistresses in particular are vulnerable. We must do something about that, and we look to the Government to take the lead.

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. In fact, attacks on sub-post offices are down. The Post Office has invested a great deal of money and time and has worked with the National Federation of Sub-Postmasters to address the problem of security. However, there is more that we can do, and I would certainly be interested in the case that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. This is a crucial area. Sub-postmasters and their staff deserve to be safe from such attacks, and we will do everything we can to ensure that they are.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): What progress has been made with setting up the technology in readiness for the universal bank? That will bring banking facilities to millions of people who have previously been denied such access. Will the Minister pay tribute to the likes of Mr. Paul Titcombe, the sub-postmaster at Horton Street post office in Lincoln, who put out his own leaflet to reassure his customers that they will continue to receive benefits and payments in cash despite the changes? Customers have been frightened by the campaign fuelled by the Conservative party, which has brought the changes that the Government are making into disrepute.

Mr. Johnson: The Post Office is currently out to tender for the technology that needs to be added to the Horizon system so that post offices can provide the full range of network banking. I can reaffirm what was in the leaflet put out by the sub-postmaster in my hon. Friend's constituency. Before and after the move to automated credit transfer, any pensioner or benefit recipient who wants to continue to get their money in cash in full across a post office counter, weekly if it is paid weekly at the moment, will be able to do so.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): As the Minister sits there, presiding over the meltdown of our sub-post offices, forced closures are taking place at a rate of nearly two a day. There have been 434 in the first three quarters of the current financial year.

The Minister has made much of the fact that universal banking services will apparently plug the gap caused by the introduction of ACT. Does he not find it incredible that the new technology for sub-post offices, due to be installed by the end of March, is not yet equipped with a facility to provide any of those universal banking services? Will he bring some hope to our beleaguered and battered sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses by guaranteeing that ACT will not be introduced until the new facility is in, tested and tried? Conservative Members will give that guarantee: we will not introduce ACT until the new facility is in place.

Mr. Johnson: I seem to have been a long time in my service position, but I shall try to deal with the hon. Gentleman's request.

Those figures relating to closures are a cause for great concern. Let me make it clear that we are not, as it were, banking simply on universal banking services, Government general practitioner services and all the other initiatives that are in the pipeline in accordance with the report of the performance and innovation unit. Today we shall announce practical measures to attract new sub-postmasters into the network.

The problem is that over the past two years people have become convinced that the network is dying. We must restore confidence in it. We shall announce today that on 1 April we shall abolish the introductory payment, equivalent to 25 per cent. of salary, that new sub-postmasters must currently make. We have also created new management posts that will concentrate on rural areas, and we are providing £2 million to pay the capital costs of taking over the running of sub-post offices if local communities wish to do that. Those are important practical measures. *[Interruption.]*

A Conservative Member asked the question, but the Conservatives clearly do not want to hear my response. Their party would privatise the Post Office; we are making it plain that we will not go down that particular railtrack.

Business of the House

12.32 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House please give the business for the coming week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for the week after the forthcoming constituency week is as follows:

MONDAY 26 FEBRUARY—Second Reading of the Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill *[Lords]*.

Motion to approve the Administration Committee report on the trial summer reopening of the line of route.

TUESDAY 27 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Hunting Bill.

WEDNESDAY 28 FEBRUARY—Opposition Day [6th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 1 MARCH—Consideration in Committee followed by remaining stages of the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill.

FRIDAY 2 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after will be:

MONDAY 5 MARCH—Debate on Welsh affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 6 MARCH—Second Reading of the International Development Bill.

WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 8 MARCH—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 9 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to be reminded that on Wednesday 28 February, there will be a debate relating to the protection of the European Communities' financial interests and to the Court of Auditors' annual report for 1999 in European Standing Committee B.

On Wednesday 28 February there will also be a debate relating to informing and consulting employees in the European Community in European Standing Committee C.

The House will also wish to be reminded that on Wednesday 7 March there will be a debate relating to motor vehicle distribution and servicing agreements in the European Community in European Standing Committee C.

Additionally on Wednesday 7 March, there will be a debate relating to health requirements for animal by-products in European Standing Committee A.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report*.

The business in Westminster Hall for the remainder of March will be as follows:

THURSDAY 8 MARCH—Debate on public funding of civil legal services.

THURSDAY 15 MARCH—Debate on the Social Security Committee report on housing benefit.

THURSDAY 22 MARCH—Debate on the Scottish Affairs Committee report on poverty in Scotland.

THURSDAY 29 MARCH—Debate on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Report on electoral malpractice in Northern Ireland.

[Wednesday 28 February 2001:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: Unnumbered EM submitted by DTI dated 21 November 2000, informing and consulting employees. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee report: HC 23-xxx(1999-2000).]

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: (a) 13572/00, European Community Finance; (b) Unnumbered EM submitted by HM Treasury dated 20 December 2000, European Community Finance. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report HC 28-v (2001).

Wednesday 7 March 2001:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: 13889/00, Competition in Motor Vehicle Distribution and Servicing. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 28-iii(2000-01).]

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the Leader of the House, although I suspect that her attractive red outfit may be matched by some red herrings in what she has announced. I am sure that it will be comforting to hon. Members of all parties to know that the House will be sitting throughout the month of March.

The House rises today and does not return until Monday 26 February. Under normal circumstances, we would have expected ministerial statements on two pressing matters. The first is the millennium dome, and today's report that there will be a handback clause in the sale agreement—

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): A handbag?

Mrs. Browning: The hon. Gentleman did not hear me, so I shall repeat that it is reported that there will be a handback clause in the sale agreement. There is great concern about that, and I am sure that the House would want to hear about the details of the agreement for the disposal of the dome site from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The dome has been a terrible drain on lottery resources, and it is very worrying to think that it will continue to be a drain on taxpayer resources. Will the Leader of the House explain how the Government intend to inform hon. Members about the detail of the agreement, given that the House will be in recess?

The second matter on which we would have expected a statement is the complete failure, announced today, of the Home Office computer system to process asylum applications. For the past four years, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has been challenging Government policy on the matter, often in Opposition time. The Government continued to claim that they were increasing the rate at which decisions were processed, and made no reference to any technical problems with the computer. The Home Office now says that the problems are due to the computer. The Government seem to be falling back on those old chestnuts when a problem arises—it is the

fault either of the previous Tory Government, or of the computer. Those excuses are beginning to have about as much credibility as the promise that the cheque is in the post.

Will the Leader of the House say when we can expect a White Paper outlining the consideration given by the Government to the constitutional consequences of scrapping the pound? The matter is especially pertinent, as we heard only this week that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has been rebuked by the European Union for spending too much public money. That is our money, and it has been spent in our country. Will the right hon. Lady ensure that for the first time the Chancellor shares with the House how he and the Government came to the decision that there are no constitutional consequences to the policy? Otherwise, we fear that the Chancellor's EU masters will continue to wish to control UK public expenditure, regardless of whether we join the euro.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Lady asked about statements on the dome. To the best of my recollection, the fact that discussions on the handling of the dome are continuing is in the public domain. She referred to stories about a handback clause, but I am afraid that I have not seen them. I am sorry to learn that they are causing great concern, but I am confident that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is taking such matters into account.

The hon. Lady then moved on to the issue of the Home Office computer system. I know that it is very awkward for Opposition Members that almost all the present computer systems were commissioned by the previous Government, who tied us in to irrevocable contracts. Those contracts had very severe penalties, and we could not abrogate them. I recognise that that is a real source of difficulty, especially on matters such as asylum, out of which the Conservative party is trying to make some mileage.

I heard the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) this morning trying to pretend that no one had ever mentioned problems with the system in the past. I do not know where the right hon. Lady has been, but I remember copious references to the problems. If I heard her correctly, she also alleged this morning that no one had ever said that the system had been commissioned by the Conservative party. I have heard that repeatedly over the past few years—in despairing tones, from ministerial colleagues. As I am feeling charitable today, I will say that the right hon. Lady was uncharacteristically inaccurate.

On the question of a White Paper on the constitutional consequences of the euro, as you will be sadly aware, Mr. Speaker, we have been over this territory many times. The Conservative party is completely familiar with the Government's position on the constitutional issues—we do not believe that there is a bar—the moves towards the euro and the five economic tests. There is nothing to add to what has been said so often before.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): The Leader of the House will be aware that the International Criminal Court Bill is progressing through the House of Lords. However, I am disappointed that she has not given a date by which it will be debated in the Commons. Could she now do that so that the Bill can get here rapidly? Clearly, the Bill will be an important step forward in dealing with the prosecution of international war criminals and dictators in the future.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's great interest in the Bill, of which he has long been a supporter and advocate. I say to him, gently, that the Bill has not had its Report stage in the House of Lords.

Mr. Corbyn: I said that it was progressing.

Mrs. Beckett: I know, but it has not yet completed its progress. No matter how great the concern, we do not set timetables for debates in this House when the other House is still dealing with a matter. We do not presume to know the judgment of another House until a Bill arrives here.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I draw the Leader of the House's attention to a matter that may be of particular interest to you, Mr. Speaker—namely, the report this morning from the Procedure Committee on the election of Speaker? May I ask for an undertaking from the right hon. Lady that the House will have an opportunity to debate this report as soon as possible? Given that the Committee itself seems to have reached a consensus on recommendations to the House—that is broadly representative of the House generally—we may require very little time in the Chamber to deal with the matter. Perhaps the Leader of the House might find such an opportunity even in the week after our constituency week. It is important that the matter be determined before any possible Dissolution. Will she give us that undertaking today?

Secondly, I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to the report this morning that the official advisers to the Government on the safety aspects of the privatisation of National Air Traffic Services are very concerned about the qualifications of the preferred bidder. Clearly, this problem should be brought before the House as quickly as possible so all Members can see what is involved.

Thirdly, what are the plans for the remaining stages of the Hunting Bill on Tuesday 27 February? The Leader of the House will be aware that substantial amendments are being tabled by the Government to cover huge areas of concern on all sides. Putting aside the personal views that all hon. Members have, I am sure she would agree that we all have a responsibility to make sure that the Bill is workable and practical and meets the anxieties of police forces throughout the country. Can I have an undertaking that, if it proves necessary, amendments will be available before Monday, the day before the debate? Will the right hon. Lady give an undertaking that if additional time is required, we can at least go until midnight that night, if not longer? Perhaps she might negotiate with Conservative Front Benchers who, I understand, share our anxieties about getting the Bill right. Perhaps the Government might like to borrow half a day—or even the whole of the following Opposition day—from the Conservatives so that the House can give the Bill careful consideration.

Mrs. Beckett: I am aware of the publication of the report on the election of a Speaker. The House owes a debt of gratitude to the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), who chairs the Procedure Committee, and his colleagues for their assiduity and speed in dealing

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with the matter. I have not had an opportunity to study the report fully, but I understand that it is very good. We all appreciate that.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) knows perfectly well that no Leader of the House would make a commitment ahead of time to dates that have not already been announced. I repeat my comments to the hon. Member for Macclesfield and his colleagues that I understand the House's wish to discuss the matter and make decisions on it. I shall bear that in mind; doubtless it will be discussed through the usual channels.

I have seen the press reports to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall referred. The Government have always stressed that safety will be an important factor in any decisions. If the press reports are accurate, they will be carefully considered by my right hon. and hon. Friends who deal with those issues.

Discussions are under way about the best method of scheduling and debating the remaining stages of the Hunting Bill to ensure that hon. Members have an opportunity to reach a proper decision according to the wish of the majority. I cannot say more now, but those discussions are being undertaken in a spirit that all hon. Members would welcome. I shall bear in mind the hon. Gentleman's generous offer of a day of Conservative time.

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the review of local government finance? Consultation on the Green Paper, which was published last year, ended at the beginning of December. We held a debate only two weeks ago on this year's review, and several hon. Members raised general anxieties about the subject. In the light of those factors, it would be useful to discuss those issues generally before we make a decision on the future of local government finance.

Mrs. Beckett: I have some sympathy with my hon. Friend's point. Although the local government grant has increased by 14 per cent. in real terms in the past four years, compared with a cut of 7 per cent. in real terms in previous years, anxiety remains about the underlying structure for settling local government grant. Hon. Members of all parties share that anxiety. I cannot undertake to find time for an early further debate on the matter, but it is hoped that further proposals, perhaps even a White Paper, will be produced later this year.

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): There was much discussion yesterday about long supplementaries, and especially long, rambling replies at Prime Minister's Question Time. Is not that almost implicit in a 30-minute session? Would not the House be better served by a return to two 15-minute sessions a week?

Mrs. Beckett: I know that Opposition Members like to make much of that point because they believe that the Government are somehow in a weak position. However, the Conservative party, not for the first time, is in danger of shooting itself in the foot. As someone who has had more experience than most hon. Members of dealing with Prime Minister's Question Time from the Opposition Benches, I believe that the 30-minute session is much harder for a Prime Minister. It gives a competent Opposition an opportunity to conduct a sustained line of questioning, which puts greater pressure on a Minister and a Prime Minister.

Despite the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about inadequate answers, the Prime Minister's second change, to which Conservative Members never refer for some reason, cut out the time-wasting repetition of the answer, "I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave some moments ago." The Prime Minister has answered more questions than his predecessor; he answers them well, and the Conservative party makes an error, not for the first time, in requesting a change.

Mr. David Lammy (Tottenham): The Leader of the House will of course know that, since 1997, my constituency has received a substantial amount of money through regeneration budgets. Will she consider scheduling a debate on the relationship between retailers and multinational fast food chains and urban regeneration in our town centres? I ask that in the light of KFC's decision to pull out—indeed, to chicken out—of Tottenham High road, and our anxiety that other such outlets on our high streets will follow suit.

Mrs. Beckett: I know that my hon. Friend and his constituents recognise the role that the Government have played in putting substantial further resources into the area. However, I also understand the underlying concern that he expresses and that I think is felt in many parts of the country about both the change in our high streets and the way in which that change renders community feeling and the local environment somewhat vulnerable. I sympathise with the concern that my hon. Friend expresses. I fear I cannot undertake to find time for a debate in the Chamber on those issues, but he might seek an opportunity in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I thank the right hon. Lady for the very courteous and encouraging response that she gave to the question asked by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) on the Procedure Committee's second report entitled "Election of a Speaker"? May I maximise my charm, diplomacy and persuasion in asking her whether she realises that the overwhelming majority of hon. Members—including I think the overwhelming majority of Labour Members, let alone Opposition Members—would like to have a debate on that report and to have in place a new system for the election of a Speaker by the end of this Parliament? It is an important issue, and the Procedure Committee undertook the inquiry at the request of the House. May I make that fervent plea for an early debate?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful point. He is also entirely right to say that it was very clearly the wish and the will of the whole House not only that such an inquiry be conducted, but that it be conducted expeditiously. As I said, we are all grateful to him and to his Committee for having done so. He will not, I know, expect me to go much further than I already have in answering the question from the hon. Member for North Cornwall. However, I do indeed bear in mind the

wish of the House in wanting the report to be carried out, and I have little doubt that it will be the wish of the House for the report to be debated.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): May I draw to my right hon. Friend's attention a series of complaints that I have had from residents of Barrow upon Humber about a recent outbreak of lawlessness in the village? They are particularly concerned about cars continuing to park at bus stops and a truck that ended up in a bumper-to-bumper confrontation with a police car—when a bus was not able to proceed up the high street because it was blocked by the truck and a Mercedes was parked in the bus stop. May we therefore have a debate on observing the highway code? The fact that the truck was a "Save the Pound" Tory truck and the Mercedes at the bus stop was owned by a Conservative Member is in no way colouring my views on the issue.

Mrs. Beckett: I am very sorry to hear of the sad experience of my hon. Friend's constituents—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Devastated.

Mrs. Beckett: Yes, indeed, I am devastated, particularly as it would appear that the incident was due either to bad parking by a Tory Member of Parliament or to the lack of progress of a piece of Tory party propaganda on wheels. Clearly, yet not for the first time, a Tory bandwagon has hit some problems. However, I fear that I cannot undertake to find time in the near future for debate specifically on that matter.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is there any possibility of a Home Office Minister making a statement to the House on the policy for the treatment of people seeking asylum in this country, given that genuine asylum seekers would have no objection at all to being held in detention until it was shown that their applications were genuine? It would then be possible to see whether there was any alternative to the Conservative policy of having comprehensive detention, which will ensure that those who deserve asylum get it and that the vast majority who do not are not able to get into society illegally, as is happening under this Government.

Mrs. Beckett: I am pleased to hear what the hon. Gentleman says about sympathy—which does not always shine through on the Opposition Benches—for those who are genuine asylum seekers. Of course we understand the anxiety to ensure that those issues are properly resolved.

The hon. Gentleman refers to the Conservative policy of universal reception centres. It is unfortunate that the Conservative Government did not implement the policy during the years when they had the opportunity. I have, no doubt in common with other hon. Members, experience of constituents who were here seeking a decision on their case for years under the previous Government without its ever being resolved. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, not only has the Conservative party opposed all the measures that we have introduced to tackle asylum problems but it is even opposing the only proposal that has been made so far for a new detention centre, at Aldington. Therefore, although I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes, I fear that, not for the first time, the remarks made by members of his party are not consistent with its policy.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): When can we return to the question of the loss of jobs in the steel industry and consider the disgraceful events of yesterday? At dawn, a confident announcement was made of 4,000 jobs for redundant steelworkers. By midday, it turned out that the jobs would probably never be created and, if they were, that few of them would be located in the areas where the steelworkers lived. Is it not grossly unfair to steelworkers to raise their hopes in that way? Was it not reasonable of the steel union to describe yesterday's stunt as "a cruel fantasy"? Would not a debate be an opportunity to appeal to Corus once again to negotiate in a reasonable way with the steelworkers and the Government, instead of indulging with its collaborators in self-serving publicity stunts?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend will know that there is considerable concern about the impact of the Corus changes on the local communities and that the Government are determined to do what we can to assist and will work to provide retraining or other opportunities. I understand my hon. Friend's concern that some of the proposals, when followed through, will not have as much impact as was hoped. He will know that the Government have throughout pressed Corus to reconsider some of its proposals and have consistently offered to do what we can to help. That position remains unchanged.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): The right hon. Lady will be aware that yesterday was one of those rare occasions when the Prime Minister gave a full and enthusiastic answer to one of his hon. Friends about regional government, referring specifically to the north-east. Can she assure my constituents that such a statement does not indicate that the Government have serious intentions of introducing an assembly in the so-called north-west of England? The very thought of another layer of government and even more politicians like us fills my constituents with horror. Their loyalties lie with their town, their county and their country, and there is no room for an alien concept such as the north-west of England, which is merely a geographical expression and carries no sense of identity for the people of my constituency.

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, with which I suspect that not everyone in the north-west agrees. We have been consistent in making it plain that, were any proposals to be made for the development of regional government structures, they would be implemented only if that was the wish of the people in the locality. The hon. Gentleman can therefore reassure his constituents that there is no danger of anything being imposed on them against their will.

Mr. David Crausby (Bolton, North-East): Will my right hon. Friend be able to find time for a debate on the obscene profits announced by the oil companies, perhaps with a view to levying a windfall tax in order to compensate motorists?

Mrs. Beckett: I know that great concern has been expressed about the profits of the oil companies, and that that has been drawn to the attention of my right hon.

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Friend the Chancellor and other right hon. and hon. Friends on repeated occasions. My hon. Friend will know that we look carefully at all the issues and all the complications that arise, but he will also know that, while my right hon. Friend has undertaken to take those matters into account, he has made no commitment on them.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): I revert to an important point made by the shadow Leader of the House, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). Why do Her Majesty's Government refuse to make a statement in this place on the dome? Can the Leader of the House not change her mind, even at this late stage? Is she aware that the taxpayer is paying £1 million a month for the care and maintenance of the dome, and that a cosy deal seems to have been struck with the Labour benefactor, Mr. Bourne, whereby his bid can be perpetuated as the sole bid under consideration—notwithstanding the fact that other bidders, such as Mr. Gerbeau, are keen to have their tenders considered? Is that not a scandal? Does the right hon. Lady not realise that obfuscation and flannel by the ignoble peer, Lord Falconer—*[Interruption]*—in the other place shed no light on the matter and do not reassure the public that an honest deal is being done for the taxpayer and for the country?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not refer to an honourable Member of the House of Lords as "ignoble". Perhaps he would be good enough to withdraw that remark.

Mr. Wilkinson: I think Mr. Gerbeau talked about the total ineffectiveness of the Government—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am instructing the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the remark.

Mr. Wilkinson: I withdraw it and say instead "the ineffective peer in the other place".

Mrs. Beckett: With regard to the request for a statement on the dome, I told the shadow Leader of the House that of course the matter is under consideration at present, and will remain so. There is no cause to make a statement at present; no doubt the point will be borne in mind, should the need for such a statement arise.

As for the hon. Gentleman's remarks about a cosy deal, it is not a cosy deal—the matter is in the public domain. Mr. Bourne has indeed been a benefactor to the Labour party—he has been a benefactor to the Conservative party as well.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I know that my right hon. Friend always reads the latest Employment Service statistics with great care. I am sure that she will have been as delighted as I was that they show that youth unemployment in my constituency has fallen by 50 per cent. since 1997. Could she make time for a debate on youth employment and the success of the Government's programmes, and could particular attention be given to the differential rates below the minimum wage, which are paid to apprentices, as I think that there may be abuse by some companies?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend makes two powerful points. I have noticed increasingly that observations are made by my hon. Friends about the dramatic fall in youth unemployment and in long-term youth unemployment. I have no doubt that the same phenomenon is occurring in the constituencies of Opposition Members, but for some reason they do not want to mention it very often. The fall in youth unemployment should be a source of great satisfaction to Members on both sides of the House. Nothing could be more damaging for the future of our country than for the young, in particular, to languish in unemployment and see their prospects and hopes blighted so early in their lives.

I take my hon. Friend's point about the concerns as to the potential for exploitation in the different rates of the minimum wage. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. However, I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a debate on the matter in the near future, although my hon. Friend may find that there are opportunities to raise it in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): When are we going to have the debate on small businesses? Last week, in answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), the Leader of the House said that many requests were received for annual debates and that it was not possible to comply with all of them. Is not this matter different, however? Does the Leader of the House remember that the Labour party made an explicit policy promise in its manifesto at the previous general election that there would be an annual debate on small businesses? Are not the Labour Government reneging on that promise?

Mrs. Beckett: We are not reneging on anything. I am simply unable to announce a date at the present time.

Mr. Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): Will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on consumer protection? There are two principal reasons. The first is so that the Government can amplify the provisions of the White Paper "Modern Markets: Confident Consumers". Secondly, such a debate would give the Conservative party the opportunity to explain its consumer protection policies. For example, some Conservative Members supported the Outworking Bill and put their names to it; others opposed on principle providing legal protection from con artists wanting money up front; and those on the Conservative Front Bench, while saying that they agreed with the principles and participating in the debate, absented themselves from the vote, thereby effectively killing the Bill for this Session. Vulnerable people who could have been protected will now have to wait months, perhaps years, as a result of their actions.

Mrs. Beckett: I have great sympathy with the point that my hon. Friend makes. I know how disappointed he will be that he was unable to make further progress with his Outworking Bill. Sadly, as he will know, it is by no means the first time that Conservative Members have claimed to support legislation, or to be perfectly happy to facilitate its consideration, but the opposite has happened, and they claim it is all an unfortunate coincidence. He is therefore right to draw attention to that problem, and I share his regret that it is not possible to proceed with his Bill and do more to protect outworkers. I am confident that my hon. Friend, and those like him who genuinely

wish to help those who are being exploited, will look for other opportunities to raise the matter, but I fear that I cannot promise a debate on the issue in the near future.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Government have made some very controversial changes to our procedures, with a view to injecting some certainty into the legislative programme. Against that background, will the right hon. Lady tell the House how optimistic she is that, by the end of March, the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill, the Social Security Contributions (Share Options) Bill, the Health and Social Care Bill, the Homes Bill and the Hunting Bill will have completed their passage through Parliament?

Mrs. Beckett: I should have to check precisely where all those Bills are at present, but the right hon. Gentleman may be inviting me to anticipate some of the decisions of the other place. He is certainly right to say that we have embarked on some experimental changes in procedures, which are controversial, especially among Conservative Members, but have long been recommended by Members on both sides of the House. We believe that as the procedures settle down, they will give the House greater certainty and enable us to deal with legislation more effectively. I am confident that the Government's legislative programme is well on track.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Might my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on the administrative costs of social security—in particular, the new Conservative plan to scrap the automatic £200 winter allowance for pensioners, which would be expensive, complex and confusing—

Hon. Members: Order, order.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot hear the hon. Gentleman, with hon. Members shouting "order". Let me hear what he is saying. He might know that the Leader of the House is not responsible for Conservative party policy, but he can continue with the question; I want to hear what he has to say.

Mr. Leslie: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to ask my right hon. Friend whether the Government would find time to debate the administrative costs of social security, so that we could debate issues such as the effect of scrapping the automatic £200 winter allowance for pensioners—a plan that would be not only confusing and complex, but extremely costly. That blows a hole in the Conservative party's hollow aspirations to cut the costs of red tape, which are a complete and utter joke.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to refer to the concern that any Government should feel about the possibility of a substantial increase in administrative costs for no gain. I understand his wish to debate the possible impact on costs of the policy that the Conservative party currently advocates. Such are the pressures of time, however, that I fear I cannot find time to debate issues such as social security every time that the Conservative party changes its policy.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): Does the Leader of the House have any intention of restoring to our timetable the debate on the Standards and Privileges Committee which, rather sinisterly, she pulled out of the timetable last week? Unfortunately, there is a danger of our whole system of self-regulation being irrevocably discredited. The Committee has overridden the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards on three occasions, and it so happens that each time a member of the Government was involved: the Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), formerly the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), formerly the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The Chairman himself has been convicted by the commissioner of systematic non-disclosure.

The inquiry into the affairs of the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), has dragged on for more than a year and will drag on for even longer because the Committee is hearing witnesses, something which the same Chairman refused to do in the inquiry into the Hamilton affair at the beginning of this Parliament. In fact, he cut off the Committee proceedings when I was about to question Mr. Hamilton, and he prevented us from calling Fayed or any of the other witnesses.

We need to know what is going on. Will the Leader of the House restore that debate to the timetable so that we have an opportunity to express our concerns? I hope that there will also be an opportunity for those concerns to be satisfactorily addressed.

Mrs. Beckett: Although I am somewhat disappointed by what the hon. Gentleman has said and the tone in which he said it, I am in some ways quite pleased that he said it on the Floor of the House, because it enables me to tell him how disgraceful I thought his contribution was on the BBC last week, when he made exactly the same points. He was, as he pointed out, a member of the previous Standards and Privileges Committee, and in consequence I should have thought that he knew better than to try to undermine the work of the present Committee in the way that he has done previously and again today.

I must say two other things to the hon. Gentleman. First, despite his remarks, the Committee's decisions—which it is free to make on behalf of the House, as is right and proper—were unanimous. The Committee makes the decisions that it believes are in the interests of the House. Secondly, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ashton-under-Lyne (Mr. Sheldon), who chairs the Committee, is held in high esteem and respect in the House, which is more than can be said for the hon. Gentleman at present or will be said if he carries on like this.

NHS Hospital Building

1.11 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the NHS hospital building programme.

The national health service is in the most prolonged period of expansion in its history. The NHS plan that we published last July set out a major reform programme to accompany the investment that we are making. Extra cash is now beginning to bring on line the extra capacity that the NHS needs to make care better and faster for patients.

This morning, my Department published new figures showing continued growth in qualified staff within the health service. The figures show that in September 2000, compared with September 1999, there were 2,500 more doctors, 3,500 more scientists, therapists and technicians and more than 6,300 more nurses working in the NHS. That means that since 1997, the number of doctors has risen by 6,700, the number of scientists and therapists by 9,600 and the number of nurses by 17,100. Of course, problems do remain with shortages of doctors, nurses and other trained staff, but progress in the health service is now being made.

The NHS plan set ambitious targets for addressing the shortage of trained staff that has bedevilled the NHS for many decades. From April, NHS budgets for training doctors, nurses and other qualified staff will rise by over 11 per cent. Together with the other action that we are taking to recruit and retain more staff, that increase in training budgets will sustain growth in staff numbers not just until 2004, as the NHS plan promised, but until 2010. The record increases in funding which the Government are now making mean that the NHS today is the fastest growing health service of any major country in Europe.

There is a huge amount of catching up to do. Nowhere is that clearer than in the state of NHS buildings. This afternoon, I am publishing a report on the progress that we need to make as a nation in improving the NHS estate and, in particular, in modernising its hospitals. One million patients a week use NHS hospitals. One third of those hospitals were built before the NHS was created, and one tenth date back to Victorian times. We cannot deliver 21st century care in 19th century buildings.

For too long, investment in NHS infrastructure has been a low priority when it should have been a high priority. Capital investment in the NHS was lower at the end of the previous Parliament than it was at the beginning. The consequences are plain for all to see: shoddy buildings, unreliable equipment and out-of-date hospitals. In too many places, the environment in which staff work and patients receive care is simply unacceptable.

We have made a start in putting that right. The biggest new hospital building programme in the history of the NHS is already under way. Since 1997, 38 major capital schemes, worth almost £4 billion, have been given the go-ahead. New hospitals are already open in Carlisle, Dartford, south Buckinghamshire, Rochdale and Sheffield. A further five new hospitals are due to open later this year.

The NHS plan set out proposals for a total of 100 new hospital developments in England during the course of this decade. Many parts of the country need those new hospitals—some local communities have been waiting decades for them. In 1997, we established a team of experts—the capital prioritisation advisory group—to advise the Government on which new hospitals should move ahead first. The criteria that the group uses includes an assessment of where health need is greatest and facilities are poorest.

The group has met during the past few months to advise on the next round of new hospital developments. I am grateful to it for the difficult work that it has had to do. The NHS plan indicated that nine new hospital developments would be given the go-ahead in 2001, with a further nine to follow in 2002. The group considered 29 bids for those 18 new hospital developments. The advice that I have received is that there is a strong case for investment in all 29 proposed schemes. I have accepted that advice. Instead of approving 18 schemes, I am giving the go-ahead to all 29.

I can announce that, during this year, work will begin to procure 12 new hospital developments in Birmingham and Bradford, for Bristol's mental health services, in Central Middlesex, East Kent, Leicester, Lewisham, Peterborough, Salford, Tunbridge Wells, Wakefield and Whipps Cross. Next year, work will begin to procure a further 13 new hospital developments in Brighton, for Bristol's acute services, in Central Nottinghamshire, Chase Farm, Chelmsford, Colchester, Hull, North Middlesex, North Staffordshire, Plymouth, St Helens, Walsall and Wolverhampton. The following year, work will begin to procure a further four new hospital developments in Oxford, Southampton, South Devon and Tameside.

The total projected value of the new hospital developments is £3.1 billion. Each will need to be subject to the normal approvals process and, of course, each will need to confirm viability, affordability and value for money before it is finally signed off. The first of the new hospitals will be open by 2006. That is an unprecedented expansion in new hospital developments in the NHS. For millions of patients and thousands of staff, it will provide modern state-of-the-art hospital treatment and care.

Many of the new hospital developments will be delivered through the private finance initiative, if that represents best value for the taxpayer and the NHS. I can confirm that, at the end of the PFI contract, the option will be open for each hospital to become the property of the local health service.

I am also making a further major reform of the PFI process. For too long, hospital developments have been considered in isolation from other changes to local health services. A hospital can only work successfully—for example, avoiding bed blocking and long waiting times—if it works in partnership with local primary, community, intermediate and social services. In each of the PFI deals, consideration will need to be given to building alongside a new hospital new primary and intermediate care facilities in the local community to help to ensure more seamless care for local patients. In some cases, that has already happened, spreading the benefits of private finance to other parts of the NHS, where investment is sorely needed.

However, we need to go further still if we are to deliver the shorter waiting times that patients need and good health demands. NHS hospitals deal with almost 4 million emergency admissions a year. They have grown by more than one quarter in the past 10 years. In the NHS,

emergencies always come first. That is as it should be, but every year increased emergency admissions displace planned elective admissions. That sometimes means that planned operations are cancelled at the last minute, causing distress for patients and frustration for staff.

The NHS plan announced a new generation of diagnostic and treatment centres to overcome that problem by separating emergency from elective work. Today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is visiting one such pioneering centre at the Central Middlesex hospital. As its experience shows, insulating routine hospital operations from often more complex emergency treatment can make a real impact on the time that patients wait for treatment.

Within the hospital developments that I have announced, 16 such new centres will be developed. In addition, similar projects have been agreed at City Birmingham hospital, Dudley, Hinchingbrooke, Kidderminster, Liverpool, Milton Keynes, Ormskirk, Southport, Sutton Coldfield and West Middlesex. In total, we shall invest around £250 million in this new generation of fast-track surgery centres.

The centres will each have distinctive features according to the needs of the local health service, but they will all bring faster care to patients. Patients will be able to book their admissions at their convenience rather than simply being given an appointment time. Some centres will operate at weekends. There will be more day surgery and more same-day test and diagnosis. They will all help to get waiting times down for patients. Crucially, they will mean greater reliability for patients by helping to end the misery of last-minute cancelled operations.

Investment in new hospitals must produce reform in the way in which hospitals deliver care. The problems that patients and staff experience today in the NHS are a product of previous failures not only to invest, but to reform. The resources that we are making available will help to lever in long-overdue changes.

The new hospital developments that I have announced will provide new standards of care for patients and a better working environment for staff. There will be workplace nurseries for staff. There will be no mixed-sex wards, but more single rooms. Patients will have access to a bedside telephone and television, and will have the latest scanning and diagnostic equipment. There will be same-day test and diagnosis facilities to make services faster and more convenient for patients.

There will also be more beds in the new hospitals. For four decades, the number of hospital beds has been falling—157,000 were cut between 1980 and 1997 alone. More than 60,000 of those were general and acute beds. In the year to December 2000, the number of general and acute beds in hospitals started to rise again. I am determined that that trend should now continue.

Overall, these new hospital developments will provide almost 3,000 extra beds on the number currently provided. Indeed, in every single one of the new developments more, not fewer, beds are planned. Moreover, I am issuing to the NHS today new guidance, following the national beds inquiry, which requires each region to expand, not to contract, the number of beds available for patients. The prevailing culture in the NHS has been one of bed closures and cutbacks. That is no longer sustainable. What the NHS needs is more, not fewer, beds.

This major programme of investment will bring more staff, more beds and more new hospitals. It will also bring reforms to the way in which health care is delivered. Patients will be treated in modern, high quality facilities with the latest equipment and the best trained staff. Reliability will be improved and waiting times will be cut. Of course it will take time to deliver, but after decades of neglect, the NHS is now set for a decade of sustained growth alongside far-reaching reform.

The choices that we as a Government have made for Britain—economic stability and investment in our key public services—are paying off for the NHS, the staff who work in it and, most important of all, the patients who use it.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement.

Well, well, well; surprise, surprise. Just before announcing the date of the general election, the Government produce a wish list for voters, bribing them with the taxes that they have not yet paid—good old Labour party pork-barrel politics. I am grateful to the Secretary of State for pointing out that 6,700 extra doctors have joined the NHS since 1997. Given, as he frequently points out, that it takes five years to train a doctor, every one of them, by definition, began his training under the previous, Conservative Government as part of our programme of expansion. We also provided extra nurses, thanks to the increase of more than a third in the number of nurse training places between 1994 and 1997. The Secretary of State conveniently forgot to mention those facts.

The right hon. Gentleman's announcement is a sham. He is going for great headlines. Although he says that he is giving the go-ahead for 29 projects, let us consider the buts, and there are many of them. He is giving the go-ahead for 29 projects, but each will need to be subject to the normal approval process. There are 29, but each will have to confirm viability and affordability and, before it is finally signed off, value for money.

The first of the hospitals will be opened by 2006. The Government have failed to deliver in this Parliament and have already guaranteed that, should they be re-elected, they will fail to deliver in the next Parliament.

I shall ask some questions to ascertain whether the statement is anything more than headline and whether there is anything substantive within it. How, in detail, will the projects be funded through PFI? What will be the length of the average contract through PFI? What is the expected rate of return? How many of the current PFI projects in the national health service are behind schedule?

The Secretary of State talks about seamless local care. I ask him to think again about the way in which he describes seamless local care for patients. He talks about building primary and intermediate facilities alongside new hospitals. Seamless care is a function not of geography, but of co-ordination of services. It is of little comfort to patients who might be at the periphery of a health area if everything is concentrated in the centre. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will explain what he really means.

I am delighted, at least in principle, by the concept of fast-track units, as the Secretary of State calls them in his announcement. We described them in our "Believing in Britain" document as stand-alone units. The concept has

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been our policy for some time. I am always ready to welcome the conversion of the Secretary of State to our thinking. In bringing forward the policy, he will have recognised the problems that always exist when attempting to introduce fast-track policies of this nature.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us his estimates for the extra numbers of staff that will be required for the units, and especially his estimates of specialist staff. How will consultant care be divided in the units? Will the same consultants be responsible for all junior staff, even round the clock? These are the practical differences between a headline and a policy.

The Government have missed two factors. First, the Secretary of State says that emergency admissions and displaced planned elective admissions sometimes mean that planned operations are cancelled at the last minute, causing distress for patients and frustration for staff. The greatest problem, in terms of cancellation of operations and frustration for patients and staff, is the Government's waiting list initiative, which throughout the country regularly causes cancellation of operations or worse, forcing surgeons to do things that they do not want to do simply to squeeze more minor complaints through the system to get the waiting list down.

Surgeons at Guy's hospital in London say that they have been asked by management to do fewer hip replacements so that they might deal with more minor complaints in the same amount of time. We think that that is an unethical approach to care and that the Government should abandon that failed policy.

Secondly, the Secretary of State talks about the number of beds, including intermediate care beds. We are seeing a huge reduction in the number of care beds in the community—as many as 50,000 in the current year. That will lead to more bed blocking and less ability to provide intermediate care. It will have a knock-on effect on waiting lists because of cancelled elective surgery.

I ask the Secretary of State to answer eight questions. The number of—*[Interruption.]* I know that Labour Members think that answering questions in the House is bizarre and unusual, but it is why Ministers come to the House. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether the extra nurses that he talked about will be full-time equivalents? When does he expect to reach the average European levels of expenditure on health to which he alluded? What will the length of the PFI contract be for new projects? What will the rate of return be on these contracts? How many current PFI programmes in the NHS are behind schedule? Can he confirm that the option to return a building to the NHS already exists under PFI and is nothing new? What extra staff will be required for stand-alone units and how will they be recruited? How many care home beds does the Secretary of State estimate will be lost this year, making bed blocking more acute?

We await answers to those detailed questions; that is the difference between a Government who live by headlines and a Government who have thought through their policy. We shall judge the Government not on the promises that they are making today, but on their delivery. They promised to cut waiting lists, yet lists have gone up; cut NHS bureaucracy, yet it has increased; abolish trolley waits, yet they are still there; and get rid of mixed-sex wards, yet they still exist. We judge the Government by what they have done, not by what they promise, and so will the British people.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Are you going to vote against it?

Dr. Fox: You silly man.

Mr. Milburn: If I may interrupt the dialogue, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) started by praising his party's record. If he wants to quote his party's record, perhaps he will stand by the record that meant that the number of nurse training places were cut under the previous Government, as were the number of GP trainees. They fell by a quarter under the previous Government, whereas they are rising by a quarter under this Government.

I shall deal with the specific issues raised by the hon. Gentleman. The number of extra nurses, doctors and so on that I announced—which, indeed, were announced earlier today—are head count figures, as they were in the NHS plan. The length of the contract for PFI deals will vary according to local circumstances. We expect that many contracts will be between 15 and 30 years. As for the cost of the contracts and extra personnel to the revenue budgets of the NHS, we expect that it will amount to an extra £300 million of revenue commitments for the NHS, which it is well capable of affording, given the increases that we have made.

On the number of contracts that are behind schedule, I can confirm that not a single contract is behind schedule. Indeed, many PFI contracts are coming in on time and ahead of schedule. The hon. Gentleman said that the option to return to NHS ownership at the end of a contract is nothing new. Well, it was not new under the previous Government because that was not how PFI operated then. We made the change to PFI contracts; in fact, I made it when I was Chief Secretary to the Treasury. That is a new development for PFI.

The hon. Gentleman started with a rather outlandish allegation that the programme was a form of electioneering. It is a strange form of electioneering for a Labour Secretary of State to agree to hospitals in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), the shadow Defence Secretary; in Colchester, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Transport Minister; and in the constituency of the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), the shadow International Development Secretary. It is an odd Labour Secretary of State who embarks on electioneering and agrees to new hospitals in the constituency of the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman), the shadow Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and that of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), the shadow Home Secretary. It is a very odd Labour Health Secretary who agrees to two hospitals in the constituency of the shadow Health Secretary.

The one thing that the hon. Gentleman failed to do in his speech was confirm that he would match our spending on those new hospitals. The truth is that he cannot match it. He cannot match us on doctors, nurses, beds and

hospitals because there is a big difference between the parties: the Conservative party is always committed to cuts in public services, whereas the Labour party is committed to investment in public services.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): May I warmly thank my right hon. Friend for his statement this afternoon? On behalf of my constituents in Normanton and throughout the Wakefield area, may I give a big thanks, because Pinderfields hospital is in my constituency, and that is where the new development will take place?

It has taken four years of Labour government to provide a new hospital. We appealed for 18 years under the Tories, but got nowhere and today we heard sour grapes from the shadow Health Secretary. We must now get on with the job.

Primary health care provision was allied to my right hon. Friend's statement. Will action be taken to reduce the waiting time to see general practitioners in many of the primary care group areas? Will he assure me that a monitoring system will be established to ensure that PFI delivers the work and goods, as it would be in relation to provision funded by taxation? On behalf of staff and patients at Pinderfields hospital, I express my hope that there will be a speedy start to the development of hospital services.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his kind comments. The Wakefield development involves £164 million of investment. As he knows, it is long overdue in the area and will bring benefits to the local health service. However, there will not only be a new hospital at Pinderfields general; I can confirm that the development will also involve additional primary and intermediate care facilities in the north Kirklees area. That is good overall news for the local health service.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): I welcome the announcement of the new hospitals and the new emphasis on scanning and diagnostic equipment. However, does the Secretary of State recognise that the real issue is not beds or bricks and mortar, but lack of staff? Is not that at least part of the reason why the first of the hospitals will open in 2006? Has not the use of PFI been the cause of some delay in hospital building, especially in respect of smaller community hospitals in places such as Tiverton and Frome in Somerset? Many of those hospitals feel that development has been delayed specifically because of PFI. Why is there not available in the public domain more information that compares the value for money of the PFI programme with that of direct financing, and why have some parliamentary questions on the subject taken as long as a year to answer? What level of NHS expertise exists for securing best value for the taxpayer from the PFI programme?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is aware, as we all are, that the trained staff that the NHS needs can be got from somewhere. We are making progress. We have more nurses and doctors and we are getting more radiographers and so on into the system. That is precisely what is needed, but it can be done only through training and recruitment. To achieve that, we must ensure not only the right incentives and pay structures, but the right environment for staff to work in. That is why the new facilities, including new nurseries and so on, will make a genuine difference for staff when they come on line. We shall get there in time. We have today made an important commitment not only to build more new hospitals, but to train more staff for the future. If I could train more staff more quickly, I would gladly do so, but the simple answer is that it takes time.

I think that the hon. Gentleman and his party are wrong about PFI. I know that there are concerns about it in various parties, but we have today shot one of the major foxes—apart from the one on the Opposition Front Bench—in respect of cuts in bed numbers and PFI. People have said in the past that PFI inevitably leads to fewer beds, but I am afraid that the only thing to which it inevitably leads is more hospitals.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): On behalf of the people of north Staffordshire, I thank my right hon. Friend for this truly wonderful news. Having worked in North Staffordshire hospital, I know how much it will mean not only to patients, but to staff. On behalf of north Staffordshire Members of Parliament, may I ask him to receive a delegation to discuss the extension of the medical facility at Keele university? As a former radiographer, I have another question: will he also discuss with us the re-establishment of a school for radiographers?

Mr. Milburn: I am tempted to say that every silver lining has a cloud, but that would be unkind to my hon. Friend and to the other Labour Members who represent north Staffordshire constituencies. They came to see me some months ago and I know that they have campaigned assiduously for the development and that the local newspaper has also campaigned extremely hard. I am aware of the problems in north Staffordshire, which has two sites with old buildings, dilapidated equipment and an environment that is suitable neither for staff nor for patients. We can begin today to put that right. It will take some time to get there, but we will do so, and my hon. Friend's constituents will have precisely the sort of modern and up-to-date facilities that they have long deserved.

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Just as I welcomed announcements of new hospital buildings under Conservative Governments, I welcome the same announcements from a Labour Government. I will welcome such developments even more when they are built—if they are built. But what a great shame that I cannot join the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and welcome a new hospital in south Staffordshire. The Minister talked about Leicester and Lewisham, but he did not mention Lichfield. What can he say today to reassure people in my constituency who, for the past three and a half years, have known that our minor injuries unit, renal dialysis unit, day surgery unit and maternity unit are under threat, if not that the Victoria and Hammerwich hospitals are under threat of total closure? Can he give them any reassurance?

Mr. Milburn: I shall gladly look at the situation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but if I were him I would be cautious. Before he starts making commitments that his Front-Bench spokesmen clearly are not prepared to

[Mr. Milburn]

make, he and his party must say where on earth they will get the resources from to pay for additional beds or new hospitals. Unless he does that, his points are irrelevant.

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): On behalf of my constituents and all the people of Enfield, I should like to say how important and welcome is today's announcement of the success of the bids not just for Chase Farm hospital but also for North Middlesex hospital, which will make a big difference to the delivery of health care in Enfield.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) talked about expansion under the previous Government, but my right hon. Friend will know from our meetings that, for many years, Chase Farm hospital was under threat of closure. Because of that threat, it was badly run down and local people lost confidence in it, and, when the Government were elected, staff morale was at the lowest possible point. Labour promised that we would turn all that round and that Chase Farm would have a secure future. I am so pleased that we can say today that we are delivering on that promise, and that Chase Farm has a secure future and will go from strength to strength in serving the people of Enfield. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS trust and the North Middlesex Hospital NHS trust, the senior management and all the staff on their work in making the bids robust and successful?

Mr. Milburn: I pay tribute to all involved in putting together the bids, which require a huge amount of effort and work. A great volume of papers has rightly to be prepared. The hon. Member for Woodspring asked earlier about the approvals process, but it would be pretty surprising if we did not have a proper approvals process to demonstrate affordability and value for money—precisely the sort of things that are necessary in the NHS. I also pay tribute to the staff at Chase Farm who have sometimes worked in pretty difficult surroundings. I hope that today's announcement will bring them good heart and good cheer and a bit of optimism for the future.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Questions must be brief during statements. The House will realise that there is a time limit on the important debate which follows. I appeal for brief questions so that as many Back Benchers as possible can participate.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The Secretary of State's announcement will be welcome to many hospitals, but, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, Bedford hospital has been very much at the end of the line for finance since the old days of the resource allocation working party. It desperately needs a new mortuary. Can he hold out any hope from these announcements that it will get one promptly? What can he say on this important subject?

Mr. Milburn: The situation in Bedford will be a matter for local and regional discretion. I think that the right hon. and learned Gentleman is aware that the Government are dramatically increasing capital budgets, first to the regions and then to the individual trusts. More money will go to the trusts than ever before, and they have a discretion to use that as they see fit. It is not for me to second-guess that. If there is a problem in the provision of mortuary pathology services, that should be taken up with the trust management and the regional office management. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman would care to write to me about specific matters, I shall be glad to consider them.

Mr. Alan Meale (Mansfield): I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State on these magnificent and momentous decisions, which are much in line with the approach of previous Labour Governments to the national health service, and contrary to the weasel words of the Opposition, who have tried to turn this into a party political issue connected with the general election. As the Secretary of State said, some of the new hospitals will be in Tory constituencies.

May I say on behalf of the people of central Nottinghamshire, particularly those who work in the health service, that, with the Secretary of State's help, we will make every endeavour to deliver and to continue to improve our health services in the area?

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who has spoken to me about the problem in the Central Nottinghamshire Healthcare NHS trust, specifically at King's Mill hospital. I pay tribute to the work that he has done on behalf of the local community. Frankly, this investment should have been made in these areas many years ago. Everyone understands that—the opportunity was there. For 18 years, another Government were in power who could have made that capital investment. Sadly, they decided to put other priorities first. Their priority was not investment in the national health service.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I take the Secretary of State's statement at face value. It indicated a huge additional investment in the health service. I share the gratitude of north Staffordshire for the huge capital project in the area that will benefit many of my constituents. Will he give an assurance that it is not just the number of patients treated in the NHS that matters, but the outcome of those projects. Will he assure me that the position of those with mental illness and chronic illness will not be overlooked under the NHS plan and in the encouraging announcement that he has just made? He knows my interest in the definition of personal social care, and the ability of people with chronic illness to get the medical treatments they need, which sadly they often have to pay for.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is well versed in these issues, and widely respected on both sides of the House for his views on the national health service. He is right that the NHS is having to manage more mental illness and chronic illness than at any time before. I am pleased that there will be facilities for people with chronic illness and mental illness, including a provision in Bristol, in the area of his hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox).

Mr. Marsha Singh (Bradford, West): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement? I am absolutely thrilled, as the people of Bradford will be, because the hospitals in my constituency serve all of

Bradford. I am delighted that, after years of health service cuts, we now have a Government who deliver on their promises. We do not need to electioneer on this subject, because my constituents know that the health service will not be safe under the Tories, whereas it is under Labour. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Milburn: Wait until the real electioneering starts!

I am grateful to my hon. Friend. The announcement about Bradford involves a significant investment—more than £100 million. I am well aware that some of the buildings at the Bradford Royal infirmary date from the 1930s, and that at the St. Luke's site they date back even before that to the 19th century. I am well aware of the difficulties that staff and patients have had to put up with for many years. I hope that we can make a start on the project in the Bradford area as soon as possible. It will increase the number of beds, and provide investment in extra rehabilitation services that are sorely needed.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The majority of the announcements were about large, acute hospitals serving urban populations. What progress is being made on replacing community hospitals, which often face the same problems as old, Victorian buildings in need of refurbishment? They serve smaller towns and rural areas, and include the Victoria hospital, Frome in my constituency.

Mr. Milburn: That is an important issue. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), has today announced extra investment of £13.6 million in one such community hospital at Sheppey to modernise its facilities. It is important that we apply the same rigour to smaller developments as we apply to big acute schemes. When we came to office, there were many developments in the pipeline that were not getting anywhere. We had to take some difficult decisions about prioritisation. We have done that, and it is now paying dividends. Communities are beginning to get the acute hospitals that they need. I now want to move on to the next phase.

We need to advance the private finance initiative, so that the benefits of private finance go beyond purely the acute sector and into the immediate sector, primary care and the development of community hospitals.

Dr. Doug Naysmith (Bristol, North-West): I thank my right hon. Friend for his announcement, particularly in the context of its effect on mental health services in the Bristol area. There were many other good things in the announcement, but the five Bristol Members have pressed my right hon. Friend for such a statement for some time.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that the response of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) was incredibly curmudgeonly, given that his constituents will also benefit?

Mr. Milburn: At best, it was politically inept. I would have expected the hon. Gentleman to welcome two major developments in his area. I find it bizarre that he did not, and I shall be interested to see his press releases later.

My hon. Friend has lobbied and campaigned assiduously for these developments for many years, in the context of both acute and mental health services. They are long overdue, and I hope that they are warmly welcomed in the area.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I am sure that those representing the constituencies in which hospitals have been announced will, when they are built—if they are built—be as pleased as I was when Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital was built in Margate. Along with many other hospitals, it was built under the last Government. The Secretary of State should bear in mind the fact that building hospitals is not the prerogative of any one Government; it is welcomed on both sides of the House.

The Secretary of State said that modern medicine could not and should not be practised in out-of-date, clapped-out hospitals. Nunnery Fields hospital, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), is one such: it needs to be closed, and indeed it was scheduled for closure.

Because of the closure of so many residential and nursing home beds—the Secretary of State did not comment on that when asked about it by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox)—we have a desperate shortage of beds, and a problem of bed blocking, in east Kent. The Secretary of State has two letters from me on his desk on the subject, awaiting answer. Will he give an undertaking that Nunnery Fields hospital will not close until a replacement has been provided, and that this glossy programme will include such a replacement?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman said that there had been a lot of new hospital development under the last Government. Let me correct him. Between 1980 and 1997, the last Government gave the go-ahead for seven hospital schemes worth over £40 million. During our first three years in office, we gave the go-ahead for 33 schemes worth over £40 million. The hon. Gentleman should put the situation in perspective.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has had to make difficult decisions about his position relating to the reconfiguration in east Kent, and I am well aware of the local controversy surrounding the issue. I hope that today's announcement of an investment of £102 million in new facilities in east Kent will help.

As for bed blocking, the hon. Gentleman knows that we have made resources available to Kent county council, and have also provided resources for intermediate services through the PFI. If the hon. Gentleman is so concerned about social services expenditure in the area, he might have a word with his Front-Bench team, and persuade them to give a commitment to match our additional expenditure on social services.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): May I echo the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), and say a big thank you on behalf of everyone in north Staffordshire who has supported the campaign of the local newspaper, *The Sentinel*, and every member of the North Staffordshire Hospital NHS trust who has worked hard—under the leadership of David Fillingham—to get the bid

[Ms Joan Walley]

together and meet the deadlines? May I also thank my right hon. Friend for taking a personal interest in the health needs of north Staffordshire?

Will my right hon. Friend tell us how much money north Staffordshire will receive? May I invite him to visit the area, and to take a close interest in every single development that takes place?

This is wonderful news, and we have real cause for celebration after all those years of no investment.

Mr. Milburn: They do not give up in north Staffordshire!

I will try to pay the area a visit. On the investment, we have put in £224 million. That is a very substantial amount, but the state of the buildings means that it is needed. It will mean that there will be 131 additional beds in the area overall, and I hope that that will be much welcomed too.

Another pleasing element of the north Staffordshire proposals is that the people in the hospital got together with those in the primary care and the community sectors to agree a joint bid. I hope that that will mean that a great many patients may not need to go to hospital at all. That is a good thing: it is a model proposal and it is quite right for us to give it the go-ahead.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): Does the Secretary of State understand that, although his promise of new facilities at Kidderminster looks like a pretty straightforward bribe to save the Wyre Forest seat at the next election, it should still be good news for many of my constituents in Worcestershire too? However, given the higher mortality rate that always couples out-of-hours surgery and the risks associated with any invasive surgery, is he satisfied that it is safe to provide such a facility many miles from the nearest district general hospital?

Mr. Milburn: I am satisfied about that. The hon. Gentleman alludes to my hon. Friend the Member for Wyre Forest (Mr. Lock), the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department. My hon. Friend has worked long and hard to secure that investment for his constituents. He has not been helped by those in the area who have ignored the best clinical advice, which comes from local consultants and GPs. They confirm what we know—that, sadly, it is not clinically safe to continue to provide the existing range of services in Kidderminster. We are doing what must be done, and ploughing in the additional investment for which my hon. Friend has quite rightly campaigned. I am very pleased that we have been able to give that investment the go-ahead, so that the Kidderminster area can have the modern, up-to-date facilities—and the new type of hospital—that it needs.

Dr. Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): I too welcome today's announcement of significant investment in Birmingham. That investment will go on new facilities at the City Birmingham hospital, and on a new hospital to replace the Selly Oak and Queen Elizabeth hospitals. We have waited a very long time to replace the mixed-sex wards in old Victorian work houses, such as those that I visited at Selly Oak last month. However, my right hon. Friend will be aware that there is considerable anxiety that the taxpayer should not be taken for a ride by private finance companies. Will he assure my constituents that, if public finance proves to offer better value, it will be made available within the same time scale as private finance?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, that is always the case. We test developments to determine what will provide the best value for money—providing public-sector cash through the Exchequer, or getting the investment from the private sector. In fact, my hon. Friend will know that the public sector provides the cash anyway. In a sense, it is the same as taking out a mortgage, which is what everyone does to buy a house. It should be no different when it comes to paying for hospitals. At the end of the period—30 years, or whatever it is—if the local health service wants to have the hospital back, that is fine and dandy: the local service will get it back.

When I inspected some of the facilities in Birmingham, I was impressed by the strength of the case mounted by the local health service, and depressed by the state of some of the buildings. They are very old and extremely dilapidated, and this investment is long overdue. I believe that the investment of almost £300 million in new facilities in the Birmingham area will make a substantial difference to health care for patients and to the working environment for staff.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Today's statement by the Secretary of State is very bold, and welcome for that reason. Will he explain why the proposals do not amount to privatisation? The Labour party was dead against the private finance initiative before the 1997 general election. He will know that the Duchess of Kent's hospital in Catterick—in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—recently closed. Will he assure the House that, in addition to the expenditure announced in today's statement, extra resources will be given year on year to hospitals such as the Friarage, so that they can take the additional patients that the NHS now has to treat?

Mr. Milburn: With respect, that is precisely what is happening. For the next financial year from April 2001, health authority budgets will be growing by, on average, 8.9 per cent. I cannot remember the figure for North Yorkshire, but it is a substantial amount of money. Frankly, whereas the previous Government failed to put in that investment, this Government are making that investment. The hon. Lady asks what privatisation is. It is forcing people to pay for their hip, knee, hernia and cataract operations: the policy of her hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox).

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I thank my right hon. Friend warmly on behalf of the people of Milton Keynes for his announcement today of a diagnostic and treatment centre at Milton Keynes general hospital. I welcome the recognition of the special problems that Milton Keynes faces because of its fast population growth of 5 per cent. every year. Will my right hon. Friend contrast today's announcement with the historic underfunding of Milton Keynes, as part of Buckinghamshire, under the Conservatives?

Given that there are 16 new centres, will my right hon. Friend give some thought to encouraging networking between them and the existing centre at the Central Middlesex, so that the lessons can be learned about the most effective way to run such centres?

Mr. Milburn: That is an extremely sensible suggestion. We are talking about a new type of development for the NHS, so it would be sensible to learn from experience and from the success at the Central Middlesex. Milton Keynes will receive an additional £9 million of investment in the local community health service. My hon. Friend has raised the rate of population growth with me on a number of occasions, including in our discussions about this new development. I am pleased to tell her that the proposal that we have accepted today will bring about a 16 per cent. increase in the number of operations in the local area.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on this unprecedented announcement? I have been here for a long time and there never has been such an announcement before. In congratulating him on the proposed new build, I welcome also the plans to recruit and retain even more nurses, doctors, therapists, scientists and technicians. There will be some envy in those constituencies that are not currently benefiting from the additional money. Will the Minister of Health in Northern Ireland be kept advised of the excellent progress being made in the NHS here to ensure that we can maintain comparable standards?

May I personally thank the Secretary of State for the decision that has not yet been mentioned—to provide patients with privacy and dignity by getting rid of mixed wards?

Mr. Milburn: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman. In this day and age, people should expect that, if they go into hospital, the basics will be right; the food should be good, the care should be provided, the wards should be clean and they should be given privacy and treated with dignity, particularly as so many people who use hospitals are elderly. That is precisely what we must provide and what will be possible in the new hospital developments. Over time, we will make that possible everywhere. The hon. Gentleman knows that we have regular dialogue between the four United Kingdom Health Ministers, and I very much hope that that continues in the future.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): Substantial numbers of my constituents are treated daily at Pinderfields hospital in temporary huts that were erected for casualties of the second world war. I listened with amazement to the comments of the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) in response to this statement. In 18 years, all we got in Wakefield from the Conservative Government in response to our problems was a private hospital, built at Methley Park, which drew staff out of the NHS to treat people in the private sector. I warmly welcome the Government's announcement today.

In respect of PFI—which may be applied in many of the schemes—there are anxieties among low-paid, non-clinical staff about their treatment. What assurances can my right hon. Friend give to ensure that those people are properly valued within the NHS?

Mr. Milburn: On the last issue, my hon. Friend will be aware that the Government have changed the rules. Under the previous Government, the policy was one of compulsory competitive tendering and compulsory market-testing. Inevitably, that meant that in every one of the PFI deals that went ahead, low-paid staff were automatically transferred out to the private sector. That is no longer the position. It is now a matter of discretion for the local trust to determine whether it wants to retain services such as catering, portering and cleaning in-house, or to transfer staff to the private sector. As my hon. Friend knows, we have taken important steps to protect staff better if they transfer.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend who has campaigned long and hard for a new hospital in Wakefield. He knows that I am aware of the appalling facilities that staff and patients have had to tolerate at Pinderfields. He knows fine well that the local community, unlike those on the Opposition Front Bench, will welcome today's announcement.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Unfortunately we must move on.

Points of Order

2.5 pm

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Let me take the point of order of the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory), who has given notice of it.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Tuesday, the Government leaked details of their proposals on competitiveness to the press well before the documents were available to hon. Members. In answering a point of order from me, you said that you took the matter seriously, and you asked the Secretary of State to investigate the leak and report the results to the House.

Today, the Department of Trade and Industry has replied to a parliamentary written question. The answer is inadequate. It refers to the receipt of details only by the *Financial Times*. However, it was clear from my original point of order on the matter that other newspapers were given information. For example, *The Daily Telegraph* carried a full and detailed quote, which exactly matches page 5 of one of the documents.

Furthermore, the so-called investigation simply refers to the documents being "obtained by" the *Financial Times*. We know how they were obtained; the front page of the *Financial Times* refers to a DTI insider, who provided the information. The DTI investigation ignored that, and the reply therefore implies that the documents were stolen by the press rather than handed out by members of the Government or those who work for them.

The investigation is incomplete and partial. It is a further abuse, and shows contempt of the House. I ask you, Mr. Speaker, not to accept a brush-off, indeed, a defiance of your initial ruling, but to ask the Department to try a little harder to ascertain the way in which the leak happened, and who was responsible for leaking documents in advance and thus denying the House its scrutiny role.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. As he said, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has answered a parliamentary question about the circumstances surrounding the publication of the White Paper. If the right hon. Gentleman is not satisfied with the response, he is entitled to pursue the matter through other parliamentary means, including tabling further questions to the Secretary of State. If he does that, I shall be very interested to read the answers.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to draw your attention to the Procedure Committee report on the election of a Speaker. It is an excellent report, to which I contributed. However, page xxxvi reports on the only Division that took place during our formal proceedings. The Division list shows that the majority of the Committee supported the proposal for an alternative vote. However, the report concludes that the exhaustive ballot proposal was the Committee's preferred option. Could you advise me, Mr. Speaker, on the way in which the conflict between the text of the report and the outcome of the Division, as reported in the proceedings, can be resolved? How can we proceed?

Mr. Speaker: The House knows that the report was published with great speed. Unfortunately an error was made in printing a Division list in the minutes of the proceedings. A correction is being issued.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you arrange to set the record straight? The Secretary of State for Health said that Whipps Cross hospital was in the constituency of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith). Although the hospital serves the hon. Gentleman's constituents—who will benefit enormously—it is in my constituency of Leyton and Wanstead. I thank the Secretary of State on behalf of the constituents of Leyton and Wanstead and of all the surrounding areas for giving the go-ahead for that £184 million project.

Mr. Speaker: Then that hospital has a very good Member of Parliament.

BILL PRESENTED

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Secretary Clare Short, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Cook, Mr. Andrew Smith, Mr. George Foulkes and Mr. Chris Mullin, presented a Bill to make provision relating to the provision of assistance for countries outside the United Kingdom; to make provision with respect to certain international financial institutions and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday 26 February, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 49].

Phillips Inquiry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Touhig.]*

Mr. Speaker: We come now to the main business. I remind the House that I have put a 15-minute limit on speeches from 4.30 pm to 6.30 pm.

2.10 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): On 26 October 2000, the Government published the report of the BSE inquiry. I set out the report's key conclusions and outlined a package of measures for the benefit of people suffering from variant CJD and the families of those who have already died of the disease. The House will want to know that, since that time, another six people have died of variant CJD, bringing the number who have died to 86. The variant CJD surveillance unit has identified eight people who are suffering from variant CJD.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced his intention to make interim compensation payments of £25,000 to each of the families of those who have died and to the families whose loved ones are still alive. He has already established a care package for people suffering from variant CJD which is intended to support patients in the community. The care package covers the elements of care that cannot be readily supplied by local health and social services. My hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health will give further details of the care package and compensation arrangements when she replies to the debate.

Last Friday, the Government published their substantive interim response to the BSE inquiry report, with positive responses to each of the 167 recommendations. The response sets out what has already been done, what is under way, what more the Government intend to do, and how others will be involved in the final outcome. The interim response provides the basis for a wide-ranging public consultation before a comprehensive final response is published later this year. I published the response last Friday to give parliamentarians and others a chance to consider the proposals before today's debate.

The inquiry team found serious shortcomings in the previous Government's handling of BSE. The inquiry's report documents institutional and political failure up to the highest levels. There was an inability to focus clearly on the emerging problem of BSE in cattle and to take charge. Many of those dealing with the problem hoped and believed that a link between BSE and human health would never be found. No contingency plans were made in case a link was discovered. Public protection measures were not implemented and enforced with sufficient vigour.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Although I appreciate that the Minister did not have responsibility for agriculture at the time, does he recall that, as long ago as July 1992, I and others were asking questions about the reticence of the then Ministry about the precise issues to which he is now referring? Does he recognise that the Phillips report demonstrates that the answers that we were given in this place were misleading and inadequate? I do not know whether that was intentional or unintentional, and the Phillips report does not address that issue. Is the Minister aware, however, that farmers and CJD families feel bitterly betrayed by the failure of everyone who was in office at that time to apologise or to explain the misinformation that was given to the House and the public?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes his points in his own way, and of course he anchors his remarks in the Phillips report. I am being very careful—the matter is of course contentious and enormously important—to ensure that, as I go through the criticisms of the Government's handling of BSE, every single point that I make is founded in the Phillips report. The issue of communication between Departments is clearly referred to in Phillips. Phillips said that a lack of communication led to delays in taking necessary action.

It is telling that, on issues of interdepartmental communication and contingency planning, not one but two former Cabinet Ministers had their evidence rejected by the inquiry. In some crucial spheres, BSE policy was slow in development, sometimes lagging behind the latest scientific developments. The official line, that the risk of transmissibility was remote and that beef was safe, did not recognise the possible validity of any other view. Dissident scientists tended to be treated with derision. Dispute displaced debate.

Ministers and officials tended to be over-reliant on scientific advisory committees for policy advice. They failed to recognise that the proper role of advisory committees is to advise on science, not to make decisions for the Government on issues of policy and implementation. The Government's scientific advisers were not always given a complete picture of what was happening "on the ground" in terms of enforcement and implementation. Consequently, on certain occasions, scientific advice was not based on the full facts as known to the then Conservative Government.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that there were attempts by senior civil servants to lean on scientists to suppress their data and interpret them in a manner that fitted in with the political picture at that time?

Mr. Brown: I understand the point that my hon. Friend makes, but it is not founded in Lord Phillips's findings themselves. I want to confine my comments to Lord Phillips's findings. There is ample evidence of failings—institutional failings and political failings—in Lord Phillips's findings to give parliamentarians on both sides of the House tremendous cause for concern.

Lord Phillips's inquiry identified significant failures in enforcement of safety measures. Lord Phillips explicitly says that that was made worse by the prevailing political desire for a "culture of deregulation".

From as early as 24 February 1988—this relates to the points made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler)—Ministers were aware of concerns among civil servants about a possible link between BSE and human health. Those concerns were not shared with the public. The Government failed to be completely open about BSE and did not trust the public to understand

[Mr. Brown]

complex issues of risk and uncertainty. That resulted in a presentational policy whose object, in Lord Phillips's own words, "was sedation".

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I have a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Lowther, of Cumbra Park hotel, in Carlisle. Their daughter Victoria was one of the very early tragic victims of variant CJD. They have asked me to ask various questions, which I shall do in writing to the Minister so that he is able to respond to them in detail. I should like, however, to deal with two points. First, Mr. and Mrs. Lowther have studied the Phillips inquiry very carefully, but have come to the conclusion that it poses more questions than it answers. Secondly, if what the Phillips inquiry says is correct, why is no one standing trial? Why are not ex-Ministers or senior civil servants standing trial for what some people believe is the manslaughter of at least 86 people to date, and probably many hundreds in the future?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the Minister responses, may I appeal to the House for very short interventions? There is very limited time for today's debate and the many important points that I know that hon. Members are keen to make. Brevity would be appreciated by everyone.

Mr. Brown: Lord Phillips is very clear on the point of individual blame. However, although shortcomings and failings of individuals are identified and carefully listed in the report, Lord Phillips says something to the effect that those who come to our report looking to allocate blame to individuals will go away disappointed. He identifies institutional failings and political failings, but he does not put the blame for the tragedy that has occurred on any one individual.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Minister has just stated that, in 1988, certain civil servants felt that some of the information available then should have been shared with the public. Is he of that view?

Mr. Brown: I am being careful to respond to Lord Phillips's findings because that is my responsibility as a Minister. I published the interim response in advance so that we could all read it. The report contains 167 recommendations and we all have a right to consider the Government's interim response. I do not want to go further than what Lord Phillips has said and found, and I am being careful not to treat the House to my personal views. Having studied the matter with some care as part of my ministerial responsibility, I have of course formed personal views, but my responsibility to the country as a Minister has to come first.

Lord Phillips makes it clear that in giving public assurances about the safety of beef, it was a mistake for Ministers to go beyond the advice that they had received from officials. I have learned that lesson, and I do not intend to make that mistake. Ministers should have stressed the important role of public protection measures rather than giving the impression that BSE did not pose a risk to humans. The consequence was that when the link between BSE and vCJD was announced, the public felt betrayed—a point well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew).

Lord Phillips found that, for the human victims of variant CJD, there was significant variation in the standard of care provided by the national health service. Let me remind the House that variant CJD is a terrible disease. For some of the victims and their families, the tragic horror of the disease was made more difficult to bear by lack of appropriate treatment, assistance and support. Those were Lord Phillips's findings.

Although the inquiry looked primarily at how the previous Government responded to the challenges of BSE and vCJD, it raised issues that went much wider than BSE. Those issues affect the whole process of government, across all Departments.

Mr. Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): This is obviously a difficult issue, but given the lateness with which the link was recognised and acknowledged and the long interval that could still lead to a substantial number of cases, is the Minister satisfied that we have enough research and investment in place? If and when we find that this is a much bigger problem than 86 people—which could still happen—we should know how to deal with it. We should use the time lag to prepare.

Mr. Brown: The amount of research that the Government are undertaking into transmissible spongiform encephalopathies has been enhanced in my time as Minister. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there are still things that we do not understand. It is important to keep the research programme fully funded and properly developing. As for the total number of human victims, I am satisfied that the public protection measures now in place protect the public, but I cannot give the House a forecast of how many victims of what happened in the late 1980s and early 1990s there may be.

Mr. Nick Harvey (North Devon): The right hon. Gentleman says that he is confident that the measures in place to protect the public are adequate. Will he say a word about the methods used to incinerate and dispose of infected carcases? Does he have every confidence in those methods and is he sure that there is no risk to public health from those processes?

Mr. Brown: I am satisfied that that is the case. I recently visited one of the disposal plants, in Widnes, with my Spanish counterpart, who is interested in how we organise these things here. I am satisfied that the arrangements in place now are satisfactory and secure. We do not know how much variant CJD is present in the population as a result of things that happened in the past. Until we do, it is difficult to give the House accurate forecasts of the future number of victims of the condition.

The whole affair has raised wider issues than BSE; it goes to the heart of how government works. A number of major cross-cutting topics run right through Lord Phillips's report and findings. I shall run through the principal ones. Lord Phillips identifies the need for effective management of scientific advisory committees and of how scientific advice is used in developing policy; the need for greater openness in government; and the need for a consistent and proportionate approach to the assessment, management and communication of risk and uncertainty. It is a notoriously difficult area.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The right hon. Gentleman is touching now on the open provision of

information to the public. I know his personal views on the matter, which are robust. Why did the Government resist the amendments tabled by me and many others to the Freedom of Information Bill, which would have entrenched in statute the right to information and factual advice provided to Ministers—exactly the core of Lord Phillips's findings?.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is putting two separate sets of advice together. One is the scientific advice on which Ministers base their policy decisions. It is the Government's view that that should be in the public domain. The other is policy advice to Ministers. Ministers are clearly entitled to consider a range of options before coming forward and defending what they have done. The hon. Gentleman takes me slightly outside my ministerial responsibilities.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I understand that the criticisms levelled at serving civil servants have been reviewed by Sheila Forbes and that the report is now complete. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it would have been helpful for hon. Members to have seen the report ahead of the debate? Does he intend to publish it so that we know what it contains?

Mr. Brown: I have thought carefully about that. I have not read the report, although I can do so. I have deliberately not done so because I believe that disciplinary matters within the civil service must be for permanent secretaries and ultimately the Cabinet Secretary. We should think carefully before we, as parliamentarians, decide to make assessments about the capabilities of individual civil servants. We should also think about when we should intervene and when we should not. If the House wants me to read the Forbes report, I will, but it is my considered view that I should not, and that it should be left to the permanent secretaries.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): My right hon. Friend has made a robust response to the issue, on which I congratulate him. He said in an interview on 12 February:

"The scientific advice that informs the ministerial decisions that I make is all going to go into the public domain."

That is excellent. Will that apply across government? Will all the scientific advice to Ministers be public?

Mr. Brown: I shall answer to the House for what I am accountable for. The scientific advice that informs my ministerial decision making will go into the public domain. That is my commitment to the House and my response to my hon. Friend's question. There may be all sorts of caveats involved in other Ministers' day-to-day operations of which I am not aware, so I cannot give a blanket response; but where a policy decision is made in MAFF and that decision is informed by scientific appraisal, the appraisal will be put into the public domain. People will be able to read it, and I will explain and justify the decisions that I have made. Ultimately, as the Minister, I am accountable to the House.

Lord Phillips identifies the need for rigour in the development and implementation of policy. Of course, we all want to be rigorous in the development of policy, but how is that to be tested? Surely putting the information on which the decision has been based, if it is a scientific issue, in the public domain and having it tested in the House in front of Select Committees is the best way to test it. Lord Phillips identifies the importance of having the right structure of government and legislative framework in place.

Even before Lord Phillips's team reported, the new Labour Government had already made significant changes to address the points that I have mentioned. Again, I should like to take the House through the most significant of them. We have set up the Food Standards Agency as an independent agency with consumer protection as its main objective. Its board meetings are held in public. It puts its advice to Ministers in the public domain. We have opened up scientific advisory committees to much greater public scrutiny, including the appointment of committee members specifically representing consumers. A new code of practice for scientific advisory committees is being developed, covering many issues raised by the inquiry. The House will want to know that we will be consulting on that later in the spring.

The chief scientific adviser's new "Guidelines 2000" make it clear that Departments should think ahead, identifying at an early stage the issues where scientific advice is needed. Departments should get a wide range of advice from the best sources, particularly where there is scientific uncertainty. Departments should publish the scientific advice they receive and all the relevant papers.

We have begun the process of modernising Government and of civil service reform. The aim is to improve strategic policy making and to promote a genuinely joined-up approach to problem solving. Departments, including those within the devolved Administrations, have been forging closer links to improve co-operation and consultation on matters of shared interest. For example, formal arrangements, such as the National Zoonoses Group, chaired by the chief medical officer and with members from the Department of Heath, MAFF, the Food Standards Agency and the devolved Administrations, are supported by greater informal contact. The secretariat for the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee is now drawn from three departments—MAFF, the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency.

We are proposing to enhance the role of the chief veterinary officer to make it comparable with that of the Government's chief medical officer. In future, the chief veterinary officer will advise the Government as a whole on veterinary matters and may be asked to provide advice for publication.

We are making progress in relation to risk management. All Departments have prepared a risk management framework. Some frameworks—including those of MAFF and the Department of Health—have already been published. The Food Standards Agency has published for consultation draft statements on its approach to risk. The interdepartmental liaison group on risk assessment and its subgroup on risk communication now ensure better sharing of information between Government officials and a more consistent approach to risk across Departments.

We have passed the Freedom of Information Act 2000, creating a statutory right of access to all information held by public bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, unless it is covered—as the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) pointed out—by certain tightly defined conditions: for example, where disclosure would be illegal or against the public interest.

[Mr. Brown]

All that is real progress. The inquiry report itself acknowledges that

"the scenery has shifted very considerably from that with which we made ourselves familiar".

Progress has been made, but there is more to do.

Institutional shortcomings cannot be corrected overnight. The whole approach and behaviour of Departments and individuals will need to change to ensure that the lessons identified by the inquiry are properly absorbed and implemented.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The right hon. Gentleman gives a most impressive account of the administrative action that he has taken in his Department and in respect of matters for which he is directly and currently accountable. Does he acknowledge that his tenure—although, on merit, he may well remain in his post for a long time—is limited? What is needed is an assurance that can be guaranteed only by a legal requirement of openness—one that endures and enables members of the public to know about the scientific advice that is being proffered, precisely so as to ensure that the very measures that the right hon. Gentleman has taken, which he has outlined at length, are pursued by his successors.

Mr. Brown: In responding to the Phillips report and in presenting the Government's interim response to the House, I do so for the Government. I am the Minister who co-ordinates the Government's response on the matter; I do not speak only for MAFF. When I make a commitment for MAFF, I am careful to make that clear. What I cannot do is to cover every possible caveat that might arise in the departmental responsibilities of other Ministers, so I am very careful not to do so. The commitment to be open and to publish the advice that is available to Government from the FSA—the agency, too, has a commitment to meet in public and to put its advice to Government into the public domain—is made on behalf of the Government, not just on behalf of MAFF.

Dr. Iddon: Is not one of the problems the fact that we are entering a more technical age? The scientific advice given to Government is becoming ever more technical; there are several examples of that—on genetic modification, stem-cell technology and BSE. Is it not important that, throughout the civil service—especially at the top, where senior civil servants are advising Ministers—we should introduce more scientific literacy? Are senior Ministers taking measures on that matter?

Mr. Brown: Yes. Indeed, on my arrival at MAFF, I was struck by how much science there is in the Ministry already. As my hon. Friend will know from his experience as a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, there is a programme of research—especially on TSEs—that I have just enhanced. There is certainly a recognition of the point that he makes.

Dr. Gibson: Will my right hon. Friend explain why the Ministry's budget plummeted at the very time it should have been increased so as to investigate the scientific problems to which he referred? The Select Committee found that, at the time of those problems, the MAFF budget showed the greatest percentage decrease of all departmental budgets.

Mr. Brown: We did not decrease expenditure on TSEs. My hon. Friend is right to note that there was a small downturn in the budget as a whole—a matter that I am trying hard to rectify.

To return to the main thrust of my remarks on the Phillips report, the purpose of the interim response is to hold an open, public consultation before finalising the Government's position. That is the right approach. The questions raised by the inquiry report go to the heart of some of the most difficult aspects of public administration. Although it is unusual, I believe that we are right to seek views on all the central issues raised by the inquiry report, before finalising our response.

The following are among the key questions. What else might be done to ensure that Departments maintain an effective research, management and scientific advisory system? How can Government ensure that the full range of scientific opinions can be heard by those developing policy? Do the initiatives by the Food Standards Agency on openness meet the challenges of public confidence in food safety and the specific lessons of BSE? Is there more that the agency might do?

How might Departments best implement the Government's commitment to trusting the public and continue to develop ways of being open and consulting widely while developing policy? Should the Government do more to increase access to information about publicly funded research and development programmes? What more can be done by Government on risk management in science and in food safety?

Are current and proposed arrangements sufficient to ensure that consumer protection legislation can be properly enforced and its effectiveness monitored? Are there any perceived gaps in the powers available to the Government to respond urgently and proportionately to an apparent hazard to human or animal health?

The interim response sets out the Government's thinking on those issues and on each of the 167 recommendations and lessons of the inquiry report. It is right that we should be open about the mistakes of the past, the action that has been taken to put them right, and the areas where there is still room for improvement.

One central question that remains unresolved is the origin of BSE. The Government—in an initiative taken by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and me—have asked Professor Gabriel Horn to lead a group that will pull together all the scientific research on the origins of BSE. We expect Professor Horn to make his report in time for inclusion in the Government's final response.

There has been a significant loss of public confidence in the arrangements for handling food safety and standards, in large part due to the events surrounding BSE. The report of Lord Phillips identifies institutional and political failure throughout the BSE story. Our task today is to do everything we can to ensure that those failures do not happen again. Since coming to office, the Government have committed themselves to a policy of open and transparent working on issues of food safety. Our aim is to provide consumers and others with timely, accurate and science-based information and advice,

enabling people to make informed decisions and choices. To establish credibility, it is necessary to generate trust. Trust can be generated only by openness. Openness requires that, where there is uncertainty, it is recognised and explained.

The BSE inquiry report is an important and thorough piece of work. It documents a national tragedy that has so far claimed the lives of 86 of our fellow citizens and has wreaked havoc on an entire industry. The report sets out what happened, what went right and what went wrong. It sets out lessons for the future. The Government are committed to learning those lessons.

Our interim response is a forward-looking document. It sets out what has been done, what we intend to do, and why. It forms the basis of an important consultation, which I intend to be comprehensive and thorough. I commend both the inquiry report and the Government's interim response to the House.

2.40 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome this opportunity to debate Lord Phillips's report, and I pay tribute to Lord Phillips, his team and their advisers for the work which they undertook. This is a most important subject, and I welcome much of what the Minister has said about the report and the steps that have been taken to deal with the problem since the report was published and during the past five years by Governments of both parties.

The Phillips report makes it clear that our knowledge of the issue is still far from perfect. Large gaps remain to be filled, one of which, no doubt, will be addressed by the group to which the Minister has referred. As I said in my initial response on the day that the report was published, I accept its main conclusions, and now that I have had a chance to study it in more detail, I confirm my first impression that it is a comprehensive and broadly fair document.

I have never worked at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in any capacity, so I am not able to judge with certainty the accuracy or wisdom of the Phillips report in every detail. My right hon. Friends who are present—some of whom may seek to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker—all have direct or first-hand experience of many of the matters examined by Lord Phillips, so I look forward to their comments on some of the report's details. However, on behalf of the Conservative party, I should like to make it clear that we recognise that mistakes were made. I profoundly regret the consequences of those mistakes, and we are truly sorry for the tragic outcomes and terrible suffering of victims of variant CJD and their families.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: In a moment.

Our first concern and care must be for the victims and their families, and I fully support the action taken by the Government, some of which was set out in the interim response, published last week. I welcome yesterday's announcement on the interim payments to the families.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I welcome what the hon. Gentleman says about apologising to the victims, but the mother of one of them, Anthony Smith—a neighbour of mine—has written to me, saying:

> "If you get the opportunity, I would like you to ask on my behalf why nothing has been heard from the individuals criticised in the report, not even an apology, they appear to be getting away with murder."

It is a very moving letter, and Irene Smith concludes:

> "An intelligent, healthy young man has died through ignorance and sometimes it is too painful to bear."

When will the individuals who were criticised apologise publicly?

Mr. Yeo: I naturally sympathise very deeply with the hon. Lady's constituent. The report is extremely circumspect in the criticisms that it makes of individuals. I hope that she has studied the relevant section, because it is clear from Lord Phillips's balanced conclusions that he is rightly reluctant to go too far in blaming any individual.

I would have said this later, but I shall do so now: some of the individuals involved are civil servants who do not have an opportunity to answer for themselves in any case, so pursuing individual criticisms is not a particularly constructive way to address the issue. I am interested in the judgment of the official who explored the possibility of disciplinary action against civil servants. I entirely agree with the Minister that it would be inappropriate for him to become involved in that process in any way, and in his position I certainly would not wish to read the report—

Judy Mallaber *rose—*

Dr. Gibson *rose—*

Mr. Yeo: I shall give way in a moment.

Nevertheless, the fact that disciplinary action against officials has not been considered necessary reflects the balanced way in which Lord Phillips has addressed individual responsibility.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: In a moment.

I return to the question of the families. Finding the right help for people with variant CJD is a challenge, and innovative solutions are needed. Time is of the essence, and the Conservative party pledges its full support for the measures that are needed. I believe that we owe it to the victims and their families to ensure, first, that every possible care and assistance is given to them and, secondly, to ensure that the lessons of this episode are thoroughly learned and applied right across government, not only in Britain but in other countries where BSE may now be an increasing problem. Our experience in Britain—an experience which we would all rather not have had—may have given us knowledge and expertise that will be applicable and valuable elsewhere.

Judy Mallaber: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No, it is more important to deal with the issues.

[Mr. Yeo]

Other countries may want to learn from us, and I am sure that the Minister will facilitate that, where possible. History would rightly condemn us as having failed in our duty if the messages that ring loud and clear from the Phillips report were to be ignored. Lord Phillips did recognise, however, that where mistakes were made, the individuals concerned—ranging from civil servants and scientific advisers to Ministers—acted in good faith, and I welcome that recognition.

Anyone who has served in Government will be acutely aware of the danger and possible unfairness of passing judgment with the benefit of hindsight. Neither Ministers nor civil servants enjoy the luxury of spending days, weeks or even months studying the background to decisions that are taken every day of their lives. Those decisions may subsequently come under close scrutiny, but they are often made when other issues appear to be more important or more urgent, not only to Ministers and their advisers but to the outside world. The Phillips report recognises that fact in relation to several points—for example, in paragraph 1292 of volume 1, it does so specifically in respect of the important issue of the communication of risk.

It is also significant that, even with all the resources at the inquiry's disposal and having studied the subject for three years, the inquiry team concluded that the origin of BSE may never be known. Happily, the report was at least able to dispose of some of the theories on the origin of BSE that had been put about—for example, that it resulted from changes in rendering methods.

Let me move on to three of the key messages in the report.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I respect his tone, but I represent one of the families that was devastated. Ministers were mentioned—for example, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who is not in his place. I do not know whether he has given any indication of why he is absent. Families in my constituency, finding that at one stage his evidence was simply not accepted, feel that he owes them and the House an explanation.

Mr. Yeo: The right hon. Gentleman has put his concern on record, and I am sure that it will be noted by my right hon. and learned Friend.

The first key message is the need for better communication within Whitehall and the ranks of government. That will not come as a great surprise to anyone with inside knowledge of the workings of government. The second key message is the importance of responding in a timely manner to information that becomes available and to unfolding events; and the third is the overriding requirement for openness and transparency. The Minister referred to the collapse of public confidence in the safety of the food chain, and that cannot be fully restored without such openness. That collapse has exacted a heavy toll on consumers, producers and taxpayers. Special care has to be exercised when assurances about food safety are offered to the public.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): As well as trying to give confidence, the Government must get regulation right. Many of us would argue that we do not need more regulation; we need good regulation. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that we need to find the necessary resources for that? Will he commit his party to finding those resources to ensure that not only BSE but TSEs are properly monitored and evaluated to ensure that such a disaster never happens again?

Mr. Yeo: I certainly agree that we need better rather than more regulation. Like the Minister, I must take care to make commitments only in respect of matters on which I speak. I said recently in the House that the Conservative party is committed to maintaining the budget that the Minister has managed to secure for his Department. That is the nearest that I can get to answering the hon. Gentleman's question.

The report gave a number of examples of the need for better communication in government. The Minister referred to an example that occurred early in the period studied by the report, when officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food recognised that BSE might have implications for human health, but that recognition was not immediately conveyed to the Department of Health. Clearly, vigilance is always needed to ensure that poor communication does not produce bad outcomes and that decisions are not made on the basis of inadequate data. That need is not confined to the relationship between the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Health; it extends, as the Government's interim response acknowledges, to relationships with specialist units, other agencies, advisory committees and, indeed, industry.

Communication must now take account of a new factor—devolution. The interim report, if one reads between the lines, shows that devolution has complicated matters. The existence of four Administrations in different parts of the United Kingdom increases the risk that information available to one may not always be passed to another as quickly as it should be, even though that other Administration may need the information. We had an example of that last year, on a matter concerning an environmental health risk rather than a human health risk, when information available to the Ministry of Agriculture in London about the importation of a GM-contaminated crop was not passed to the Scottish Executive in as timely as a manner as the Executive thought necessary.

The Government have set much store by the establishment of the Food Standards Agency. We fully support the agency and I warmly welcome its efforts to establish itself as an independent, authoritative source of advice for consumers on food safety matters. If the agency succeeds in that role, consumers, producers and taxpayers stand to benefit.

Dr. Gibson: Does the hon. Gentleman remember a former Prime Minister describing the agency as "PR nonsense"?

Mr. Yeo: I do not remember that. We debated the agency in Standing Committee earlier in this Parliament. It is now up and running and it has our support. I wish it well. Having said all that, it seems doubtful that even if the agency had existed in the period covered by the

Phillips inquiry, that fact alone would have prevented, or even significantly alleviated, the difficulties that the inquiry has exposed.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Yeo: I shall give way in a moment.

Lord Phillips concluded that in dealing with BSE the Ministry of Agriculture did not lean in favour of agricultural producers to the detriment of consumers. Although the agency's independence is important and valuable, and is potentially central to its future success, I do not think that it would have made a material difference to the matters that we are debating.

Mr. Nick Brown: There are two different points here. The agency's value in circumstances such as these is that it can make a robust, independent assessment of the science and then put the information in the public domain. Realisation of the link between BSE and vCJD emerged between 1984 and 1996, and, if the agency had existed then, that emerging scientific opinion would have been made public and a response would have been required, which did not happen in the events that Phillips described.

Mr. Yeo: I understand the Minister's point. Nevertheless, it is significant that Lord Phillips said in his summary that he did not think the Ministry of Agriculture—

Mr. Brown: Just to clarify, I was agreeing with that point. The hon. Gentleman was making a separate point.

Mr. Yeo: In that case, there is not a great difference between us.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No, I am sorry; I am anxious to make progress. Many Members who are directly involved in the report want to speak in the debate, and I did not intend to speak for more than 20 minutes.

Good communication is needed not only within Britain but between the Food Standards Agency and agencies in countries from which we import food. There is concern about that.

I turn now to the second message, which concerned the need for a timely response to new information on emerging problems. I do not pretend that that is an easy balance to strike. The public can be alarmed by an over-hasty response to a situation, and the ability of producers to deliver safe, healthy food at prices that suit consumers might even be jeopardised by excessive caution or over-regulation. Nevertheless, the Phillips report suggests that inaction and delay can pose equal, perhaps even greater, dangers.

The safety of the food chain and the protection of consumers must always be the paramount concern of the Government. Preserving that safety often requires prompt action. The precautionary principle has an important role to play. Timely action, even if it is embarrassing to the Government, inconvenient to the industry or costly to consumers, often offers better value in every respect in the long run than a delayed response, which can be more drastic, expensive and time consuming.

There are a number of examples demonstrating that need, which I will not go into now because they are in the report for everybody to read. One of the lessons to be learned from those examples is that it is not only the decision but its implementation that has to be timely. Sometimes that is difficult because when a policy maker makes a decision in a structure as complex as government, the speed with which it is implemented is not always visible to the policy maker, or indeed the public, until a retrospective study such as this is undertaken.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Yeo: No, I have given way several times. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends are referred to in the report, and my giving way will reduce their opportunities to contribute to the debate.

The third and crucial message from the report is the need for greater openness in Government decision making on food safety issues. It goes without saying that statements on such a sensitive subject by Ministers and their advisers must be meticulously accurate. The publication, without any censorship or editing, of advice that Ministers receive from scientific and other bodies can contribute to greater transparency. The need for openness is accompanied by a difficult requirement for Governments to achieve—the need to strike the right note in offering consumers reassurance about food safety. As the Phillips report points out, when the full consequences of BSE began to be understood, the public felt that early statements had been too reassuring. That territory has been explored many times already.

Today's debate is unlikely to be the last on this subject in the House. A great deal more work needs to be done on BSE and CJD if these matters are to be completely understood.

Other concerns are sometimes expressed, such as those about sheep. We do not—and may not—know for many years the full consequences of BSE in Britain, let alone in those countries where the incidence of BSE is increasing and the same steps have not been taken to deal with it. There are alternative theories about the causes of CJD and its link to BSE. The messages of the Phillips report apply not only to BSE and beef, but across the food chain and beyond. As the Minister said, the systemic failures that Lord Phillips identifies will be completely eradicated only by a wholehearted effort on the part of Ministers and civil servants. If they are eradicated, the sad history of BSE in Britain will at least have had one beneficial result. I join the Minister in commending the report to the House.

3 pm

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): I thank Lord Phillips and his team for their work in producing such a long and useful report. I also thank the Government for establishing the inquiry. It is interesting that it took a new Government to wipe the slate clean and have a proper examination of what went wrong. We suspected that things were going wrong, and Lord Phillips confirms that. The report is workmanlike, thorough and exhaustive, but it contains much new information.

[Dr. David Clark]

Like other right hon. and hon. Members, I was invited by Lord Phillips to make a statement to the inquiry, which I was glad to do. For the five years between 1987 and 1992, I was the shadow agriculture spokesman and opposed Conservative Members who were in government and who are here today. We had four major robust debates on the issue, including on some Supply days. I did not apologise for that then, and I do not apologise for it now.

My experiences during that time convinced me that, unless we had a freedom of information Act and legislative rights, the consumer could never be properly protected. That is why, when I was in government, I was so pleased to publish the White Paper on freedom of information. I was also pleased to chair the Cabinet Committee that was involved in setting up the Food Standards Agency. Although those two measures do not mean that problems like BSE or TSE will not arise again, we are now more likely to know what is going on. I do not apologise for that.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will reconsider the Forbes report. I understand his argument, although I hope that he will not discuss it with his permanent secretary. Many wrongs were done when BSE was emerging, and people may have died as a result. Someone must be responsible. My experience of the civil service—fine as it is—is that there is an ethos of self-protection.

Mr. Nick Brown: I understand my right hon. Friend's point, but I must emphasise that the inquiries by the civil service commissioners go only as far as the five individuals who are still serving civil servants. What he suggests would probably run wider than that.

Dr. Clark: I accept that, but I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the report's introduction. It says:

"At times bureaucratic processes resulted in unacceptable delay in giving effect to policy."

Even after Ministers reached a decision, there was a delay in the bureaucratic process. We need to be certain in public that that process and the people who run it have put those wrongs right.

Lord Phillips' report is a fine analytical work. If I have one criticism it is that he does not pick up on the nuances or the pressure that was placed on politicians who attempted to raise the issue. I shall concentrate on the period between 1987 and 1992. I believe—I think the report supports my view—that the Conservative Government made a series of basic errors of judgment, which helped to exacerbate the problem in a number of key ways. They were not strong enough to break the culture of secrecy in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and their approach was too short term.

Farmers and the general public widely regarded the Ministry as a Ministry for farmers, although that charge would have been denied. I understand that it was the job of Ministers to promote that great industry, but sometimes we have to look beyond the short term. Again, the culture of secrecy, which was probably stronger in the Ministry than in any other Department, exacerbated the problem. As Lord Phillips and many other people said, there was little or inadequate co-ordination between the Ministry and the Department of Health.

I remember participating in many debates and being howled down by Conservative Members who said, "Do you want to ruin the beef industry in this country?" The answer was no, but had we acted earlier, we could have saved a greater proportion of our beef industry and perhaps eased the conditions that the farming industry is experiencing today.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I well remember my right hon. Friend's excellent work in those years. In the debates, he, I and many other hon. Members raised the possibility that BSE was transmissible to humans. That was dismissed out of hand by the then Government and we were accused of scaremongering whenever we mentioned it. Does he recall those days? Does he think that the Government's response was appropriate?

Dr. Clark: I remember those days clearly. Right from the word go, the Southwood report said that, although it was only a remote possibility, there was nevertheless a possibility that BSE could be transmissible to human beings. I accept that it was a remote possibility, but Ministers robustly defended the status quo and said that there was little threat to human beings. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and I exchanged words on that matter in several debates.

Crucially, the public were given the impression that it was safe to eat beef. Tragically, we now know that the Southwood report was slightly wrong. The possibility may have been remote in statistical terms, but for those families who have suffered the consequences of BSE, it is a real experience. We all regret every death, and if a death is unnecessary, we must ask why it happened.

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): My right hon. Friend makes a powerful analysis of the culture of previous Conservative Governments. Deregulation was a strong aspect of that culture, and it made it extremely difficult for public protection measures to be appropriately enforced. Does he share my dismay that Conservative Front-Bench spokesmen are still talking about having a bonfire of public health regulations and enforcement measures?

Dr. Clark: At that time, there was a culture of deregulation. However, when it comes to public health, we should be aiming for better regulations and not necessarily deregulation. We must also bear in mind the fact that, in that period, many public services were being reduced. If my memory serves me right, the state veterinary service was reduced by 43 per cent. in those years. That meant that we did not have the resources in the veterinary or public health services of central Government—closure after closure of veterinary laboratories had taken place—to tackle the problem.

Thus the problem came down to money. Quotes to support that view are available. Professor Southwood said that the permanent secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food

"expressed the hope . . . that any recommendations we would make would not lead to an increase in public expenditure".

That is staggering, but it makes my point in one sentence. That is one reason why we got into such difficulties.

Delays were another issue. The Phillips report makes the point that the then Government hushed up for six months the fact that a case of BSE had been confirmed in 1986. That is in the report for everyone to see.

The Southwood report was published in June—Conservatives Members are shaking their heads, but these are the facts—but we had to wait eight months before the report was actually published. Professor Southwood suggests that vital research may have been held up in that period.

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I would prefer to concentrate my remarks in my speech, but I must correct the right hon. Gentleman's final point. The interim Southwood report was published in June and we acted on it immediately. The full Southwood report was given to Ministers in February 1989 and we published that, along with our reactions and the Government response, within three weeks.

Dr. Clark: There was delay after delay after delay. That is one of the points that I want to make. For example, it took 18 months after a case of BSE was confirmed before the Government made it a notifiable disease. It took 20 months to introduce a compulsory slaughter and compensation scheme and, even then, it was only at 50 per cent. We know—or at least we have our suspicions because I talked to farmers at that time—that farmers who were hard pressed and who were in doubt would take their beast to the market and into the abattoir because they could not afford to lose a £350 animal. The then Government eventually accepted our point of view, but there had been a delay. It took them two and a half years to announce the ban on cattle offal for human consumption, and it took them a further 20 months after making BSE a notifiable disease to pay farmers 100 per cent. compensation. That should have been done earlier.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I remember the right hon. Gentleman making many of these points in the House. The offal ban was first introduced in 1991, but it took another five years for a complete ban to come into force, during which time massive amounts of specified bovine offal and meat and bonemeal were exported. That fact is now coming home to roost, because there are now cases of BSE in countries overseas.

Dr. Clark: I remember that very well and, over the past two or three days I have been able to read the debates that took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The hon. Gentleman made such points then. I hope that I have made my general point that the previous Government were guilty of many delays. We do not know what the cost of them has been.

We issued warnings to the previous Government. In May 1990, we called for a ban on the feeding of cattle offal to pigs and chickens, but that call was not taken up until very much later. We called for the cull of the offspring of BSE-infected cattle but, again, that was not implemented until years later. We tried to stop the use of cattle and sheep offal in pet food but, again, it was years later before any action was implemented. In 1990, we called for the institution of a tagging system for cattle, but we had to wait until this Government established a plant in Workington in 1998 before we got any progress. There was a delay of eight years, in which the Conservative party in government did absolutely nothing.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House which measures recommended by advisers the then Government declined to implement? I played no part at that time, but even if previous Ministers did not get everything right, was it not the case that they systematically took steps to implement in full the advice that they received and, in certain cases, embellished and added to the proposals?

Dr. Clark: The hon. Gentleman takes a great interest in the subject and is very knowledgeable, and I do not want to disappoint him. However, I shall provide him with an example after I have made my next point. We also called for the widening of the scientific evidence made available to the Government.

Let me respond to the hon. Gentleman by pointing out that one of the recommendations of the Tyrrell committee—a committee of scientists—was that there should be a

"Survey of brains of cattle routinely sent for slaughter to monitor incidence of unrecognised infection."

The fact that that was never implemented by the Government of the day, even though their experts recommended that it should have been, is important. We know that the then Government did not implement the recommendation because it might have shown that some infected cattle were getting into the food chain. I understand the seriousness of the issue and the fact that it was a high-risk strategy, but I believe that the consumer had the right to know. There should have been a belt-and-braces approach to these issues, but the previous Government consistently refused to act on that recommendation.

Judy Mallaber: From his experience, will my right hon. Friend confirm that, even after the link between BSE and variant CJD was confirmed, many Tory Back Benchers refused to acknowledge and accept that link? Does he agree that the pressure from some of those ill-informed Conservative Members made it more difficult for Conservative Ministers to accept the link and the risk to human health?

Dr. Clark: There was certainly a strong feeling and culture among Conservative Members that they had to do everything to protect the farming industry. I understand that, but I suggested at the time—and I suggest it again now—that they were not serving their farming friends very well. Indeed, their short-term approach to the problem made life in the long term more difficult for farmers.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I should disclose that I was a cattle farmer and breeder in the period to which the right hon. Gentleman refers. I hope that he and other Members will acknowledge that, had there been proper labelling of animal feed products and had farmers had real knowledge of the possible dangers, virtually no farmer would ever have fed meat and bonemeal to cattle.

Dr. Clark: I agree absolutely. By the nature of their occupation, farmers have to think long term; otherwise, they have no future.

[Dr. Clark]

I want to stress a further important point, which relates to the way in which the Government of the day restricted their scientific advice. Any scientist who was not seen as part of the scientific establishment was excluded. I want to highlight in particular the poignant case of Dr. Harash Narang, the expert in the northern region. He was employed by the Government as the chief scientist for the Public Health Laboratory Service dealing with CJD, the human equivalent of BSE. Dr. Narang had developed a system, through electronic microscopy, to identify CJD in human beings—I concede that it was a post-mortem test—and he believed that he could use the same technique with cattle. At the time, it was taking eight or nine weeks to get the results of any tests, which meant delay with what was done with the animal meanwhile, and the animal was taken out of the human food chain.

I was staggered to find that Dr. Narang, having started to work on these matters in his own time, was sacked by the Conservative Government. To this day I find that incomprehensible. I do not know whether Dr. Narang was a fine scientist—I cannot judge; it was for his peers to judge—but I know that he had collaborated with a Nobel peace prize winner, Dr. Carleton Gajdusek, and had published papers with him. That was his standing. However, he was precluded from helping us to solve the problem. Fortunately, a private benefactor in the form of Ken Bell, a former butcher, came along and allowed the doctor to continue his work.

I am not saying whether Dr. Narang was right or wrong; it is not for me to judge. However, it is possible that his sacking cost lives, because he was permanently excluded from work in this area. At the time, it seemed that there was only a "remote possibility" of a link of transmissible disease from animals to humans. However, Dr. Narang was right and the Government's scientific advisers were wrong. I hope that we have learned—this does not stem from the Phillips report—that when dealing with science of this nature, which is at the bounds of knowledge, members of the scientific establishment do not have the sole solution.

Perhaps I have detained the House for too long, but I feel strongly about the issue. It flavoured my political thinking and I was glad to put right some of the wrongs, as I saw them, in government. I tried to ensure that, if we ever faced such a challenge again, we would have a better equipped group of scientific advisers, a better equipped bureaucratic framework, and Ministers able to think more strategically and more long term. Not enough long-term thinking was done by the previous Government when they were trying to cope with BSE.

3.23 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): There are many things that I would like to say about the matter. I shall not be able to deal with them all in a short debate, and those to which I refer will have to be dealt with briefly.

I begin by expressing my deep sympathy for the victims of nvCJD and their relatives. The Phillips report brought out the fact that everyone involved was naturally concerned to take the right decisions, and quickly. Most of us are parents. All of us have the greatest concern for protecting human life and health. In my experience, everyone involved with BSE pursued all the issues most conscientiously. That is fully recognised in the Phillips report.

I deeply regret that the outcome has been such human tragedy. However, as is recognised in the Phillips report, we were dealing with what turned out to be an unprecedented situation. The report describes BSE as a novel and alarming zoonosis. It was certainly one that was not in the experience of anyone who was trying to identify it at the time. Professor Sir Richard Southwood and other scientists—the best international experts that we could find to advise us on the issue—described us as dealing at the frontiers of science.

The chief veterinary officer once told me—I think that it is in the Phillips report—that 40 new animal diseases a year are identified. We never know which one will be the most difficult. As the Minister will know, there is a disease in the pig industry that is known as PDNS. It probably has a more damaging impact than classical swine fever. It has emerged only in the past two years, and we still do not know what is causing it. After two years, the Minister cannot take action on it because he does not know what action to take. That was the problem that we faced with BSE.

In two instances, I shall be critical of the Phillips report. However, I put on record immediately my congratulations to Lord Phillips on what I regard as an exhaustively thorough and balanced analysis. There will always be lessons to be learned from something so major and so difficult to come to grips with. I compliment the Phillips team on the way in which it has drawn the lessons together. I compliment the Government also on the thoroughness of the interim response.

I can speak only for the two years when I was the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which was in the early stages of BSE. Most of the events discussed in the Phillips report—especially the implementation of decisions that we took—came after my time. I did not follow events quite so closely thereafter, and it would not be right for me to comment on them.

I have already referred to uncertainty. I was always conscious, and certainly at the early stages—I shall make a direct response to the criticisms of the right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark)—that we were taking decisions without being entirely sure of the scientific assessments underlying them. When I took the initial decisions about the banning of meat and bonemeal, I was conscious that we were only 80 per cent. sure that it was a cause of BSE. There was always the risk of being completely wrong and being challenged on judicial review or in the courts by the industry or anyone else for taking actions that were not based on any proper scientific assessment.

My first answer to the right hon. Member for South Shields on the meat and bonemeal ban is that I received the final paper from the chief veterinary officer, in which he analysed what he thought was the cause of BSE—namely, meat and bonemeal—only jn May 1988. That was when I had the evidence on which to act. Within three weeks, or less, I had banned it. That was a quick response.

As for the slaughter and compensation proposal, I agree with the criticism in the report that there was delay. The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food should have been in contact with the Department of Health earlier about that proposal. However, the chief medical officer

took the view that that Department, once consulted, did not have the necessary expertise to consider the proposal. Therefore, the Southwood committee was set up. Within days of receiving the interim Southwood report about the slaughter and compensation scheme, I went to the Treasury. Within a week, I secured Treasury agreement. An announcement was made almost immediately thereafter. That was a rapid response.

The right hon. Member for South Shields is completely wrong about the final Southwood report. I received that report in early February, and published it as quickly as I could. I had been to Cabinet and obtained the Government's decisions on it as well. I not only published the report immediately, but announced the Government's actions. In each instance the right hon. Gentleman is wrong.

Dr. David Clark: How does the right hon. Gentleman explain to the House the comments of Professor Southwood, when he says:

"We recommended that such an experiment"—

transmission from cow to calf—

he started almost as soon as we met, but it did not get under way until the report was published 9 months later."—[*Official Report*, 21 May 1990; Vol. 173, c. 78.]

Mr. MacGregor: That is not a reference to the interim report, because we came out with all of that early on. I cannot remember the position on the particular issues that the right hon. Gentleman is raising, but I was anxious throughout to act immediately on the Southwood recommendations, and I did so.

Uncertainty is an important issue.

Mr. Ainger: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No. If I give way a great deal, I shall go on for too long. There are still a number of issues within the report with which I want to deal.

Paragraph 1151 of the Phillips report states:

"When our Inquiry began, most members of the public remained under the impression that BSE was scrapie in cattle and that the reason why cattle food had become infectious was that renderers had altered their methods of production to the detriment of safety standards."

Most of us in the House took that view; it was certainly my view. Therefore paragraph 166 in the Phillips report surprised me. It states:

"The epidemic of BSE may have started with a single diseased cow. Why should that cow have developed BSE? It is possible that the disease developed spontaneously as a consequence of a genetic mutation."

The report states that that probably occurred in the early 1970s. It continues:

"There are other possibilities. No one will ever know."

I took the received view—the best view of everyone at the time—that the cause was the change in the rendering of meat and bonemeal in the early 1980s and that sheep scrapie was coming through the process. That turned out to be partly right, as meat and bonemeal were the cause of the spread. However, according to Phillips, the rendering had nothing to do with it. I remember that the right hon. Member for South Shields raised that process with me frequently, but in fact rendering turned out to be a false cause.

I was surprised even more by the fact that scrapie had nothing to do with the cause. That is significant, as all the received scientific assessment at the time suggested that BSE came from scrapie, which led to the view that the risk to human health was remote. The reason for that was simple: scrapie had been around for 200 years, and had not had any consequences for human health.

Mr. Tom Clarke: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I shall do so just once.

Mr. Clarke: I trust that the right hon. Gentleman will not worry too much about time, because we respect his courage in coming to the House and applying himself to the matter.

May I briefly put to him a comment in the Phillips report and invite his response? The report states:

"Mr Andrews . . . should have raised with Mr MacGregor the need to have an answer to this question."

That is, the question why action should be taken on baby food and not other food. The report continues:

"Mr. MacGregor himself should have seen that the question . . . was pursued."

Would the right hon. Gentleman care to respond to that criticism?

Mr. MacGregor: If the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I shall respond to both criticisms at the right place in my speech.

I shall finish my point about uncertainty, which is terribly important. The scrapie analysis led to the scientific assessment, to which nearly everyone subscribed at the time, that the risk to human health was, as the Southwood report states, "most unlikely and remote". However, Southwood and others emphasised that if those conclusions were wrong, the consequences would be extremely serious. I never sought to disguise that. I frequently made that point wherever I went, as well as the point about the remoteness of the risk and the relationship to scrapie.

It is not only a question of scientists getting some things right and some things wrong in their early assessment. Indeed, the Phillips report does not criticise them at all for that. The Phillips report itself may be wrong about the cause; it admits that it simply does not know. I was surprised by the certainty with which it discussed the mutation theory—it may be wrong. It is essential that we continue to assess the causes, which is why the Government are right to ask Professor Horn to review the origins of BSE. That is one of the most important actions that they can take because, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) said, the ramifications may go wider than BSE itself.

Mr. Nick Brown *indicated assent.*

Mr. MacGregor: I note that the Minister is nodding.

That possibility demonstrates the difficulties of grappling with the issue at the time.

Judy Mallaber: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: No, I will not.

[Mr. MacGregor]

I want to concentrate on the lessons. First, I must briefly address criticisms of individuals, the vast majority of which were addressed to civil servants, who do not have the opportunity to reply. In my experience, they were extremely dedicated in dealing, in many cases, with extraordinarily difficult issues on top of an already heavy work load. Of course, mistakes were made. However, far more often, Phillips concludes that the right and, critically, key decisions were, in most cases, taken speedily in frequently difficult circumstances, and in the context of available knowledge. Indeed, there are many commendations to that effect in the report.

To deal with the criticisms made by the right hon. Member for South Shields, Phillips makes it clear that there were no cover-ups or deceptions. The right hon. Gentleman's point about MAFF being close to the farming industry is rejected absolutely in the report. The accusation that the 50 per cent. compensation led to an increase in the number of people trying to evade controls is also rejected. All of those accusations were analysed carefully in the report, and were rejected.

One reason—I put this criticism mildly—why there has been a focus on individuals is that individual criticisms were listed in an appendix, on which there was a media focus. The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was right and rather kind in his original statement to the House, when he indicated that there was not a similar appendix drawing out all the commendations and praiseworthy comments in the report about individuals. If that had been done, the report might have been rather more balanced.

I obviously do not want to make comments about too many civil servants, but my own permanent secretary, Sir Derek Andrews, was meticulous and conscientious in dealing with the matter. I felt particularly for the chief veterinary officer, Keith Meldrum, and Dr. Pickles from the Department of Health, who received individual criticisms. However, if one considers the overall balance of the report, they come out extremely well. I should especially like to talk about Keith Meldrum, whom the report describes as

"a particularly dedicated and hard-working civil servant".

I want to put that on the record, as it is only fair to that individual.

Judy Mallaber *rose—*

Mr. MacGregor: If the hon. Lady will forgive me, I have a lot to say.

I also want to emphasise that the three vital measures that we took during my time at MAFF were warmly praised in the Phillips report; it is important that that be understood. First, Mr. Wilesmith, who undertook the initial analysis of the disease, was given great praise for his speedy identification of meat and bonemeal as a cause of the spread of the disease. There was wide praise for the fact that we banned meat and bonemeal very soon after—I believe that the report refers to our swift and appropriate response—which directly contradicts what the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston said. As the report makes clear, that action reduced the rate of infection by 80 per cent. overnight.

Equally, the slaughter and compensation scheme and the specified bovine offal ban were described as vital measures for the protection of human health. Indeed, to respond to the point of the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston, the report describes one of those measures as far-seeing and of great importance.

Having set out that context, I shall deal briefly with the two individual criticisms of me. The first—to which I think the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston was referring—was that, after the final Southwood report, I did not ask for a review of the report's suggestion, namely, that if SBO materials were not to be used in baby food, why not ban their use in all food? But that is precisely what I did. It is on record that that was one of the first questions that I asked internally in the Ministry. As I considered the issue of baby food, that question was increasingly on my mind, and that of many people. That matter was raised in the Ministry.

The proof of that is the action I took on the Southwood report to ban SBOs in all food. I acted in response to my first question, so the Phillips report's criticism of me is rather strange. The reason that criticism is in the report—which is important for the context of future inquiries—is that many of us who went to the public hearings for the Phillips report, and had questions put to us by the report's counsel, frequently had to point out that not everything that takes place in Departments is written down. We had the strong impression that a paper trail alone was being pursued and that discussions that were not recorded in detail were thought not to have taken place.

In fact, I did ask the question about SBOs, which is why I came to my decision, and why I am surprised by the criticism in the report. There is therefore a problem in relation to the inquiries undertaken by the Phillips team. The report rightly refers to the fact that the civil service is a Rolls-Royce machine, but criticises it for taking too long to reach conclusions on issues and on its tendency to draft and redraft guidelines. That is a fair criticism. Of course, if people are asked why they did not do something 10 years after the event because no record exists that they asked a certain question, or if they are asked why a matter was not raised at a ministerial meeting because the minutes of that meeting did not refer to it, that will lead to a situation in which everything will be written down and ultra-caution will be practised to protect the civil servants.

I know for a fact—and I am sure that the Minister would agree—that in many of our meetings, the private secretary, rushed off his or her feet, takes a quick note of the conclusions and that is it. Somehow or other, the Phillips inquiry gained the impression that, unless it was all written down, something never happened. There is a risk of banking up double safety mechanisms in the civil service, which could lead to even greater delays.

The report makes another criticism of me, which I must read out briefly. With reference to the SBO ban, it states:

"Mr MacGregor is to be commended for introducing a ban which was to prove such a vital element in guarding against the risk that BSE posed to humans. However, he should not have agreed to presentation which played down the importance of the ban as a protection for human health."

That is the only other criticism, which suggests that I should have added another sentence or two to the parliamentary answer that announced the SBO ban. I have wrestled with the matter, which is one of judgment. At

the time, I was anxious about exceeding Professor Southwood's recommendations. I was worried that the next day's headlines would say "Minister and advisers disagree", when I wanted them to refer instead to the action that we were taking as an ultra-safe precaution for human health. Indeed, Professor Southwood described the precaution as being belt and braces in the extreme. In order to avoid the wrong interpretation and to show that the measure had developed from the Southwood report, I added some important additional points. They are itemised in the Phillips report, so I shall not repeat them now. That was my focus, but I am criticised for not adding a sentence saying that risk still remained to human health.

The answer to that criticism is twofold. First, there had been widespread debate in the media about the issue in the weeks leading up to my decision. The way in which it was received by the press shows that the action that I was taking in the background was fully understood. Secondly, I was assured by all the scientists that the action that I was taking was not scientifically necessary. I therefore made the point that if there was a risk and we turned out to be wrong, I would already have taken the action to deal with it. That is the way in which I presented the matter, and I leave that to the House to consider. I thought that I had presented it reasonably well.

Mr. Boswell: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the flavour of those two points justifies fears that the practice of defensive medicine might be growing? Just as it might be difficult to pursue specialties in medicine because of the risk of being sued thereafter, Ministers might be inhibited, if we persist in the constant habit of having to find an audit trail, in making decisions because they must act in an over-defensive way in order to justify them subsequently.

Mr. MacGregor: I shall return to that interesting point during my consideration of the report's lessons. I apologise to the House for taking so long to make my speech, but as I was criticised in the report, I think it reasonable for me to respond, even if very briefly.

I am in broad agreement with the Phillips report's conclusions on the areas about which I have relevant knowledge, and with those in the Government's response.

Judy Mallaber: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I am sorry; I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me if I continue.

I want to concentrate on some particular lessons, having made the point that I am broadly in agreement with them. I entirely agree about openness. I always tried to release information and reports as quickly as I could, especially with regard to communication of risk. I reject the idea that I knowingly suppressed any information, and I am sure that those of my right hon. Friends who have had similar responsibilities will say exactly the same.

Mr. Ainger: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. MacGregor: I want to make progress, as I know that so many hon. Members want to speak.

I say to the Minister that Government must not let the desire for wider consultation or the need for further review delay action if they conclude that a particular proposal or policy decision must be implemented quickly. If one consults widely, there is a risk that that may happen. I had to take two or three of my decisions very quickly.

The question of openness and sedation is difficult—the Minister is also likely to find it problematic—because of the media reaction. We were anxious to convey the precise scientific views that were taken about the risk. However, we always had to be careful about misleading headlines, so conveying such views was always a difficult matter of presentation. My other criticism of the report is that it does not give attention to the response and attitude of the media. That was hardly mentioned, but a whole chapter on it would have been helpful. I suspect that the Government's response does not deal with the importance of the media either. It contains a brief reference to training civil servants in respect of dealing with the media, but the matter is wider than that.

Although openness is entirely right, it will not solve all the problems when some sections of the media are interested merely in a sensational headline or a good scare story. I suspect that even the Food Standards Agency and its director will find that that is the case from time to time. I have always felt that one of the key qualifications for the director, apart from being a scientist, is skill in dealing with the media.

I wholly support the need for a much more informed public debate on risk assessment and management. I have often tried to get such debate going, not only as Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, but as Secretary of State for Transport. Initiating such debate is not, however, an easy thing to do. Such matters are rather boring and an accident or food scare is much more interesting than proper risk assessment. I fully support every effort to get proper risk assessment and management more into the public debate.

I strongly support the codification of good practice in respect of the scientific committees. The Neill committee on standards in public life, of which I am a member, has been codifying good practice in public life for the past few years. The lessons of the past and up-to-date thinking mean that codification is worth while.

I have a couple of points that relate to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). It is important sometimes to pay our advisers, who have a big work load, as is mentioned in the report. There is also a risk that they will be unwilling to serve if every piece of advice that they give is subjected to the sort of treatment given by the Phillips report. I suspect that some members of the Southwood committee feel aggrieved at the way in which their actions have been analysed. In future, advisers might need reassurance on indemnity. As my hon. Friend suggested, that is important in this age of blame culture and ambulance chasing.

The report refers also to training scientists in the use of plain language, which is important, but above all, media training is highly desirable. I often felt that the precision to which scientists are used can be at odds with some journalists' desire to get a good headline.

I turn finally to two other important matters. On Government action and legislation, I was surprised at how little reference was made to judicial review in the main body of the report. It was mentioned once or twice, but Ministers at the time were conscious of its dangers. I once worked in a Department that was subjected to judicial

[Mr. MacGregor]

review in respect of a particular case, so I know about all the risks of legal action that would have arisen if we had taken decisions that were not properly based.

There is a very interesting question about the matter that has not been fully explored. Paragraph 1329 of the report states that powers

"should not be restricted merely because it cannot be established as a reasonable probability, as opposed to a mere possibility . . . that the disease is transmissible."

That is where judicial review comes in and, from about paragraph 1303 onwards, the report contains an interesting analysis in that regard, although I shall not bore the House by reading it out. The message that I took was that it is always important to get the balance right. One has to continue to give the opportunity for outside interests to challenge through judicial review a Minister's action and the basis for it. On the other hand, if one is to proceed as Phillips recommends when the issue at stake and the scientific evidence are very unclear, the implications of judicial review must be thought through. That has not yet been done properly, so I ask the Minister to think a bit more about that issue.

I could say so much more, but I should like finally to deal with tests. We were greatly handicapped in the early years by the lack of a reliable test. We had no test to detect animal protein in compound feed, let alone ruminant protein. That was extremely difficult in respect of the bonemeal ban. I would have loved to have a test, and the enzyme linked immuno sorbent assay—or ELISA—test was eventually developed. Even more important, however, was the detection of BSE. Decisions taken by the European Union now depend greatly on having a reliable test for BSE. My understanding is that there are still defects in the existing post mortem tests, in terms both of their complete reliability and of the speed with which they can be carried out. We must ask in how much better a position we would be if a test in live animals could be developed. Indeed, the Government make that point on page 40 of their response. I attach enormous importance to the development of a reliable test, as it would make it so much easier to deal with the disease. I am glad that the Government are putting so much effort into that.

I apologise for having spoken so long. My conclusion is that we did seek the best scientific advice that we could and we always acted on it. We never did less and occasionally did more. We also took what Phillips described as far-sighted measures. However, BSE was an unprecedented phenomenon from which lessons are bound to have been learned. The Phillips report gives the right framework and, in my view, the Government are right to follow it up rigorously.

3.49 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) will understand if I do not comment in detail on what he said because many other hon. Members wish to speak.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), my interest in BSE developed when I was the Opposition agriculture spokesman, a post which I held until the 1997 election. As long as I live, I will remember the day when British Ministers came to the House of Commons to announce the likely link between BSE and CJD. It is a measure of how serious the issue was that, in the morning, the Government sent the chief medical officer, the permanent secretary at the Agriculture Ministry, and the Cabinet Secretary to brief me and my right hon. Friend Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman), who was then the shadow health spokesman, on the seriousness of the statement that the Government were to make that afternoon.

A great deal has happened since that day, and I congratulate the Government on setting up the Phillips inquiry. There is no doubt that that inquiry was necessary and there is a great deal to be learned from this episode in British history. I should like to start by quoting from the report:

"At the heart of the BSE story are questions of how to handle hazard—a known hazard to cattle and an unknown hazard to humans. The government took measures to address both hazards. They were sensible measures, but they were not always timely nor adequately implemented and enforced."

That key conclusion of the Phillips committee explains why disease in cattle was allowed to develop on such a massive scale.

We know the proportions of the BSE crisis. The disease was first recognised in November 1986, and since then we have had nearly 180,000 cases of BSE on more than 35,000 farms in Great Britain. Since the statement by the then Government in March 1996, measures have been taken which have cost the British taxpayer £4 billion.

We can now quantify the cost of BSE in terms of the animal population, but we are not in a position to judge how big a tragedy it will be for the human population. There have been a number of articles in *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal* during the past year on new variant CJD. There have been 94 probable or definite cases to date, of which, as my right hon. Friend the Minister said, 86 have died. That is not a large number, certainly not compared with the 17,000 cases of AIDS, but the numbers are rising and no one can say how many cases will develop in the years that lie ahead.

The impact of BSE has not been confined to the UK. The EU budget now faces serious problems because of the collapse in the beef price, and two German Ministers were forced to resign only recently on the issue.

What went wrong? I want to specify four failings in particular. First, there was delay. Measures to protect human and animal health were not put in place as quickly as they should have been. BSE was first identified in November 1986, but animals showing symptoms of the disease were still allowed to go into human food until August 1988.

When it was realised that cattle and sheep should not eat cattle and sheep, the Government gave the industry five weeks' grace to clear their stocks of feed, and we know that many in the industry took much longer than that so that stocks were used long after the ban came into force.

It was not until November 1989 that the brain and spinal cord of all cattle were banned from human food in England and Wales, and January 1990 in Scotland. The mechanical recovery of meat, which can result in spinal cord entering human food, was not banned until 1995.

Secondly, there was under-enforcement. Measures to protect human and animal health were appallingly badly enforced in the feedmills and slaughterhouses. Our cattle

were still eating contaminated feed many years after it was banned in 1988, and BSE has been confirmed in an animal born as late as 1996. More than 42,000 cases of BSE have been confirmed in cattle born after the feed ban. With regard to human food, nearly half the slaughterhouses visited in September 1995 were found to be in breach of BSE controls designed to keep infected offal out of our food—five years after the offal ban was put in place.

Thirdly, there were failures of communication. Far too often in the BSE story, Departments failed to talk to one another. That is borne out by the Phillips report. Lack of communication between MAFF and the Department of Health resulted, as the right hon. Member for South Norfolk confirmed to his credit, in the delay in introducing the slaughter and compensation policy and in addressing the risk posed by bovine products in human medicines.

The experts at the neuropathogenesis unit, based in Edinburgh, could have told the Government years before that it was possible that a small amount of infective material could transmit the disease.

Fourthly, the public were given the false impression that BSE posed no risk. So keen were the Government to try to prevent food scares that the public were not properly informed of the risks presented by BSE. Lord Phillips says:

"officials and Ministers followed an approach whose object was sedation".

When the news broke in March 1996 about the link with variant CJD, therefore,

"the public felt they had been betrayed".

There was then a massive crisis in public confidence, not only in the safety of beef but in the trustworthiness of official advice, a point which my right hon. Friend made recently. We are still suffering from that and it will take a long time to regain the British people's confidence in ministerial statements.

Disastrously, people in the food industry were listening to the Government's campaign of reassurance. The BSE report concludes that the lack of diligence in keeping our food safe was attributable in part to the Government's efforts to ensure that news about BSE did not give rise to public concern.

I want to touch on the role of scientists. I was an animal scientist myself before I entered the House. The BSE inquiry report makes many valuable points. In particular, Lord Phillips points out:

"BSE did not emerge at a propitious time so far as research was concerned. In 1985 Ministers had accepted a recommendation from the Priorities Board for Research and Development in Agriculture and Food that expenditure on research into animal diseases was disproportionate and should be reduced by 20 per cent. Implementation of this policy was resulting in staffing cuts at research establishments."

One area that is not expanded on in the report is the ability of scientists to publish their findings. The Minister may be aware that there are scientists who worked on behalf of the Government on BSE matters who are quite clear that they were prevented from making their findings public. Dr. Valerie Ellis, assistant general secretary of the Institution of Professionals, Managers and Specialists, the trade union representing many Government scientists, states:

"Anecdotally, Members of the CVLA"—

the central veterinary laboratory agency—

"did raise the issue of concern over transmission of BSE between species and were told 'not to be daft'."

One example put to the BSE inquiry of where publication was prevented was a paper on the possibility of a link between BSE and feline spongiform encephalopathy. That is an area that needs to be considered further, which I hope will happen in the fullness of time and before the full report is published.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today that he has appointed a distinguished scientist to consider the science of BSE. As was pointed out by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk, we do not know for sure how BSE first developed, and we still have a lot to learn about it.

I welcome the fact that the Government moved so quickly to set up the independent Food Standards Agency and my right hon. Friend's important restatement of the fact that all the advice and scientific information in this area is now in the public domain. There is no question but that that is a quantum change. I also welcome the new care arrangements for new variant CJD patients and the proposed improvements in the machinery of government.

What will happen if a new disease appears in future? What key lessons have been learned from the BSE crisis? The first is that we should apply the precautionary principle. When human health is involved, it is always wise in the first instance to err on the side of caution, or—dare I say it?—perhaps on the side of overkill. Secondly, we should identify all possible routes of transmission to other animals and humans, and impose all measures necessary to reduce the risk of transmission to as low a level as possible. We should ensure that all measures to protect human and animal health are properly enforced. That is vital, and arguably the most important lesson to learn from the crisis. All of us, including Conservative Members, know that those measures had not been effectively enforced for years.

Judy Mallaber: From my right hon. Friend's experience, would he agree that some of these lessons might not have been learned if the inquiry had not been established? Will he speculate on whether, if the Conservatives had unfortunately got into government at the last election, they would have set up such an inquiry? I would like to ask the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) that question, as he made complimentary remarks about many aspects of the report, although he included some caveats. Does my right hon. Friend think that the inquiry and report would have happened if there had not been a change of Government? What would have been the outcome of not holding the Phillips inquiry?

Dr. Strang: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. We would almost certainly not have had this report: the issue would certainly not have been examined with such thoroughness. When the Opposition reply to the debate, it would be helpful if they made it clear that, in the unlikely event of a Conservative Government coming to power after the next election, they would carry forward this work and implement all the measures that my right hon. Friend has pledged to put in place.

The other lesson to learn from this debacle is that we should be open, even when the information available is inconclusive. The public can cope with the truth, and they

[Dr. Strang]

must be trusted with the truth. What they cannot cope with is the realisation that they are not being told the whole truth.

There were failings in the handling of the BSE crisis. The harsh reality is that animals and, almost certainly, some people who should have been protected from BSE have been exposed to it. We are seeing the end of the disease in cattle, but we still have no idea of the scale of the human disaster resulting from BSE. We can only hope that the number of new cases of variant CJD in humans will begin to fall.

4.2 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I agree with many of the points made by Labour Members, and I understand the justification offered by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor). I extend the sympathies of Liberal Democrat Members to all who have been tragically affected by BSE. I do not want to dwell on the mistakes of the past, because I would much rather examine ways of working together to ensure that a national tragedy such as BSE is never allowed to happen again. With hindsight, many people who have examined this issue over a long period and many of the public now accept that there were difficulties, but they want leadership from the Government to ensure that the changes required do take place.

The Government have produced their interim response to the inquiry, which I welcome. I acknowledge the work of Lord Phillips and his team in producing such a wide-ranging, far-reaching and exhaustive report. I hope that we shall return to it in the future, because its recommendations extend far beyond the BSE crisis.

The report has not been received without criticism, however, and interestingly the Government chose to make an initial response prior to this debate, which in turn has shifted the emphasis and diminished the opportunity to discuss the merits and demerits of the report. I, and perhaps other hon. Members, have been contacted by some of those involved in the inquiry who have voiced a number of concerns, two of which deserve a mention.

First, there is concern that the inquiry went about verifying certain prejudged conclusions rather than seeking answers from scratch. That is a serious allegation, but I am minded to discount it, given the meticulous attention to fairness that the language of the report denotes, and the fact that it is broadly accepted by both sides of the House.

The second charge gives greater cause for concern, and has been touched on by other hon. Members. The report, without warning, in effect altered the status of civil servants in such a way that personal responsibility was accorded to civil servants who had previously been afforded the privilege of being covered by ministerial responsibility. That the actions of civil servants were scrutinised seems right in the circumstances, but given the very public nature of the inquiry's scrutiny, more attention should have been paid to protecting some individuals, especially those who faced extremely serious allegations that were published on the internet but later not upheld. Although I welcome the fact that the Phillips inquiry left no stone unturned, we must always be mindful of protecting our public servants from unjustified media or public attention.

The key to the future is the way in which the Government have responded to the report's findings. I want to examine what I believe are the three crucial areas in need of improvement that were highlighted by the report: first, the way the Government deal with risk; secondly, the need for Governments to operate more openly both between Departments and in their interaction with the public; and, thirdly, the way the Government operate internally in their practices and protocol.

The main element of the Government's response to the BSE inquiry is the establishment of the Food Standards Agency: a body that we have supported and which we want to succeed. On the face of it, the Food Standards Agency should be able to address the immediate problems raised by the Phillips inquiry. It is independent, so it should be able to command greater credibility in an age of scepticism; it conducts its business in public; and it puts all its research contracts out to tender to attract the best scientific minds available to inform it.

The Food Standards Agency cannot be the solution to all the problems highlighted by the inquiry, however. Give or take a few other smaller measures, the general impression is that the Government think they have done enough, but questions remain, the most important of which is whether the FSA is getting it right. Is it properly perceived as independent of Government, or would it be better if it reported direct to a Committee of the House rather than to a Government Department? Is it considering all the best scientific opinion? Perhaps more importantly, are its pronouncements heard and trusted by the general public?

To my mind, we are at an early stage and we cannot answer those questions for certain. The FSA is very young and its mettle is being tested by the new European BSE situation. Even if we accept that the FSA is doing all it was intended to do, the job, as laid out by Phillips, is by no means done. First, much more was brought out by the report. For example, are the Government making adequate contingency plans while awaiting the advice of their expert advisers—now the FSA? That fundamental question must be addressed, and I shall return to it later.

A yet more serious problem is raised by the "FSA solves all" approach. The findings of the BSE report have implications for the Government which range far beyond just food safety. The report specifically mentions medicines, but as yet the Government have done little to address that issue. More importantly, its comments on the treatment of risk should have caused the Government to re-examine their practices across all policy areas. On health, what is the situation in respect of single-use instruments? What about sterilisation procedures and blood transfusions throughout the United Kingdom? What about the labelling of medication?

A clear issue on which Lord Phillip's findings should have informed policy is the Government's treatment of the risks associated with mobile phones and telecommunications base stations. That issue will never be addressed by the FSA, but it leads me clearly to the first of my three concerns: risk.

How to treat risks to the public is a dilemma for any Government. It was clearly a dilemma for the previous Conservative Administration, and it remains a dilemma for this Government. There is no point in causing unnecessary scares, but the Government have a

fundamental role in protecting public health. That will often require action even before positive proof is available.

Since the period that Lord Phillips investigated, a number of risks have been identified by many individuals and groups. Genetically modified foods and the MMR vaccine have been mentioned. I am pleased to note the presence of the Minister for Public Health, who will doubtless comment on that. The most recent risk—the new outbreak of BSE on the continent—has been dealt with by the Food Standards Agency, rather well in my view. It might well be posited, however, that the lack of public panic had more to do with the fact that the media did not have enough sensational revelations from journalists with which to plaster their pages than—necessarily—with the fact that the FSA's openness has reassured the public. There has, however, been no cover-up, deliberate or otherwise, which is commendable.

Another risk that has come to the fore recently—I have already mentioned this—is posed by mobile telephones. In this respect, the situation is less clear. It is plain that some lessons from Phillips have been learned: the Government admitted that they did not know what the risks were, and recruited experts to investigate. When the experts concluded that they, too, did not know what the risks were, the Government published the report and put the science behind it in the public domain by publishing a leaflet.

That was very commendable. So far, so good. The Government congratulate themselves on that good work—but the most important aspect highlighted by the BSE report is the need to act even when the risk is only potential. We are talking about the so-called precautionary principle.

Although the Stewart report recommended the taking of precautions in relation to mobile telephone base station sites many months ago, we still hear that case upon case of applications for base stations near schools, and in dense residential areas, are accepted every day. The public are naturally very concerned, and we are seeing a growing number of petitions and demonstrations. What is the point of all this communication of risk, if precautions are not being taken until the risk has been spread?

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): According to the hon. Gentleman's argument, should not mobile phones be banned outright? The danger is likely to lie not in the mast but in the phone itself.

Mr. Breed: I agree. I think that the science should be in the public domain, and that we should adopt the precautionary principle—especially when it involves the recommendations of an independent report, which in this case was instigated by the Government.

I realise that the Minister may not wish to comment on those specific points, but I feel that comments on the broader issues relating to the handling of risk are important, and they arise from the Phillips report.

Closer, perhaps, to the hearts of many who take part in agriculture debates is the classical swine fever outbreak, which is fresh in many of our memories. It raises another aspect of the Government's attitude to risk. In their interim response, the Government responded to Lord Phillips's view that insufficient resources were available for research and veterinary services when the problem of BSE arose. They have concluded, however, that the current emergency funds are sufficient. Why, then, was I contacted during the swine fever crisis—I think other Members were as well—by so many farmers who were worried about unreasonable delays in getting test results back, apparently because Government scientists were overwhelmed with work?

Have we really done enough to cover such emergencies? That is a question that the Government must answer. The rundown in Government research and testing facilities over many years may well have precipitated some of the problems revealed by the Phillips report. Are those facilities now being given the resources that they require?

There is another crucial question. Has enough been done to tackle concerns about openness and communication within Government, and between various Government Departments and offices? A response was published before today's debate, on the basis of which I think we should ask a few more questions.

I have registered my concerns about excessive reliance on the Food Standards Agency to deliver all the changes required by Phillips. More noticeable by its absence from the Government's interim response, however, is any reference to a serious look at the need to improve intragovernmental communication and openness, and to tackle the cultural problems identified in the report.

We are told in the Government's response that they have established a number of concordats between various Departments and offices to enshrine the principles of better communication; but where precisely is the communication link that was so sorely missing during the period covered by the report—the link between the Department of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food? I am not at all convinced that enough communication channels exist as yet. Perhaps some are in the process of being set up—the Minister may be able to enlighten us a little later—but it sometimes seems that rather than redressing the lack of communication between those two Departments, the FSA has been passed the buck. It will not do the job; it must be done by Government Departments acting together.

I welcome some measures announced in the interim response. A cross-departmental committee on zoonoses has been set up, and the secretariat of the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee now involves members of both Departments. Those are positive developments—but what of the other lesson that must be learned if the report is to make a real difference? I refer to the fact that, too often, important documents sat on desks rather than being attended to with the urgency that is due to them.

All too often, it was left to those outside Government to identify the areas in which discussion was lacking. The report tells us that my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) was instrumental in raising the problem of head-splitting. I think we know what that means: I suspect that my hon. Friend was talking in animal terms. The issue had been the subject of an internal memo that had apparently been ignored.

Research commissioned by Pedigree Foods originally identified what should be classed as specified bovine offals. Pedigree Foods took the initiative to answer questions raised by the Government's own inquiries. The report specifically notes, moreover, that the measures to

[Mr. Breed]

ensure careful implementation of the specified bovine offals policy was driven not by Government but by the media, stating:

"The media played a valuable role . . . which had a beneficial influence on Government policy".

It is rather nice to be able to praise the media, at least in this instance.

The Government clearly do not talk among themselves enough. I, for one, feel sceptical about the possibility that more concordats and rules will substantially change the culture in Whitehall that has dominated us for so many years. In one circumstance after another, I still find examples of exactly the culture that the BSE report urges against, that of secrecy and closeness—be it refusing to answer straightforward questions, or refusing to meet people informally rather than undertaking formal and expensive studies and consultation. Consultations are a safe way of dealing with issues as far as the Government are concerned, but in many cases more openness would limit the need for such cumbersome exercises.

That brings me to the last issue I want to raise: the operation of government. The BSE inquiry raised many examples of bureaucracy that would be laughable if their consequences had not been so tragic. One example is the urgent note to abattoirs—a key document—explaining the importance of enforcing regulations, which took more than a year to draft and redraft. Examples of delay—Labour Members have made clear the existence of such examples—have been a significant factor in this whole affair. We need to know that such bureaucratic idiocy has ceased, and that action will be taken much more promptly.

The inquiry made it clear that the Government should not use openness and consultation as an excuse for dither and delay: they must be ready to act, and to act quickly, when there is any possible risk. Yet even in the Government's response, we see further evidence of the operational logjamming in Whitehall. One of the inquiry's crucial findings was that the Government did not have sufficient understanding of their own operation to determine who should be informed of, and who should act on, the new risks posed by BSE. The report recommends that

"lead responsibility should be clearly established for co-ordinating scientific response to a new disease or new outbreak of disease".

I believe that the Government needed to leap into action on this matter, but what was their response? They used the words "aspirational terms". The Government are looking into assessing who should be consulted and who has lead responsibility.

Only recently, the rural White Paper gave a clear example of how action can be put to one side and preference given to constant drafting and redrafting. While t's were being crossed and i's dotted, the countryside continued to decline. The Government must learn these lessons, put them into action, and monitor their own performance.

In short, we cannot say that the Phillips report is done and dusted. Its recommendations and suggestions need to be regularly referred to, and perhaps a formal annual review should be established to ensure that the recommendations accepted by the Government have been transferred into Government performance. It is all too easy to slip back into the old way of doing things. We must guard against that, and ensure that the sea changes recommended by the report are implemented, maintained and, where necessary, reinforced. That is the most important message of this sorry saga.

It is tempting to revisit the past regularly to remind ourselves of the horrors of what went on, but we have to look forward. We must do so with confidence that the report's recommendations will truly transform the performance of government.

It is true that the Food Standards Agency has been a step forward, and it is currently cutting its teeth on the very complex issues of European BSE. However, the Government need to learn more of the lessons from the report—about their internal workings, about the need for communication and openness across the board, and about the need for action, even in uncertainty.

For example, the European BSE issue raises certain questions. Are contingency plans being made in case the FSA urges a ban? Have the industry and the scientists, including those outside the existing SEAC and FSA structures, been consulted, and has contact with them been maintained? Who will be in charge of taking forward any policy? Is the Department of Trade and Industry on standby? Are MAFF and the Department of Health in agreement with whatever contingency plans have been drawn up?

Beyond that, what more is planned? Are the Government working on establishing who is responsible now, before their consultation on this interim response comes in? Is contingency planning on the basis of the outcome of the Krebs trials under way?

It is undeniable that BSE was a national tragedy. The Government are learning the lessons, and that is vital. This is not a party political issue, because it is about government and how it works, whichever party is in office and whatever hazards come to light during a Government's time in office.

The BSE inquiry was thorough—I think that all hon. Members agree on that. The Government must now be as thorough in their response, both in the immediate time frame, and in the future.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, may I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 15-minute limit on all Back-Bench speeches from 4.30 pm until 6.30 pm?

4.24 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I think that the debate has been extremely helpful. I want to thank the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) for his reply to me, and I will of course study his response.

My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food showed again today superb competence and great sensitivity in dealing with what is an extremely serious subject. It is one of the most serious matters that I have been involved with since I came to the House. The House will know that my interest in the matter in my constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston arose as a result of the very tragic case of Donna Maria McGivern. She was a teenager who died after an illness of two and half years, in circumstances that we can only imagine.

My aim today—I hope that I say this with a sense of humility—is to encourage the House to think about how families coped with the sadness that they felt as they met the hour-by-hour challenges that arose in a situation that none of them could have predicted. The families have been helped very considerably by the Irwin Mitchell firm of solicitors, and in particular by Mr. David Body. It is gratifying to note that many of the families' criticisms and proposals have been taken on board in the Phillips report and in the Government's interim response to it.

At the close of the families' evidence in phase 1 of the inquiry, Lord Phillips told them:

"This is very much your inquiry. The pressure that led to it has largely come from you. You are entitled to a thorough inquiry, and we are doing our best to make sure that this inquiry is as thorough as it could possibly be."

The House is seeking to respond to that approach today.

The questions for us are, "What really did happen? Can we really get to the root of these dreadful problems? In the light of the clear evidence of incompetence, what do we do to respond to the needs of those who have been so deeply affected?" My constituents seek the truth: they want neither a witch hunt nor a whitewash. They will have been helped by our consideration of the Phillips report today.

I initially raised some of the issues under discussion today in a debate in December 1999. I subsequently led a delegation to meet my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health, and I thank her for the interest that she showed even at that early stage in the development of the Government's response.

I want also to put on record my thanks to the Government for their speedy response when it came to compensation. They also acted speedily to consider a strategy for a care package when similar sad events arise, and to ensure the co-ordination that they clearly regard as necessary, both within and between Government Departments, and with the various outside agencies involved. Those bodies include the surveillance units, and it is the unit in Edinburgh that is charged with the responsibility of dealing with these matters in my area. I welcome the fact that dialogue is on-going, and that consultation with families continues, especially on the issue of compensation.

I turn now to the tone of the report. I want to look at the parts played by MAFF, the Department of Health and by those at every level of Government who had responsibilities in this matter. Bearing in mind what the families involved are seeking to find out, I invite hon. Members to consider how well those responsibilities were discharged.

Inevitably, the question arises whether BSE might be transmissible to human beings. At what stage did that emerge as a clear possibility, and was the response to it adequate? The inquiry made some very severe criticisms. It concluded that, in the first half of 1987, there was a policy that one senior veterinary investigation officer described as

"a total suppression of all information on the subject".

We have heard today about the events of 1988, to which my right hon. Friend the Minister addressed some of his remarks. Even after March 1987, it was demonstrated that there was a strategy of restricting the dissemination of information about BSE. Clearly that was, to say the least, somewhat unhelpful, both then and now. The inquiry concluded that the principal reason for this was concern about the possible effect on exports, and the political implications should news get out that a possible TSE in cattle had been discovered in Britain.

Many more people should have been involved in taking that decision, if it was the right decision to take. I do not believe that that was the case. The problem, on all the evidence, jumped from species to species—from cattle to feline consumption, and then to the human chain. That must have taken a lot of time. The response, in the view of the families concerned, was not one that they would have regarded to be as urgent and imperative as the facts then known invited it to be.

That leads me to question the role of Ministers as the evidence has unfolded; the role of civil servants, although I take on board the views of my right hon. Friend the Minister; and even whether the Food Standards Agency—whose establishment I welcome—is as all-embracing as it might be, given what I believe could be its input in resolving some of the difficulties.

We cannot ignore the evidence that was before the committee, to which I shall refer as briefly as possible. It is important to have on the record some of the conclusions, and without wearying the House I will do that:

"The Government did not lie to the public about BSE. It believed that the risks posed by BSE to humans were remote. The Government were preoccupied with preventing an alarmist over-reaction to BSE because it believed that the risk was remote. It is now clear that this campaign of reassurance was a mistake . . .

A vital industry has been dealt a body blow, inflicting misery on tens of thousands for whom livestock farming is their way of life . . .

BSE developed into an epidemic as a consequence of an intensive farming practice—the recycling of animal protein in ruminant feed. This practice, unchallenged over decades, was a recipe for disaster . . .

At times officials showed a lack of vigour in considering how policy should be turned into practice to the detriment of the efficacy of the measures taken."

Those are serious indictments. Although my right hon. Friend the Minister rightly advised us to consider the report as a whole, it is important that we address ourselves to those criticisms.

Earlier I expressed surprise at the absence of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am disappointed that he is not here to deal with some of the criticisms that were made of him, by contrast with the right hon. Member for South Norfolk. The Phillips report was particularly critical of the failure of the Government to review and evaluate the Southwood report, saying that there was at MAFF, as at the Department of Health, a team failure to subject the Southwood report to a proper review in order to evaluate whether the unexplained differences in approach to the food risk posed by BSE had explanations that appeared to be sound.

Some families recall the evidence that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe gave during phase 2. He was critical of the inquiry generally, and commented that the committee had become lost in papers and failed to understand how Government worked. He was particularly robust in asserting that the Southwood report had been subjected to a vigorous review in his Department. The Committee expressly rejected his evidence.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman told the committee that in his Department there had been copious review, correspondence and discussion about the report, which would have included the questions raised—

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

"although he could not now remember the details of these."

He also referred to an "amazing quantity of exchanges" between his Department and that of the right hon. Member for South Norfolk. The Committee said:

"We did not accept this evidence"

and went on to say:

"If offal is not safe for babies, why is it safe for adults?"

The committee went on to say that the right hon. and learned Gentleman should have ensured that his Department reviewed the report and provided an answer if there was one. He did not.

I regret very much having to repeat those criticisms, but I would have thought that the families and the House expected the right hon. and learned Gentleman to be here to reply to these serious comments. Whatever further debate we have, we will not necessarily get all the replies that people would expect from Ministers involved over a lengthy period. We look forward to some responses which hitherto have been missing.

My right hon. Friend the Minister correctly referred to the role of the civil service and told us about the inquiry by Sheila Forbes. I take on board my right hon. Friend's sensitivity, but many of the families have conveyed the view that, given that there is no suggestion of disciplinary action, there may be a danger that what is perceived as the ethos of the civil service—that much goes on behind closed doors without people hearing much about it—is being endorsed by that approach.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk gave his explanation of some events. He will forgive me for concluding that, frankly, even in that situation, perhaps some of the civil servants were protecting their own backs rather than Ministers'. That might be regarded as extreme, but families do take that view and we have to find a way of reassuring them about the role of civil servants and the need for openness and transparency in these matters.

I must now refer to the role of the FSA. It was a first-class decision to establish such an agency, which is long overdue. I welcomed it at the time and I think that it is a great credit to the Government that the decision was taken. However, I must express some of the reservations that some of the families have, although those are expressed in generally supportive comments about the work that the FSA is seeking to do. The families believe that their contribution will be acknowledged by Sir John Krebs and his staff.

Nevertheless, the families also believe it is symptomatic of attitudes that are prevalent in the civil service that while numbers of groups were invited by the FSA to be stakeholders in the BSE controls review—for example, the National Farmers Union, the Meat and Livestock Commission, the Small Abattoirs Federation, the Department of Health and MAFF—no invitation was extended to the Human BSE Foundation. Those involved had to speak from the floor if they chanced to be at a meeting. Nobody wanted that approach, probably not even the organisation itself. I believe that it can be corrected.

I thank the House for giving me a hearing and I hope that I have not inadequately expressed the view, the concerns and—dare I say it?—the anger of my constituents. If, in the light of the report, the Government's response and my right hon. Friend the Minister's excellent handling of the situation, we get to a stage where lessons are learned and we can prevent such trauma from reoccurring, the deaths of my constituent Donna Maria McGivern and many others will not have been in vain.

4.40 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I am sure that all hon. Members would wish to associate themselves with the early comments of the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), and those of the Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) about the anguish of the families. It is also common ground between us that Lord Phillips has produced an exemplary and exhaustive report. He has approached the subject with great clarity. Later I want to concentrate on an aspect on which further work remains to be done.

Although I was not criticised by Lord Phillips, it is right to try to draw some lessons from my experience and that wonderful thing, hindsight. I shall use the short time available to do that. I want to build on the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) about judicial review.

If we are to learn the lessons of the report, we must put ourselves in the position of a future Minister who tries to act differently, as it suggests. Such a Minister faces the continuing problem of the interpretation of the rule of law in the United Kingdom compared with many other nations. We do not have administrative law, and Ministers have to behave in a specific manner when making decisions.

Let us take the case of feeding meat protein to herbivores. The report states that the activity is not new, but dates back to the 1920s. Our legal system means that if, in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s or 1970s, a Minister had said, "That is unusual; I'm not happy about feeding meat protein to herbivores. I think it would be better to ban it", he would have been subject to judicial review and unable to effect his intention. That is also true today. Many might say that the same anxieties are provoked by feeding fishmeal to herbivores. However, I know that no Government or Minister could ban that practice in the absence of anything other than a general belief that such an activity was not proper.

If we try to examine the issues in the way that Lord Phillips suggests, we must consider carefully the implications of our system of judicial review. That runs counter to another aspect of the report that we want to support: the ability of people beyond the confines of Whitehall and Westminster to intervene and say that actions are unfair and unacceptable. It is a pride of our nation, stemming from 1688, that we have a system in which the rule of law, rules, regulations and attitudes apply as much to Ministers as to anyone else. I do not suggest that we are considering an easy problem or that I have a solution. However, it deserves serious consideration.

Mr. Boswell: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Gummer: I prefer not to give way because I have only 15 minutes in which to speak.

The second issue that requires careful consideration is the relationship between openness and science. When I became Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I said that I would put in the public arena all the advice that I

received. The present Minister will agree that there was no occasion when I failed to do that. He referred to such advice this afternoon. We are as one; that issue is not controversial.

However, the way in which one deals with risk is controversial. The Food Standards Agency recently had to consider the risks of imported French meat. The new, independent agency—its independence is uncontested—made a clear decision, which it stated. I accept the Minister's explanation of the two aspects that were tackled when my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk asked him about that. However, it cannot be said that the decision received universal approbation.

One of the difficulties of assessing risk is that it is not possible, in any circumstances, to say that there is no risk. All that one can do is say that the risk is small, remote or unlikely at one end of the spectrum, and likely at the other. Even if that is repeated constantly, there are two reactions, which are not necessarily rational. The first is, "If the risk is as small as that, why are you bothering about it?" The second is, "If you can't tell me there's no risk, there must be a big risk." The difficulty lies in communication.

There is a problem when scientists say that a risk is remote. Actions must be proportionate to that. That is the nature of English law and Scots law; in that context, we are at one. I refer the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston to stem cells—an issue on which he and I agree—to show the difficulty of assessing what scientists tell us. We both have several deep doubts about what they have said.

There have been concerns about genetically modified organisms. One has only to read the statements made by the Prime Minister on that issue, explaining the safety of GMOs, to see that he has based them on advice that he has properly taken from scientists. The Minister himself will know how difficult it is to frame legislation in a manner that not only protects the environment—I think that we share a similar view on the dangers posed by GMOs to the environment—but avoids the possibility of being caught in a judicial review that would overturn all ability to protect people in those circumstances. It is therefore a matter not only of the law but of how one can communicate the scientific view when that view very firmly asserts that there is little risk or that the risk is very remote.

Although I think that various possible cases were examined, I do not think that the Phillips report takes the view that there have been restrictions on scientists. Simply as a matter of fact, I must say that whenever I found someone who was speaking differently from my advisers, I went to great trouble to investigate that person and his comments and whether I should give them credence.

Although I think that the events occurred before my time, I certainly looked into and reviewed carefully some of the matters that were criticised by the right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark). As he will know, in such circumstances, there can be no question of Ministers sacking anyone. However, that was not the issue. The issue was to determine whether those who spoke differently had something to contribute. In all circumstances, Ministers—like all hon. Members, I should hope—have to gather as many independent examples as possible, investigate the facts and heed them.

Mr. Ainger: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No. I am really going to try to complete what I have to say in my 15 minutes, and I have only about five minutes left.

I have now to address the issue of the media—not to attack them, but for exemplary purposes. It would be very difficult to do what Phillips hopes that we shall do in future without taking that issue very seriously. I refer the Minister to one of my decisions which resulted in my closing a relatively large number of abattoirs. The media were not pressing me to close more abattoirs, but attacking me every time that I closed one. That situation continued, and even extended to enormous inaccuracies.

I remember taking one journalist to task. I told him that I had closed the abattoirs because I thought they had not been protecting the public health. I asked him why he did not telephone me before making such statements so that I could provide the facts. I said that I was quite open about providing the facts, which are all in the public domain. He said, "If I telephoned you I would not have a story, and I have to pay the school fees." Although that is an extreme example, it is a serious one. We have to recognise that moods in the media change enormously. Even if one is seeking to be an honourable and decent reporter of what is being said, one gets caught up in the particular mood.

I used abattoirs as an example because, in that case, the mood turned out to be entirely wrong. So tough was it, however, that I found it necessary to see every hon. Member—some were Labour Members—in whose constituency an abattoir was being closed, to explain in detail why we felt that closure was necessary. The attack from outside was that the closures were either a wicked Brussels invention, which is of course the most convenient explanation for the media, or that I had a thing about small family abattoirs, as some of them were. If the point on mood is true in that situation, it must be true also in the situations that we are discussing.

I come now to a difficult issue. It is easy to pick out examples of a person's comments that turn out to be right. It is also perfectly right for hon. Members to stand up and say, "I remind the Minister that, in 1988, I said so and so", and those comments turned out to be right. However, although I do not think it is necessary, I could read out a series of comments that people made in 1988, 1992 and 1994 that turned out to be entirely wrong.

There was, for example, great pressure on me to ban all milk produced in the United Kingdom because it might be an agent. The scientists told me, with the same firmness that they used when telling me that BSE transmission was a remote possibility, that transmission by milk was a remote possibility. The difficulty is that I happened to be right in one case, but—clearly, as events turned out—wrong in the other. The advice, however, was the same. In both cases, my determination to accept that advice and to reach to the edges in the direction of safety was precisely the same.

As I am in the fortunate position of not having been criticised, I am not trying to defend myself. I am merely saying that that is my experience of doing the job.

[Mr. Gummer]

A serious issue for future Ministers is to determine how, in the context of Phillips's concerns, we can square a circle that is difficult enough to deal with at the time.

In my last minute, I should like to say something about civil servants. I think that the Minister has taken a brave and proper stand in his decision neither to read nor to comment on what is a civil service matter. I come from a business background. I was a Minister for 16 years. One of the most difficult things about being a Minister is that one has no personnel responsibility. One could not run a business on that basis. I merely say that that is a right thing. It is a necessary protection for the public from politicking in the civil service. The time to stand up for principle is when it is most difficult. The Minister has done that, and I commend him for it.

4.55 pm

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I listened carefully to the comments of the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). I remember his years as the Minister in charge of agriculture from 1988 to 1992. I would have preferred it if he had addressed most of his remarks to his period in office rather than commenting on judicial review and criticising the media. Those were smokescreens rather than proper accountability for his period in government and the decisions taken at that time.

I have taken a strong interest in BSE since my election as a Member of Parliament. I am a scientist and the constituency that I represent is rural. West Wales has a great deal of livestock agriculture. The first speech that my right hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. Davies) made in the House in 1988 was an Adjournment debate, in which he drew attention to the problem of BSE. I remember having a conversation with him about it the following week. In the months and years that followed, as the epidemic unrolled across Britain, I took part in debates here, watched what was happening in the media and was in touch with farmers and farming unions in my constituency, and my views are based on that first-hand experience.

Much of my experience is reflected in the Phillips report, although my view is more polarised and less generous than that of Lord Phillips. I want to refer to two comments made by farmers. I am surprised that, in the two or three hours of the debate so far, little direct reference has been made to farmers, their unions and their role in the crisis. A large part of the secrecy and the hiding of the crisis came from individual farmers and the farming unions, the Conservative constituency associations, MAFF and so on.

In 1989, a farmer came to see me at one of my surgeries to reveal something connected with the problem of BSE. He said that a cow on his smallholding that had contracted BSE had had a calf just a month or two before. He was surprised that, although the cow was destroyed and he had received compensation, the calf was allowed to survive and develop. As the cow must have been developing BSE during most of its pregnancy, he thought that there was a danger of maternal transmission.

I wrote to MAFF and tabled a series of parliamentary questions, because it struck me forcefully that the precautionary principle was not operating. It was self-evident common sense to the farmer and to me that it would safeguard human health to destroy the calf as well as the cow. When I told that story a few months later to a prominent member of my local farming union at the united counties show in Carmarthen, he said that there was no risk whatever of transmission. He told me that a cow on his farm had had BSE. The price of calves was good in the late 1980s. He knew that there was a valuable calf inside the cow, so he arranged for a caesarean section so that the calf could survive. He was so convinced that there was no risk that he arranged for a vet to come out and conduct an operation.

Sadly, that was the climate that prevailed among farmers, the farmers unions and, indeed, in MAFF. They believed that although an animal was severely diseased, there was zero risk of maternal transmission—there was no problem. The then Government completely denied that there could be any relationship between BSE and a risk to human health, even though, as we heard earlier, the Southwood report conceded in 1990 that there was a remote risk of such transmission.

In May 1990, the House debated the subject. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal was then the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) opened the debate for the Labour Opposition. When I re-read my own contribution to the debate, I found that my Labour colleagues and I reflected the views of the Labour party at the time. We made it clear that the transmission of BSE to humans could never be ruled out. Indeed, by 1990, there was evidence of transmission to other species—zoo animals, cats and so on. Prudence or the precautionary principle should have told us of the risk.

Hansard shows that, during that debate, Labour Members—especially my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields—were howled down by Conservative Back Benchers, who accused us throughout of scaremongering. Unfortunately, however, what we feared came to pass. We were constantly told that there was no evidence of BSE being transmitted to humans, but the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. There is always that danger.

I am delighted that, during the first few years of a Labour Government, we established the Food Standards Agency; it is important that, instead of being part of MAFF—with its conflict of interest between consumer and producer—the agency is independent of Government and reports to the Department of Health. The producer thus has no direct involvement.

Several hon. Members have cited the comments in the Phillips report about the then Government's policy when BSE became a problem. Their fears of public over-reaction resulted in the presentation of policy by Ministers "whose object was sedation". They tried to pretend that there was no problem and to cover up its very existence.

Reference has been made to civil servants and former Ministers. I regret that no action is to be taken against any individual. A front-page report in today's *Western Mail* quotes a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger). It says:

"Terry Harvey, from Saundersfoot in West Wales, whose 25-year-old daughter Marianne died of the disease in August 1999, said the money brought little comfort.

"I would be prepared to forgo every penny in return for an opportunity to question some of the ministers who were in charge during the BSE outbreak. For someone to admit responsibility for our children's deaths is more important than any amount of money."

Parents and relatives of CJD victims share that view, as do the general public. An enormous blunder was committed; it spanned about 15 years and no one has owned up to their errors, nor explained why what was originally a problem has become a catastrophe.

I hope that, under the new Government and certainly with the Minister in charge, all scientific committees, not just those in MAFF, become much more open and transparent. They should conduct as many of their meetings as they can in public, so that they can be publicly reported. Not only their advice but their meetings should be open to the press and public.

I welcome consumer representation, but it needs to go wider. Environmental groups, especially those dealing with GM foods and anything that has a consequence for the environment, should be as broadly based as possible. We need to incorporate dissenting voices much more. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields referred to the experience of Dr. Harash Narang in the BSE story. Other people, such as Richard Lacey and Stephen Dealer, expressed dissenting opinions, but their opinions were not generally taken into account.

When in opposition in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Labour party pressed for much greater effort to be put into BSE research and into developing a diagnostic test, first in dead animals and then in live ones. That research work was not done on a sufficient scale in the 1990s, when £1 million, £2 million or £3 million was involved, and the epidemic is now costing us at least £1 billion a year. That early work should have been done. There are tests now, but they are not very reliable. In a sense, we have lost five or 10 years simply by not making such research a priority in the 1990s.

The costs of BSE are incalculable. So far, there have been 94 victims of CJD in Britain, but we do not know whether the eventual total will be hundreds or thousands. We have heard about the problems with blood transfusion and the fact that it is impossible to sterilise surgical instruments if they are infected with prions because they are so robust and heat resistant. The cost to the NHS will, therefore, be substantial.

There are now incidents of BSE in France, Germany, Ireland and Portugal. Instead of being disappointed and sorry for their problems, some Conservative Back Benchers and farmers almost revel in the fact that BSE is now found in other countries. In fact, Britain exported BSE to Europe. It can all be traced back to animal feed that was recklessly exported. Feed contaminated with meat and bonemeal was banned in Britain in 1988, but it was sent abroad.

Could BSE happen again? Could we suffer from something like it again? Of course there is a danger that such diseases could evolve, but I hope that the Government now have in place suitable mechanisms—through greater transparency and openness, but particularly through the Food Standards Agency—to ensure that it cannot happen again.

5.8 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I thank the Minister for his measured and careful approach to this extremely difficult and distressing situation. I congratulate him on his forward-looking approach and the fact that he is determined to build on the lessons referred to in the Phillips report.

I should like to associate myself with the apologies and regrets expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the Conservative spokesman on agriculture. The tragic fact is that, no matter what we say this afternoon, nothing can bring back the loved ones of the families that have been so tragically affected by the whole episode of BSE. The very best that we can do is to take the lessons that have to be learned from the circumstances and the experiences that we have all had. In that respect, I wish to express my regrets for the agriculture industry, whose once prosperous and thriving cattle sector is a shadow of its former self, although obviously it is rebuilding itself.

The report is admirable and expresses the issues very clearly in a readable and comprehensible manner. It makes every possible effort to be fair and even-handed. In such a debate, it is to be expected that hon. Members will be tempted to quote selectively from the report. However, Lord Phillips laid it on the line that the Government of the time were

"anxious to act in the best interests of human and animal health."

He said:

"The Government did not lie to the public about BSE . . . it believed that the risk was remote."

He also said that

"allegations of a government 'cover-up' of the risks posed by BSE . . . cannot be substantiated."

That is clear and unequivocal.

Equally, however, things went wrong, and obviously there are lessons to be learned. I shall concentrate on only two, which I have briefly discussed, in passing, with the Minister. The first lesson relates to openness and media reaction. In his opening remarks, the Minister described that as a notoriously difficult area. There were several food scares in the late 1980s and the 1990s. We had the salmonella in eggs episode; questions were asked about soft cheeses; there was a problem with apple juice—and, I seem to recall, with carrots; I cannot now remember what it was, but I recall headlines of the "killer carrots" variety.

There is undoubtedly a genuine dilemma, which the Minister has already faced and will continue to face, concerning how best to explain what are, in all fairness, half-completed scientific findings, which may or may not be confirmed, without there being a huge, terrified and unjustified media outcry. Some may say that a media outcry does not matter. Some of my right hon. Friends have expressed their fear that a judicial review may arise from an unjustified media outcry. The public can make up their own mind if they have access to the correct facts, but "killer carrots" was not a factual description of the problem with that particular food.

During my time at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which was only 14 months, there was a change in the scientific advice that we were given based on the finding of infectivity in the distal ileum of calves. That episode is described in great detail on pages 137 and

[Mrs. Gillian Shephard]

138 of volume 1 of the report. It was also exhaustively examined in the evidence that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), the then Parliamentary Secretary at MAFF, and I gave to the inquiry. There is no doubt that we strained every nerve in an attempt to give information as completely, accurately and speedily as possible. Within five days of receiving the advice from SEAC, we had produced a complete press report and informed the EU and, it goes without saying, Parliament. The report commended us for that.

However, I recall—this is a point for the Minister—that having given a lengthy, detailed press conference and issued a press release, there was a curious silence from the sound and television media. Fearing that I had not been as open as possible, I went to Millbank and said, "Does anyone want to interview me about an increase of infectivity in the distal ileum of calves?" Although I was trying to be open with the media, they were not too interested. It is possible that I might have been accused of trying to cover something up merely because an issue, which was important and serious and which represented a new development, seemed, on the face of it, to be boring and technical. It is easier for the media to say, "Killer carrot". It is not always as easy as it seems to be as open as one should be. I know that the Minister realises that, and I am trying to share my experience of that problem with the House.

The issue of accountability and responsibility causes me some anxiety on the Minister's behalf. On page 30 of volume 1, the report refers to the division of responsibility for enforcing regulations between central and local government. It says:

"Although central government was largely responsible for the Regulations made about BSE, it usually fell to local government to enforce them."

Local authorities were required to attend the inquiry and gave evidence collectively, which was fine. I am not in the least worried about taking responsibility for the safe practices of slaughterhouses. Although other people—the chairmen of environmental health committees in local government—had been elected to take responsibility for the conditions in them, I accept that the Minister stands at the end of the line. However, as the right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) said, there was the issue of the division of responsibility.

To address that problem, we took the controversial decision of creating the Meat Hygiene Service, which took on responsibility for many matters. The report deals with that in the section on lessons to be learned. We believed that we had gone some way to solving the problems. I think that the Minister may face similar difficulties because responsibilities have been devolved to the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The report says:

"When BSE emerged, the Territories"—

its word—

"were in general content to follow the lead of MAFF and"

the Department of Health. It went on:

"Under devolution, a similar attitude cannot be relied upon."

I know that the Minister has the situation in hand, but it is important for people to march together when there is an overarching issue of public health. I am sure that he will continue to maintain that approach. The matter is delicate. New elected and devolved institutions are naturally wary of any encroachment of what they see as their territory, although public health is clearly relevant across the country.

I want again to express my heartfelt regret and sorrow for those families who have been so grievously affected by the episode. In explaining how it was to be a Minister in government at that time, when less scientific knowledge was available, the report helps to explain today's circumstances. However, we cannot expect the families to see it that way—how can they? I believe that the Minister's positive approach and the support that has been expressed on both sides of the House may help individuals and families to cope with their grief.

5.20 pm

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): I am grateful to have the opportunity to participate in this important debate.

All hon. Members hold advice surgeries and I first became involved with the issue of vCJD after I held a surgery in my constituency. In a cold hall in the village of Eaglesham one of my surgeries turned out be anything but routine. A gentleman, whom I did not know, appeared to explain what had happened to his family. I have the permission of that gentleman, Mr. Tibbert, to mention the fact that, tragically, he lost his wife, Margaret, when she was 29. Listening to the experience of the Tibbert family and learning that a very young son had lost his mother to the disease ignited my interest in the issue.

Since the terrible but important circumstances in which I met Mr. Tibbert, I have come to learn that a second family in my constituency—they do not desire any publicity—have lost a young son to this terrible disease. I have also come to know them and discussed their tragic experiences with them.

I have explained the background to my keen interest in the subject and, as the first paragraph of the introduction of the Phillips report makes clear, the issue is not only a tragedy for the families involved, but it has become a national tragedy. In my conversations with those who have become interested in the subject because of their personal experiences or through their interest in food safety, food hygiene and public safety, I have learned that there is a general welcome for the way in which the Government have dealt with the tragedy and continue to seek to deal with it.

The Government commissioned the Phillips report, responded positively to it and have made a genuine attempt to provide a care package to support the families affected. I do not think that that is a party political point, because I believe that a care package was not in place in the past because this was a newly discovered disease that Governments were not accustomed to dealing with. The package has now been put in place, but I dare say that, if the Conservative party were in power, it would also be undertaking to provide a care package, to consult the families of the victims and to consider proposals for compensation.

As with the compensation for far east prisoners of war, it is not the money but recognition of the problems that is important. Therefore, I ask my right hon. Friend the Minister to make strenuous efforts to continue to consult the families of the victims, because they believe that to be crucially important.

All hon. Members who have met the families of the victims would have several outstanding questions. Some of those questions about who knew what and when and about where we apportion the primary responsibility may never be answered. I suspect only the consciences and memories of the Ministers and civil servants who were directly involved and who attended the meetings will be the true testimony to what happened.

I do not seek to put words into the mouths of my constituents but there is a desperate desire among the victims' families to get to the bottom of some of the questions. All I ask is that everyone who has taken part in this interesting debate and those Members who read it will try for a moment—I know that it is an impossible task—to consider what they would do if one of their loved ones or relatives was involved. What would they expect the Government or Opposition to do? Sometimes such demands seem to be unrealistic, or are perceived to be, in the world of the civil service, or that of the Government. We should have empathy with those who are making the demands, and I know that my right hon. Friend has. We should understand their loss. It is that sense of loss that continues to motivate them, and it will do so every day of their lives until they feel that they have got to the bottom of what really happened.

There is the question of who was at fault. It is undoubted that some politicians share a proportion of the blame. The Phillips report says that the campaign of reassurance that was undertaken was mistaken. It identifies the fact that the March 1996 Cabinet refused to ban meat from animals older than 30 months, but that, subsequently, that policy was changed.

I suspect that the Conservative politicians who were involved at the time will have an opportunity to play a part in the debate. I think that they will do themselves a disservice, and a disservice to the House, if they try to rewrite history and their role in it. As my right hon. Friend the Minister has said, we should accept the report in the round, including in equal measure its criticisms and its acknowledgements. We should acknowledge that mistakes were made and individuals should not try to wash their hands of them. No attempt should be made to rewrite history. Those involved should accept the portion of blame that is rightly attributed to them. The families of the victims will think much more of the former Ministers who were involved if they do that.

I echo the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) about the civil service. I am echoing also the words of one of my constituents, Mr. Tibbert. The civil service is unaccountable and cannot respond to the criticisms that are made of it. However, the Phillips report states that even the policies that were belatedly agreed to were not fully implemented.

My right hon. Friend said that it was primarily or exclusively the responsibility of the permanent secretary to ensure that lessons are learned within the civil service. I understand that. Given that we have not heard the last of this tragic issue, it should be understood that the families of the victims want to find answers wherever they may be, whether in the political sphere or the wider sphere of government.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor)—he is no longer in his place, but I do not think that I shall quote him unfairly—was asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston about paragraph 553 of the Phillips report, which deals with the safety of baby food and whether a ban should be extended to all foodstuffs. The right hon. Gentleman suggested that he asked that question, and requested that the ban should be extended. He suggested that the report is inaccurate in its criticism of him. Whether that is a denial of convenience or one of conviction, I do not know. I am not in a position to make that judgment.

The Minister of the day is identified in the report and it is suggested that he failed in his duty and responsibility. It seems that he contests that and suggests that the blame lies elsewhere. That may amplify demands among some relatives that answers should be sought in a much wider sphere. I accept what has been said about the role of the permanent secretary, but in this instance it seems that the right hon. Member for South Norfolk is saying that such a dialogue took place between him and the then permanent secretary. Sensitivity—which I know my right hon. Friend the Minister has—will be needed in future regarding the role of the civil service. While my right hon. Friend does not have direct responsibility in any way for the civil service, can he make sure that the permanent secretary ensures that lessons are learned in the wider civil service?

As other Members have said, it is important to concentrate on what can be done now. The establishment of the Food Standards Agency is an important and ground-breaking initiative which, hopefully, will reduce the chances of this tragedy being repeated. Tragically, as was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), described the creation of the FSA as public relations nonsense. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman regrets saying that and is considerably wiser now that the agency is up and running and doing important work.

In the short time available, I should like to single out an issue that has not yet been identified in our debate—the failure of Departments in Scotland to deal with the issue. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for dealing with different aspects of that matter. Paragraph 1104 on page 216 of the report, which deals with the appraisal of concerns about human health, states that in Scotland, any analysis was conducted by the agriculture department. There was no wider consultation; others did not participate in it and did not give their opinion.

In the report, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries for Scotland is quoted as saying that it expected its comments to form

"no more than one element in any Scottish Office assessment of an issue . . . But no such wider assessment appears to have been made by . . . officials"

in Scotland. That statement is worrying, and I hope that in the welcome, but complex, interrelationship between the House of Commons and the devolved institutions throughout the United Kingdom, there will be discussions and dialogues between different Departments in each devolved Administration and between Departments of different Assemblies and Parliaments.

A real concern of which I have experience involves the fact that the support services that I mentioned were missing in the past and a care package was not available. I welcome comments that the financial contribution to a future care package will be increased. Should the need

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arise—heaven forfend—the current £1 million will be increased. I hope that my right hon. Friend will confirm that that substantial commitment will be extended if, unfortunately, that is the case.

I welcome my right hon. Friend's earlier comments on openness and the fact that he will publish the research that informs his decisions on any future matters of this nature. Of course, we all wish that that had been the case and that a minimum level of best practice had been applied by the previous Government; we wish that all of the information that informed decisions had been placed in the public domain. Sadly, however, those in office at the time chose not to do that.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will take the bold decision to publish research that he discounts in reaching his decisions, not simply that with which he agrees.

Mr. Nick Brown: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he seeks. We must remember that rejected opinions have also informed decision making, so it is right for scientific views to be placed in the public domain.

Mr. Murphy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that intervention, which will be welcomed by hon. Members of all parties and by all the families who have tragically been affected by the disease.

As has been said, the report will not be the end of the affair. The tragedy is eternal for the victims' families.

5.35 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I rise to speak not as a former Minister who had responsibility for the matters under discussion, but as somebody who has taken a keen interest in BSE for a considerable number of years. Looking at the Minister, I realise that he is the eighth Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food with whom I have raised the issue. I suspect that some current MAFF officials know that all too well.

I am present because I want to speak about the contribution made by a remarkable constituent of mine, Mr. Mark Purdey, to progress on BSE. He appears frequently in the Phillips report and his theories and hypotheses deserve serious attention. I welcome the report. Some thought that it might conclude the matter, but as the Minister said, it is merely a staging post in the search to identify the source of BSE and, very possibly, of nvCJD. That is why I agreed with the hon. Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) when he said that we owe it to all the people who have suffered so horrifically, especially from nvCJD, to seek to identify the causes of this terrible calamity. The report does not identify those causes. It states merely that

"BSE probably originated from a novel source early in the 1970s . . . as a consequence of a gene mutation."

A significant number of people do not believe that that is correct and many scientists hold alternative views.

I appreciate the eight Ministers of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food whom I have bothered about the issue. I refer especially to my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), who ensured that Mr. Purdey had access to officials to discuss some of his approaches, and other hon. Friends who held similar responsibilities and other current Ministers have done the same.

I am not a scientist, so I hope that the House will give me some licence on the matter. Some of the correspondence that I received from Mr. Purdey was completely incomprehensible to me, but I sought to ensure that it received proper consideration. I should like to describe Mr. Purdey's background. He is a dairy farmer in my constituency. He was a scholar at school and declined a university place to study zoology and psychology in 1972 in order to start a pioneering organic farming community in the west of Ireland. He has been farming ever since and is an independent scientist who is involved in the aetiology of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and has been investigating environmental factors in isolated clusters of TSEs throughout the world. He has published five articles on BSE and organophosphorus theory in peer-reviewed journals.

That is his background. His position originates from his opposition to the Warble Fly Order 1982. When the order was introduced, he refused to dress cattle with organophosphates because he believed that it was dangerous. He thought that the nervous systems of cattle could be damaged by dosing at the Government's advised level, which was three times the manufacturers' recommended dose for the use of that extremely powerful chemical. As somebody who has dipped sheep, I, too, know a little bit about the strength of OP dip. Mr. Purdey's view is accepted by Lord Phillips. His theory is not that the chemical is the cause of BSE, but that it could be the trigger that destabilises the nervous system of cattle.

I should like to illustrate the way in which Mr. Purdey has pursued his theory, and how the official view has altered over time. I have correspondence that I am sure was provided on the best advice available to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries which states that the overwhelming probability was that BSE came from scrapie. Subsequently, at the National Farmers Union conference, Professor Sir John Pattison announced that there was a 50:50 possibility that it came from scrapie, and I remember the impact that that had on farmers. The Phillips report now says that it is fallacious to say that it came from scrapie.

Meanwhile, Mr. Purdey marches on with his theory, which he has sustained and reinforced. It concerns the use of organophosphates. OPs are used to treat cattle with warble fly, but many humans are also exposed to OPs. They are used in crop spraying and they occur in shampoos used to treat children with headlice, and dogs. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk asked for dog leads and collars to be examined when I raised the matter with her originally. Therefore, animals and humans are exposed to OPs in their environment.

Mr. Purdey's work has continued significantly since he gave evidence to the Phillips inquiry. He has identified a link between a copper deficiency and the manganese replacement that appears to interact with OPs to cause what he luridly describes as a lethal chain reaction in the brain. My scientific knowledge is woefully inadequate, but, apparently, copper binds to the prion, and, if copper is absent, manganese will then bind.

Mr. Purdey has drawn attention to the increasing use of manganese. We now use manganese instead of lead in petrol. Manganese is used in increasing amounts in

poultry feed to enhance growth and egg production. It is also used as a lick to enhance bone growth in calves. Therefore, it is present in the environment. I understand that 98 per cent. of the manganese that is fed to poultry ends up in chicken litter which goes into compound feeds.

Therefore, the theory on which Mr. Purdey is working is that the interaction between OPs, which is accepted by the Phillips inquiry as a possible trigger, when combined with a manganese surplus in the brain, leads to the chain reaction that is causing the problem.

I do not know whether that is right, but I have pressed continuously for Mr. Purdey to be given support and encouragement in the form of research funds so that he can test out his theory. Professors in Italy and France have just completed studies which produce the same correlations as Mr. Purdey has produced independently as a lone dairy farmer, trying conscientiously to research the matter and capable of speaking for four hours before the Phillips inquiry.

There now appears to be a growing body of evidence that that is a much more serious theory than previously thought. It was certainly resisted by scientists in the past, but I hope that, in the light of the Minister's comments, he will ensure that the matter is pursued. I welcome his appointment of Professor Gabriel Horn. I hope that his inquiry will be sufficiently wide-ranging to consider individual viewpoints—I do not say prejudices, although the danger is that people may have preconceived ideas—and will be open to new ideas, so that the matter is pursued.

I pray in aid an important article written on 10 April 1997 by the then hon. Member for Oldham, West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), now the Minister for the Environment, entitled "Let's find the real cause of BSE". He said:

"A new government should sweep aside these evasions."

The article was written about two or three weeks before the election, so it was an attack on the previous Government. He continued:

"The Purdey theory should now be taken very seriously by the authorities."

It is disappointing that we are now at the end of this period of government and what the Minister for the Environment wrote in opposition has still not been implemented. The contents of his article and his approach were precisely right.

I recently met Baroness Hayman. I hope that there is a determination to ensure that funds are not limited to traditional lines of inquiry and research, and that the Department will enable Mr. Purdey's theory to be investigated thoroughly.

I welcome what the Minister said about making any scientific advice or material available to the public. I challenge him straight away, because some important material on OPs should be made public. Will he publish the work of the Veterinary Medicines Directorate on the reformulation of organophosphates and the removal of phenol? That material is of significant scientific importance, and should be in the public domain. I am sure that the Minister meant what he said, because he was very forthright. He gave a categoric assurance that he would make such material available, so I hope that the Minister for Public Health will confirm that.

It is not for me to determine whether these theories are right or wrong. For 15 years, I have supported my constituent because I did not think that his idea was crazy or eccentric. Originally, a cow of his with BSE that did not fit the official description of the cause of the disease was the trigger for him to pursue this career of investigation that is now gathering increasing support and understanding. I hope that his theory will be examined, because if it is right, the origins of BSE and CJD are not what we think they are, and the basis of the approach that has been followed all these years may be wrong. No one in the House would disagree that we owe it to all those who have been afflicted—whether in the agriculture industry or the families affected by CJD—not to rest until we have done everything we can to identify the cause of this terrible suffering.

5.48 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): In their moving speeches, my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) spoke of two of his constituents and my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) told us about Donna McGivern, and I want to dedicate my remarks to one of my constituents, Donna McIntyre.

Donna was born on 13 July 1979. She lived initially in Northfield in my constituency, and went to Old Meldrum primary school and later to Dyce academy. Reading the profile that she wrote about herself at the end of her time at the school, I was reminded of many of the pupils whom I taught over the years in Aberdeen.

Donna talked about her interests: the brownies, the guides, the choir, swimming, badminton and squash. She said how she enjoyed going on holiday with a friend's family to Malta, and going on holiday to Holland with the choir in 1994. She talked of how she enjoyed her work experience as a nursery nurse and helping in an old people's home, and her ambition to go into nursing or accounting. That fits closely with the account of her by her family and friends as a caring, helpful and loving person. In 1999, she worked with the Prince's Trust Volunteers.

Towards the end of 1999 and the beginning of the millennium, Donna began to suffer from depression. In the early months of last year, she became increasingly confused. She went missing from her flat, and her sister, Lisa, found her and took her back to her father's home. She started to behave as if she were drunk. She started to lose co-ordination and basic control of her movements. She went to the doctor, and then to Fosterhill hospital on 26 August, and in the following month it was diagnosed that she almost certainly had new variant CJD. She has had very good care ever since, but her condition has steadily deteriorated. Since November she has not been able to speak. She sleeps a lot, and responds to being hugged and held by friends and family; sometimes she gives a great smile. But to appreciate the extent of the tragedy it is important to realise fully the awfulness of each person's case, and also the potential scale of the problem.

I want to express my gratitude to Donna's father, Billy McIntyre, who is present in the Strangers Gallery and who has shared his experience with me, and to Professor Hugh Pennington, the recognised leading authority on the subject, who has shared his professional expertise with me. I shall try to speak on Billy's behalf. He told me that he wanted to speak not just on his own behalf, but on behalf of other victims' families. I cannot presume to give voice to what Donna would say if she were not deprived of speech.

[Mr. Malcolm Savidge]

When we discussed the scale of this, Billy said to me, "This could be a time bomb." Professor Hugh Pennington told me, "There are so many unpredictable factors that we really cannot know the potential scale." Because the disease is a new variant, we do not know whether it will behave in the same way as the comparatively rare disease that we know as CJD. Indeed, if it is similar to that disease, the incubation period could be as long as 40 years. At present, it seems that all who have suffered have had a similar genetic make-up involving the MM prion. Apparently, just under 40 per cent. of the population harbour the prion.

Professor Pennington told me that we could be talking about hundreds or about hundreds of thousands. Taking the worst-case analysis, we should think of the resulting devastation of our economy, given the cost of compensation and care; but we should think even more of the human cost and the personal devastation.

As was rightly pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams), the disease originated in Britain. Tragically, for too long and to an excessive extent we exported it not just to the rest of Europe but to the rest of the world, including the third world. That means that some of the world's poorest people may be affected. All too often disasters hit the poorest, in disproportionate measure.

Indeed, we may find a disproportionate distribution by wealth in our own country. One of the most infectious causes of the disease is MRM—mechanically recovered meat—which went into the cheapest sausages, pies and burgers. I now see a disturbing hypocrisy in past occasions when comparatively affluent people could be observed eating prime beef that would never be a source of danger, and saying that British beef was safe.

I want to discuss three things: blame, lessons and restitution. First, let me deal with blame. Billy told me that it was difficult to express the degree of anger and incomprehension that he was experiencing. He said it was an irony that what was done yesterday was described as no-fault compensation. Some people certainly had no fault—the poor victims, who could not be more innocent.

Billy said something that ties in with what was said by my hon. Friends the Members for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr. He asked who would be brave enough to plead guilty. Would it be the feed manufacturers who put commercial interests before the public interest? Would it be the farmers—I am certain that there are some, somewhere—who were less than scrupulous about suspected BSE? Would it be the abattoirs and renderers who took insufficient care in extracting SBO? Would it be some of the members of the media—a question raised by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer)? They prefer not to remember now that they were not all very helpful at one time. What about civil servants and Ministers?

Billy McIntyre said that he feels that two people are especially to blame. The first is a civil servant—Keith Meldrum, the chief veterinary officer. I recognise that Phillips says that Keith Meldrum was very active later on, and I accept that he was. I also accept the points made in his defence by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), but I still believe that Mr. Meldrum deserves blame.

For far too long, Keith Meldrum held to the dogmatic assumption that only large quantities of infected material would pass on the disease. For that reason, he did not realise the importance of separating the processing of feeds. He delayed the introduction of bans for too long, and there was insufficient rigour in the inspection and enforcement regimes. Moreover, exports should have been halted as soon as fear of the disease emerged. In fact, those exports were vastly increased at precisely that stage.

There is a real worry that the concerns of the industry weighed more heavily with Mr. Meldrum in the early stages than did the concerns of safety. To be fair, however, he is representative of others who are responsible in the same way. I repeat a point that is often made: in this country, we do not give sufficient recognition to corporate criminal liability—what my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food called institutional failure.

As a result, Phillips too often blames fairly senior civil servants and Ministers, who may have been directly responsible, but he forgets that the chain of command goes to a much higher level, in the civil service and among Ministers. Billy McIntyre offers a balance in that respect—he told me that the other person whom he really blames is Margaret Thatcher.

I accept the point made by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk, who said that Phillips makes a completely convincing case in relation to the issue of rendering in 1979, when Margaret Thatcher had been accused of direct responsibility. Phillips found that rendering did not make a difference, and that BSE could not be destroyed by rendering.

Other influences were at work, however. Among them are the cuts in research funding, including that for animal and veterinary services, the pressures on research institutes to get external funding and to devote more time to those matters that helped commerce and less to what was necessary for safety, the decreases in the veterinary services referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark), and the emphasis on deregulation referred to by my right hon. Friend the Minister and by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields. Ministers, civil servants and scientists were all affected by an ethos that, far too often and far too readily, put profits before people, wealth before health and, as it turned out, money before life.

Billy says he feels disgust at the honours with which Baroness Thatcher is loaded. There will doubtless be many memorials to her, probably including some in this House, but it should be remembered that for some people her memorial may be the terrible mad-cow legacy of BSE and CJD. Donna was born just a few weeks after Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister. We must eradicate the BSE infection, but we must also eradicate the more crass and materialistic aspects of Thatcherism.

There are other lessons to be learned. Billy says that we must guarantee that this does not happen again, and we must first guarantee that transmission of BSE and CJD is not still going on. In that respect, we must look at what is happening in Germany, and in respect of possible medical transmission.

Putting those guarantees in place means that we must be vigilant. We must improve surveillance, and not do so at the expense of research into the causes of the disease and into possible cures—or at least research into the

possibility of arresting the disease. Secrecy must no longer hold sway. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 is in place, but we need far more openness, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) said. Departmentalism must be broken down; we must have joined-up government, including across devolution, as my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood said. There must be an end to the dogmatic defence of departmental positions, which can still far too often go on. There must be less arrogance and more flexibility. We need more scientists in certain Departments at top levels.

Although I see no rational connection between BSE and genetically modified foods—in fact, some of the suspicions of the latter that have followed are irrational—I recognise the point made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal; that MBMs were being used as feed for half a century before we began to discover what was happening, and were used for most of the last century. We must always observe the precautionary principle.

I conclude by speaking of restitution. The £25 million initial compensation is very welcome as a start, and the vast increase in help with care assistance is also immensely valuable. However, I am again reminded of something that Billy McIntyre said to me. He said that the Government gave compensation to farmers so that they could replace lost animals. No compensation given to families can replace a lost daughter or a lost son. What compensation can one ever give to Donna and her fellow sufferers for the fact that they are no longer able to enjoy family life? They will not be able to enjoy the right to have a family of their own. They will not even be able to enjoy the right to life.

I talked earlier of memorials. The best memorial we could have to Donna and her fellow sufferers will be if we fight as hard as we can to eradicate both BSE and CJD and the errors that led to their becoming so widespread.

6.1 pm

Mr. William Thompson (West Tyrone): It is a privilege to come here this evening to say something about the Phillips report, which I welcome. It is fair and reaches the right balance.

We have heard this afternoon that 86 people have died from this terrible disease. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge) has graphically described the symptoms and the duration of the disease. It is tragic that young people with their lives ahead of them have been struck down by this terrible disease, which has no known cure. We all sympathise with the parents and relatives of those who have died and those who are still suffering. The fact that there are eight people who are presumably still suffering from the disease may provide some hope that the disease will not grow to the extent that some of us might fear.

When I first came to the House, I was always surprised by the attitude of the governing Labour party at Agriculture questions. There was always criticism of the Opposition; they were entirely responsible for £4 billion spent on BSE and for the tragedy. We must recognise that, in reality, we cannot blame any particular person. This disease could not have been foreseen. The scientists were working at the frontiers of science and it was impossible to predict the true nature of the disease until more symptoms appeared and more scientific knowledge became available.

The inquiry was right to say that we should not look for scapegoats, because they are none. Indeed, Lord Phillips is right when he also says that if those criticised were misguided, they none the less acted in accordance with their conception of the proper performance of their duties.

We have heard some criticism of the civil service and past Ministers. The Minister was right to be measured in his criticism. He, too, faces difficult decisions. It is easy to criticise when one has never been a Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or held office. However, there are tremendous pressures on those who have to face the media and the likelihood of giving wrong or inadequate advice. The Minister should be commended on his restraint. I agree with the Phillips report that no one should be disciplined.

Happily for Northern Ireland, we did not suffer BSE to the same extent as the rest of the United Kingdom. That may be because of geography and the fact that we are separated by water. So far, there have been few cases of vCJD in Northern Ireland. I am glad to report that the incidence is decreasing in Northern Ireland, as it is in the rest of the United Kingdom.

A specific test was conducted in Northern Ireland on 2,546 animals last year. The Enfer test can indicate the possible presence of BSE in an animal. It produced 60 possible cases. After further microscopic examination, 54 cases were confirmed. At first sight, that figure may appear alarming. We used to have five or six cases, but the test revealed 54. However, 700 four-year-old animals were free of the disease. That is encouraging and shows that our approach is correct and that we are taking the right measures. In several years, we hope that older animals will be clear of the disease and that it will be eradicated.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Will my hon. Friend confirm that none of the cases that were examined could have entered the food chain?

Mr. Thompson: Yes. No animal that is over 30 months enters the food chain. That confirms that the food that we eat in Northern Ireland and, indeed, the United Kingdom is almost certainly free of the disease. That is welcome.

Let us consider the new European regulations. Europe is discovering that BSE exists there, too. The European Union is introducing new restrictions, including one on fishmeal. That will create difficulties in the United Kingdom. Fishmeal was never considered to have played a part in the BSE crisis. I understand that the view in Europe is that fishmeal may have become adulterated with meat and bonemeal. I ask the Minister for Public Health to update us on precisely what is happening in that regard. What are the consequences of excluding fishmeal from ruminant meal? If the Government have made a decision on the matter, when will regulations come into force?

As I know that time is of the essence in this debate, I shall conclude. I am grateful, however, for having had the opportunity to speak in it.

6.10 pm

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): Matthew Parker, from the village of Armthorpe in my constituency, was 19 when, in 1997, he died of variant CJD. Sarah Roberts, also from Armthorpe, was 28 when,

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

in September 2000, she died of the same disease. Matthew's and Sarah's families are devastated by those deaths. The village of Armthorpe, a close-knit community, has been shocked and enormously saddened by the loss of those two young people.

I have kept in close touch with both Matthew's and Sarah's families. I pay tribute to them not only for their bravery in the dreadful circumstances that they have faced, but for their determination to do everything that they possibly can to ensure that other families do not suffer as they have.

Matthew's family—I am thinking particularly of his mother, Doreen, his grandfather and his father—campaigned vigorously for a public inquiry. I add my voice to those of right. hon. and hon. Members who have congratulated the Government on establishing the Phillips inquiry.

I have listened very carefully to Members' comments about the difficulty of laying blame at the door of any individual. It would be wrong of me, however, not to express the very real anger that I and the families in my constituency feel about the many mistakes that, as the Phillips report highlights, were made by the previous Administration.

Today, we have had apologies from two Conservative Members. Until today, however, as far as I am aware, only one Conservative Member—the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell)—had made an apology. The families in my constituency feel particularly angry about that. They feel that the response has been totally inadequate.

Mr. Yeo: May I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the fact that, when the Minister published the Phillips report, on the record, on behalf of the Conservative party, I expressed unreserved apologies? She is completely inaccurate in the claim that she has just made.

Ms Winterton: I have acknowledged that the hon. Gentleman made an apology today. I have also said that my constituents need personal apologies. I hope that he will accept that. I also hope that, in view of his comments, he will support the Government when they have to make difficult decisions on, for example, beef on the bone.

Mr. Yeo: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Winterton: I am sorry, but I cannot give way again because of time constraints.

My constituents want honesty about the past and openness in the future. Openness is crucial to maintaining trust. That was brought home to me recently when it was thought that there might be a cluster of CJD cases in my constituency. Not only had the two young people to whom I have referred died in Armthorpe, but it emerged that a third young man who had had connections with the village had died. An investigation was started into whether there was a connection between the three people who had contracted vCJD.

After the initial investigation, I asked Dr. John Radford, the director of public health, to meet me and the families to discuss the investigation. I know that Dr. Radford had some reservations about sharing the information with people from outside his profession, but we had the meeting and he was open with us about what had taken place during his investigation. He later wrote to me and said that the meeting

"made me realise that we had not paid sufficient attention to the relatives and their feelings."

I want to put on record how helpful we all found Dr. Radford's open approach. I am extremely glad that the Government have made a commitment to ensuring openness and trust in the future.

One of the issues that we discussed at the meeting was the need to share information, especially about potential clusters. I understand that a template has been developed with the Colindale national communicable disease surveillance centre, with input from Doncaster and Leicestershire health authorities. That means that, if there are fears of clusters, the local authority can use the template to ensure that all avenues of investigation are covered. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can confirm that that is the case.

I welcome the Government's positive response to the finding of the Phillips inquiry that improvements are needed to speed up the diagnosis of vCJD. I hope that the Government will consider ways, perhaps through the office of the chief medical officer, to ensure that GPs and psychiatrists are made aware of the early symptoms to look out for and the presentation of vCJD.

I welcome the steps that the Government have taken to provide a care package for those who contract vCJD. I know that David Body, who was referred to earlier, has worked hard on that. I know that Matthew and Sarah's families felt that the support that they received from Doncaster social services was good, but they were also aware that the support varied enormously across the country.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that provision is the same across the country, of a high standard, and that the Government consider providing bereavement counselling for relatives—something that the director of public health in Doncaster feels should be available.

No amount of money can ever make up for the tragic loss that the families of those who have died from this terrible disease have suffered, but I believe that the Government moved quickly in their discussions with representatives of the families on compensation, and have responded positively to my concern about those who are in receipt of social security benefits. I know that an announcement was made yesterday about that. I welcome it, but I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to bring the regulations before Parliament quickly so that interim payments can be made.

I ask for an assurance from my hon. Friend the Minister that the Government will maintain the highest standards of meat inspection in abattoirs. That concern has been raised by the Human BSE Foundation, and I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to give me some reassurance on that matter.

I am aware that, because of time constraints, I have not addressed many of the issues in the Phillips report. The matters that I raised are those that families in my constituency asked me to bring to the attention of Ministers. I am proud that it was the Labour Government who set up the Phillips inquiry, and I am proud that the

Government are responding quickly to the findings of the inquiry. Finally, my plea is that the Government continue to do everything that they can to make sure that such a terrible tragedy never happens again.

6.20 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): We all owe a debt of gratitude to Lord Phillips for producing an extremely sane and balanced report. Naturally, at the beginning there were fears that he had been appointed to chair a hanging jury. However, he was completely faithful to the promise that he would not bring retrospective judgments to bear but would judge actions in the light of the science and information that was available at the time. In doing so, he has done a service to everybody. He has enabled us to illuminate the dilemmas that Ministers have to face.

I also pay tribute to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. His response has been equally measured and sensible. As he is in office, he knows that the dilemmas highlighted by the Phillips report are the daily provender of Ministers in sensitive Departments. Dilemmas such as those have appeared in the past and will continue to do so for Ministers in the present.

In the light of the Government's response to the Phillips report, I want to look forward and issue some slightly cautionary notes, in case anyone believes that the document is a new testament that will infallibly light our way. Two especially important issues are covered by chapters 4 and 6—the handling of scientific advice and coping with risk. Of course, the comments in those chapters are sensible, but they do not remove the need for Ministers to make judgments, which, at the end of the day, will be political—because they are made by Ministers. In many circumstances, the last step may always be taken if not in the dark, at least in the murk.

In applying the science, we faced—in the case of BSE—a new disease for which there was no history and little expertise. Scientific expertise was limited so there was no peer group which could review the conclusions reached by the most eminent scientists who had been brought in to advise the Government. The advice offered was, perforce, quasi-monopolistic. Of course, there were, and are, iconoclasts, or mavericks—according to one's side of the argument. How are they to be coped with? Should they be absorbed into the committee and their views brought within the framework of the advice? The danger then would be that the advice itself becomes an uneasy stand-off between opposing viewpoints. Should the Minister place trust in the established scientists—the best-known collection of advice—knowing that the maverick will always command the attention of the media and that, occasionally, the maverick may be right? All Ministers face that dilemma.

Mr. Ainger: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Curry: No, I am sorry but I cannot give way because of the time constraints.

Chapter 4 of the report notes that Departments must have the expertise to commission, understand, evaluate and then draw conclusions from scientific advice. With respect, that is self-evident, but extremely difficult. Science is more complex than it has ever been. The micro-branches of science are not understood by other micro-branches of science. The generalist, who, because tasks range across a broad spectrum, is almost inevitably the person employed, may not be competent in particular spheres of expertise. One falls back on the hope that there is a peer group of other scientists so that there is a dialectic and argument can take place. However, that means that there are choices, and thus, at the end of the day, that Ministers have to make a judgment. Nothing done by the scientist removes the need for Ministers' ultimate judgments.

Chapter 6 refers to risk. The problem is that, increasingly, we face demands from the public for an absolute guarantee. As our scientific ability to test materials improves and we can detect parts per billion, products that seemed to be pure in the past may suddenly be found to contain an infinitely small element of a contaminant. Of course, the word "contamination" immediately springs to mind, and that absolute guarantee is undeliverable.

Chapter 6.6 of the Government's response states:

"Government also needs to deal with issues where people perceive possible risks to health, but where the scientific evidence of harm is inconclusive. A balance needs to be struck between intervening too much, forgoing benefits and stifling people's freedom of action; and failing to help protect them sufficiently from actual or potential hazards."

That is the nub of the issue. Once again, we are back to evaluations and judgment, and all the Minister, or the Government, can do is to place in front of the public the various factors that led him to draw his conclusions and, frankly, hope that people believe that, on balance, it is the right thing to do, knowing that someone will always say that a slightly more extreme or radical solution should have been taken. That leads us straight to the precautionary approach.

Paragraph 6.14 on the precautionary approach states:

"Where there is scientific uncertainty, the precautionary principle may be applied. This holds that absence of scientific proof should not delay or prevent proportionate measures to remove or reduce threats of serious harm. The Government is committed to taking a precautionary approach where appropriate."

However, let us consider the language used there. The use of words "proportionate" and "serious harm" involves judgment. The wonderful word "appropriate" is the most important adjective in any Government's lexicon, but determining what is appropriate also involves judgment. So that paragraph lets no one off the hook; it is simply stating, in relatively elegant terms, the eternal dilemma involved in making judgments. There is no mathematical scale that can trigger action.

At the end of day, there must a certain intuitive response, and successful Ministers are often those who have a strongly intuitive sense of what is right and of which direction people demand they should take. The difficulty with the precautionary approach, which seems obviously sensible, is where to draw the line in the sand. Where should the perimeter be set around which the Minister mans those defences that are defensible? If a certain measure of precaution is taken, why not take a little further precaution? Before we know where we are, we should have moved a long way from what can be defended on strictly scientific grounds.

There has been much condemnation of the so-called culture of reassurance, but before we condemn one culture, we need to look at the alternatives. Is hesitation the alternative? Is it a culture of panic, or one in which

[Mr. Curry]

we say that we simply do not know? There is much enthusiasm for openness, and of course we say amen to that, but we must be cautious because, as my right hon. Friends have said, a populist and campaigning press may not translate an issue's complexities through to the public.

I wish to cite three contemporary cases that illustrate the dilemmas that Ministers face. I am glad that the Minister for Public Health is here, because I wish to refer to the measles, mumps and rubella vaccine. All the players are on scene. We have a vast majority of established scientific opinion in favour of the multiple vaccine. We have a handful of iconoclasts who say that it is causing serious disease in infants. We have Ministers bringing to bear the canon of established Government scientific advice and we have the press seizing on the minority view, with stories that are unashamedly emotional. If Ministers believe their scientific advice, and they have no reason not to, they are condemned to be reassuring in the words that they utter to the public; they have no alternative.

Let us consider another issue—GM foods, which several of my colleagues have mentioned. Openness does prevail; the trial sites are advertised and the map grid references are given, but that leads to direct action and a massively irresponsible and emotional campaign in some newspapers about Frankenstein foods, which makes it even more difficult for the Government to take sensible action. The result has been incoherence, division and confusion at the heart of Government. The Minister need not agree with that, but I simply state that that is the case.

The third case is TB in cattle, which will kill 10 or 20 times more cattle than BSE will in the coming year. In a purely agricultural sense, TB is a far greater problem than BSE. The trials that are taking place are heavily contested and may not produce a conclusive result. In fact, there is a 50:50 chance that they will not produce a result that will enable the Minister to say that science has incontrovertibly demonstrated a clear way forward. Farmers are saying, "We do not want to wait for the scientific tests to be completed, because the problem is so serious that we must make a pre-emptive strike against badgers." The badger group is saying, "You cannot prove that the badgers are responsible, and the whole trial is badly founded." That contemporary case demonstrates that Ministers' intuition has to play a role. The practical steps that must be taken are those that were taken by all my right hon. Friends when they were in Government, facing a similar dilemma and a similar outcome.

I applaud the Food Standards Agency, and Sir John Krebs has done a very good job in establishing its credibility. He has shown canny political sense, and I do not mean that in a party sense. Sir John has made remarks about organic food and about the possibility of BSE-type diseases in sheep. Immediately, red lights began to flash, signalling that his remarks would be contested.

Within Government and its agencies, the lesson to be learned from the BSE episode is the importance of co-ordinating scientific effort, so that scientists know what other scientists are doing. I am referring not to the centralisation of science, but to the need for awareness of what research is being undertaken. There must be a communication channel between scientists and officials, and it is important that scientists' claims be evaluated by officials. Officials should approach Ministers when the matter becomes one that, politically, they need to know about. Finally, there is a need to enforce the actions that have been decreed. That takes us straight to the old issues of resources, money and staff, which are the subject of everyday arguments between Departments.

We must be careful that we do not expect scientists to substitute for politicians. Scientists make politicians' dilemmas more difficult, not easier. They provide explanations and options; they do not provide answers to the sort of questions that the public ask and politicians need to answer. At the end of the day, the decisions will be political and they will be based on the balance of advice, which will rarely point to a definitive outcome. On every ministerial desk should be printed the legend, "There but for the grace of God . . . ", and I cannot help but feel that the Minister's sane, balanced response to this issue demonstrates that perhaps, in his mind, he has that legend on his own desk.

6.33 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): The last few Labour Members who have spoken have given extremely moving accounts of what has happened to their constituents. My position is similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) because one of my first surgery cases was brought to me by Shirley Warne, who has been in the Gallery today. She came to my surgery on the way to visit her son, Chris, who was in hospital dying of CJD. I subsequently visited and spoke to Shirley and her husband, Terry, many times. Terry is currently in the same neurological ward at Derby royal infirmary, where Chris died, and I send him my best wishes.

Shirley and Terry wanted me to argue for a public inquiry. As a very new MP, I was hesitant about doing so because I did not want to raise their hopes when I did not know whether we would get such an inquiry. I think it unlikely that we would have had an inquiry if we had not had a Labour Government. When I went to see the then Minister of Agriculture, my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham), he told me that his son had been at university with someone who had died of CJD, so he was well aware of the tragedy of the disease and felt strongly about it. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was determined that we had to get to the bottom of the matter because we did not know how big a tragedy it would turn out to be and the victims' families wanted answers.

The families are angry, as I am, because there have not been sufficient individual apologies for what has happened. I do not say that in terms of ascribing individual blame, but mistakes were made, as outlined in the Phillips report. Irrespective of whether they were made by individuals or as a result of the system that determines how the Government and Departments work, it is necessary for whoever runs an organisation to take responsibility and say sorry. People want a handsome apology.

I congratulate the Government on their response. Shirley told me last night that she had been talking to two other families who had spoken about the excellent care and assistance that they were receiving at home from nurses and the case worker who discussed their needs with them. She did not think that one hospital gave them that level of support when Chris was dying, although she greatly praised the staff at Derby royal infirmary for the care that they provided.

Mistakes were made and responsibility must be taken for them. We may not be able to prevent health and food scares from occurring, but we can take on board the well-written findings, which are summarised in the interim response. They state:

"To establish credibility it is necessary to generate trust . . . Trust can only be generated by openness . . . Openness requires recognition of uncertainty, where it exists."

We understand that the findings and recommendations embark us on a difficult agenda, but the previous Government failed to accept that there was uncertainty. They were determined to deny that it existed.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) said that he had been criticised for not being sufficiently open about the health scares, and outlined his response to that. When I considered that criticism and examined the evidence in the various volumes of the report, I was struck by the fact that Ron Davies, the then Opposition spokesman on agriculture, raised a huge number of issues on the SBO ban. He was extremely tenacious. As my right hon. Friends who were shadow spokesmen at the time have made clear, the then Opposition pursued many issues with considerable persistence. I understand that it is difficult for Ministers to take such difficult issues on board, but the lessons should be learned. The least that we can do for the families who have suffered such tragedies is to acknowledge that openly and fully.

Although we cannot necessarily prevent food and health scares from occurring, we can say that the lessons will be learned. Never again will we have a culture of secrecy; never again will regulation be thought of as merely bureaucratic, especially when it is in place to protect people. We need to examine the systems so that there is openness; to take the precautionary principle to heart; to trust people; and to acknowledge that it is difficult to talk about risks and hard for the public to assess them. Instead of hiding facts, we must be open.

I was in the Gallery before the debate began and spoke to the parents—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. It is not acceptable to refer to the Gallery.

Judy Mallaber: I am sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The solicitor, David Body, told me that his clients are pleased with the compensation package and the response, but want the lessons to be learned and put into effect. A Conservative Member said that this is the start of the process. We must commit ourselves to ensuring that the lessons are fully followed up. We need to do that for all those people who have suffered and to ensure that others do not suffer in the future.

6.39 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I endorse the views just expressed by the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber). This is the start of the process and we accept many of the points that she made.

I also share the view of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and pay tribute to the Minister for his measured and responsible approach to the debate. He is to be commended on setting the tone for the debate. It follows from his recent comments on the "On the Record" programme, when he said that it would be a mistake to turn this issue into a fight along party political lines. That view was reiterated by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), who said that it is primarily an issue about how government works, whichever political party happens to be in power. The Minister deserves credit for ensuring a balanced and purposeful debate.

The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) asked whether an incoming Conservative Government would implement, as the current Government intend to do, the recommendations of the Phillips report in full. My hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) gave that assurance at the start of the debate, and I take this opportunity to repeat the commitment.

The House has, quite rightly, dealt with the human dimension in this debate. Let us remember that much of the Phillips report dealt with the problem of vCJD as much as with that of BSE. I wish to take this opportunity to reiterate the sympathy that Conservative Members have for the families of those who lost loved ones to the disease and to those who are struggling with the problems of a family member who has contracted it. We welcome the Government's response to the needs of those families—what they have done already and what they propose to do. We shall listen carefully to what the Minister for Public Health says about further moves in that regard.

One can understand the anger and the frustration of the families involved and their need to find someone to be accountable. Their views were sympathetically put in the debate by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and by the hon. Members for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) and for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge). However, chapter 1 of the executive summary of the Phillips report concludes:

"The Government did not lie to the public about BSE. It believed that the risks posed by BSE to humans were remote."

Later it adds that, in the years covered by the report,

"most of those responsible for responding to the challenge posed by BSE emerge with credit."

However, the report alludes to a number of shortcomings in the way that things were done. They were mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk in his opening remarks and I reiterate our acceptance of the shortcomings and our regret that they happened.

Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends who were involved directly in these matters have put their case in the debate and it will have been clear to the House that they did so without equivocation. Nowhere in Phillips is their integrity impugned. To give the Minister credit, when he was interviewed on "On the Record" in February this year, he said:

"Anyone who has come to our Report looking to allocate blame will go away disappointed."

Tony Wright: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Moss: No, I have not got much time and I want to give the Minister time to respond.

The Phillips report is a thorough investigation and appraisal of the BSE issues, and offers a fair and balanced view of events. It makes three main recommendations to the Government: first, the effectiveness of communication within government and between Departments needs to be

[Mr. Moss]

considered and improved dramatically; secondly, the response time to implement decisions taken at ministerial level needs to be addressed; and, thirdly, we must consider the degree of openness with the public on health-risk issues.

On communications between Departments, we welcome the formation of the National Zoonoses Group, chaired by the chief medical officer, to address the risk to human health posed by zoonoses and to consider new and emerging diseases. To access the best scientific advice, we welcome "Guidelines 2000" from the Office of Science and Technology. It is mentioned in the Phillips report that the Meat and Livestock Commission, up to March 1996, appears not to have been covering all its statutory objectives, and that it will be putting proposals to the Government soon to achieve a better balance between its responsibilities to both stakeholders and consumers. That is a sensible move, and we trust that the Government will respond positively.

The issue of openness has been raised by many right hon. and hon. Members. The Government's main response is to point to the establishment of the Food Standards Agency. Although it is now generally welcomed, it is somewhat disingenuous to claim that had the FSA been in force earlier, a less damaging evolution of BSE and related variant CJD would have been the result. As the report concludes in chapter 1 of the executive summary,

"it was not MAFF's policy to lean in favour of the agricultural producers to the detriment of the consumer."

As many of my right hon. Friends who were involved directly in government at the time have confirmed, decisions in relation to human health implications were taken in good faith.

Many issues relating to scientific advice come within the scope of greater openness. The Government are right to respond in the positive way that they have to recommendations about how, in future, scientific information will be made available to the general public. Although we were not able to have a blanket reassurance on the matter during the debate, we welcome the Minister's assurance that he will publish the scientific advice that is put to him within the Ministry.

A critical area of science is that of testing and the need to leave no research avenue uninvestigated. That point was raised by the right hon. Member for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). In their response to the Phillips report, the Government agree with the finding that tissues in an animal incubating a TSE may be infectious before the animal has developed clinical signs of the disease. That has serious implications for food safety in meat under 30 months, despite the application of the precautionary principle.

Furthermore, the Government accept in their response that the most effective way of reducing the risk would be to have a diagnostic test sensitive enough to detect infected animals in the pre-clinical stages, which could therefore be used in widespread screening programmes.

We welcome the Government's initiative in asking Professor Horn to lead a team of scientists to review our understanding of the origin of BSE. We hope and expect that in this they will review the issue of testing. Perhaps that is the most important issue to come out of the Phillips report. The hon. Member for Eastwood spoke about the families' desperate need to get to the bottom of the BSE-CJD problem. We share that view.

The question has been raised of the efficacy and accuracy of the testing for BSE in cattle older than 30 months. It is now part of the European Commission's raft of measures to counter the problem. However, we have not yet had a clear and unequivocal statement from the Government on their view of the test. A spokesman for the commissioner, David Byrne, said that a negative test result on its own did not mean that beef from cattle older than 30 months was safe to eat. He said:

"We've never sold it"—

that is the test—

"as a safety measure. We sell it as a measure to enhance consumer confidence. A negative result does not mean beef is negative."

Although that admission could be welcomed as a sign of greater openness, it nevertheless invites questions of the Government and the FSA.

The history of BSE since the mid-1980s is as tragic an event as we have ever experienced in this country. Great distress and anger have been caused not only to the families of variant CJD victims but to the livestock farming community. We should not lose sight of the fact that livelihoods have been ruined and businesses destroyed in the agriculture sector as well. The Opposition accept that mistakes were made, but we join the Government in responding positively to all the recommendations set out in Lord Phillips' report. The families affected need to know how BSE originated and how it happened. We share those views and pledge our support for the Government in their endeavour to find the answers.

6.50 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper): We have had a measured, thoughtful and constructive debate this afternoon about the BSE inquiry and the tragedy of new variant CJD that lies behind it. Many Members began their speeches by expressing sympathy for the families whose lives have been turned upside down and often devastated by nvCJD. I join them, for we need always to bear in mind that reality when we consider the events that lie behind the BSE inquiry.

My right hon. Friend the Minister gave a clear summary of the extremely thorough and extensive Phillips report, and the shortcomings and problems that it identified. He also explained the key themes in the Government's interim response. I shall not go over that ground and I apologise now to any Members whose points I am not able to respond to in the time that remains.

The hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) discussed issues of openness; he and the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) both welcomed the report. I welcome their commitment to pursuing the issues behind the report and its conclusions. My right hon. Friends the Members for South Shields (Dr. Clark) and for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) described their concerns and the questions that they asked in the 1990s. They described their frustration in raising those issues in discussion and debate at that time.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) welcomed the report and raised important issues, based on his experience. I am certainly

interested in considering further the questions that he asked about whether or not the fear of judicial review might prevent an effective precautionary approach from being adopted. That is clearly an area in which the publication of scientific evidence can play an important role, and we need to consider it further.

The hon. Member for South–East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) expressed support for the Food Standards Agency, which I welcome. However, I disagree that the Government consider the Phillips report as a done and dusted deal and believe that no more needs to be done. The reverse is true, as our debate has shown. A huge amount needs to be done to ensure that the response to the report is properly embedded across Government. Already, a huge amount has been done, but there is certainly more to do.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), and my hon. Friends the Members for Eastwood (Mr. Murphy) for Aberdeen, North (Mr. Savidge), for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) and for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton) described powerfully the experiences both of constituents who are suffering today from nvCJD and of the families of those who have died from the condition. Many of those accounts were moving. I pay tribute to the work that my right hon. and hon. Friends have done in raising their constituents' concerns. Certainly, many of them have expressed those concerns directly to Ministers, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston came to see Ministers with a delegation to outline concerns especially about the need for care packages and the importance of improving care for those suffering from nvCJD.

I would like to highlight a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central; many of those victims' families have campaigned for a public inquiry for a long time. Those of us who will benefit from the conclusions of the Phillips report and their implementation in future owe those families a debt for their tenacity in pursuing that issue at an extremely difficult time for them.

My hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) spoke about how much was known about the transmission of the disease at an early stage. The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard)—whose speech I apologise for missing—made interesting points about the importance of the media in communicating risk. The right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) referred to the need to find the origins of BSE and nvCJD, and the role that OPs may have played. My right hon. Friend the Minister is happy to look into the report that he mentioned, and will write to him on that issue.

The hon. Member for West Tyrone (Mr. Thompson) welcomed the measures that are making a difference to controlling BSE in Northern Ireland. He raised the ban on feeding fishmeal to ruminants. I can tell him that the EU ban will be reviewed before 1 July. The Government will consider the UK position in the light of further scientific advice, the results of the Commission's missions to member states and other developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley spoke about the failure to deal with uncertainty. I should like to return to discussion on that subject in future. I shall return also to the specific points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central about care and compensation. On her concerns about meat inspection, however, I can tell her that no formal proposals have been made to change the rules, although I understand that the European Commission has circulated a working document containing initial ideas on a risk-based meat inspection system. The Government's concern at every stage will be to ensure that proper standards are in place to protect public health.

In the remaining time, I want to concentrate on three health issues that have arisen several times in the debate. First, I should like to deal with the care and support that we provide for those who are now suffering because of what went wrong in the past in respect of BSE and nvCJD. I know that many of the affected families understandably feel angry and that their troubles have been exacerbated by struggling to get the care and support that they need. The BSE inquiry identified a lack of sufficient support for patients and their families. All the lessons that we learn for the future will have come too late for those people.

Many hon. Members have expressed their concern about that to the Department. That is why the Government announced on the report's publication that £1 million would be made available for a care fund to support patients who were being nursed at home by their families. The fund is already being used to support patients in the community and to pay for elements of care that cannot readily be supplied by local health and social services. We are keen to ensure that those care packages continue to be shaped around the families' views and needs.

I can tell my hon. Friend the Member for Eastwood that we will certainly review the size of that fund if more cases arise. It is being administered by the CJD surveillance unit in Edinburgh and its aim is to provide uniform care throughout the country, to ensure that families can speedily access the expertise that they need to support them whenever they find themselves in this dreadful situation. We intend forthcoming guidance on home care charges to state that CJD patients should not pay them.

We also announced on the report's publication that we intended to make special compensation payments to those who contracted nvCJD and their families. Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that, although discussions are continuing with the legal representatives of the affected families, we will make interim payments of £25,000 in the meantime. We will also introduce regulations to ensure that the payments are not taken into account in the calculation of income-related social security benefits. We will do that as swiftly as we can.

I want to deal briefly with the important, but not easy, issue of assessing and communicating risk. The Phillips report states:

> "The other casualty of the BSE story has been the destruction of the credibility of government pronouncements."

That is extremely serious; it is about not only BSE, but trust in Government across the board and in pronouncements on health and safety. As many hon. Members on both sides of the House have said, the key is openness and honesty with the public about risk. That means publicising scientific advice and providing people with the facts so that they can make their own decisions about whether the Government are making a sensible policy judgment. We must also be able to distinguish between circumstances in which there is said to be no scientific evidence of a risk because there is lots of

[Yvette Cooper]

scientific evidence that does not support it, and circumstances in which there is simply no good evidence at all. There is a distinction between the two that we have not always made in the past in public health, but we must do so now.

For example, the experts tell us that there is a good deal of evidence to show that there is no link between MMR vaccines and autism. On mobile phones, on the other hand, they tell us that there is simply no good evidence at all, which is why we must take a different approach with regard to those matters. We must publish all the scientific evidence at every stage, whether or not it favours our conclusions. That is critical to providing people with increasing confidence in Government pronouncements.

It is of great concern that public confidence in Government pronouncements has been undermined. Hon. Members on both sides of the House must do everything that we can to improve that.

It being Seven o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

LIAISON COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.

( ) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

( ) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Rail Network

7 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): I bring a petition from the citizens of St. Albans, bearing several thousand signatures, asking for the track and signalling of the rail network to be brought back into public ownership. It is most appropriate in view of today's news that several extra billion pounds worth of revenue will be required for the east coast mainline uprating.

The petition states:

To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in Parliament assembled. The Humble Petition of residents of St. Albans

Sheweth

That public confidence in the safety of the rail network has been severely undermined as a result of recent events.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House restores the public's confidence in the rail system by passing legislation to return the rail network to public ownership and accountability.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

UK-US Relations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

7.1 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The debate is about the United Kingdom, the United States and Europe. In a recent MORI poll, people were asked:

"In a crisis, which of these—Europe, the Commonwealth or the United States—do you think would be Britain's most reliable political ally?"

The result was 16 per cent. for Europe, 15 per cent.—surprisingly—for the Commonwealth, and 59 per cent. for the United States.

I believe that there is a special relationship, but that view is not held by everyone. The director of historical studies at Cambridge, Professor David Reynolds, exemplifies the view that the special relationship is artificial. He claims:

"Recognising that the special relationship has been in part a deliberate British creation—a tradition invented as a tool of diplomacy—helps us appreciate the artifice that lays behind fulsome official British rhetoric about America."

I disagree. That is unrealistic. The special relationship is solid—rooted, as it is, in trading, defensive and societal interactions on a massive scale. One need only consider the trade flows between our two nations or the 3 million Britons who visit the US each year.

The US and the UK rank first and second, respectively, as the world's largest foreign investors. Our two countries are also the largest recipients of foreign investment, as well as one another's largest foreign investor. United States investment alone accounts for approximately 40 per cent. of the UK's entire stock of foreign investment, and in 1998, the total value of Anglo-American trade reached $165 billion—larger in value than the economies of most nation states.

Neither is this massive mutual investment in decline. Between 1991 and 1997, the value of UK exports to the US increased by 50 per cent., as did UK imports from the US. In a world where 51 of the 100 most valuable entities are not nation states but corporations, it is Anglo-American corporations that lead the way, accounting as they do for almost half of worldwide merger and acquisition activity during the last 20 years of the 20th century.

Despite that massive mutual investment, barriers and threats to the special relationship remain, especially in the spheres of trade and defence. I shall begin by examining barriers and threats to trade, before discussing the dangers to the Atlantic alliance.

Although successive general agreement on tariffs and trade and World Trade Organisation accords have reduced trading tariffs to an average of just 2.6 per cent., much Anglo-American commerce remains subject to tariffs as high as 15 per cent. In a report last August, the US International Trade Commission estimated that the elimination of those tariffs would boost bilateral trade by around 10 per cent., and would have the effect of lowering prices in the United Kingdom. I know that the Minister has seen the ITC's report, in which it said:

"Despite the healthy trade relationship between America and the UK, trade barriers persist. They are evident in agricultural products; pharmaceuticals; textiles; apparel and footwear; machinery and equipment; and services."

That is bad news, because the report was about the impact on the United States economy of including the United Kingdom in the North American Free Trade Area.

Ever since entering the single market, the UK has entrusted the terms of her foreign trade to the European Union, and thus our scope for unilateral action to reduce tariffs against the US is unfortunately limited. We can and must do more to bolster the feeble efforts of the European Union to conclude a free trade agreement with the United States.

Under French pressure, the attempts of Sir Leon Brittan to conclude an agreement collapsed repeatedly. On everything from bananas, to beef, to offshore tax rules, considerable differences remain. The broader problem is that, rather than focusing on the extension of free trade, the EU Trade Commission has focused on the extension of its own authority. In the use of its regulatory powers over trade, the EU could learn a lot from the United States, and I shall explain how.

The instrument allowing the regulation of trade between the component states of the US is the interstate commerce clause of the constitution. Specifically, the ICC gives the federal Government power to regulate trade between, but not within, the 50 states. Like the economic harmonisation provisions of the Maastricht treaty, liberal interpretations of the ICC by Congress, and at times by the Supreme Court, have allowed the regulation of intrastate activities when they have had but tenuous effects on interstate commerce. An instrument designed to facilitate trade between states thereby became a vehicle for torrents of federal regulation. In much the same way, Brussels has used the aim of economic harmonisation to justify its regulation of everything from Europeans' working hours to the shape of their fruit.

Yet in the US, at least, there has been a sea change in the federal Government's use of their power to regulate interstate commerce—a change that Brussels could do well to learn from. That change came in 1995 with the Supreme Court case, United States *v.* Lopez. Chief Justice Rhenquist's ruling in Lopez turned on his reasoning that if all that is required to justify the regulation of an intrastate activity is that it is shown to possess some small nexus with interstate commerce, there would exist in America the potential for not merely federal, but completely centralised government. Rhenquist's jurisprudence contains a powerful lesson for the EU: power over interstate commerce should be used to facilitate trade, not as a Trojan horse for extraneous federal regulation.

The EU lacks the check on centralisation provided in the US by the Supreme Court, whose recent rulings on the limits of interstate trade regulation should be a lesson to Brussels. The court's ruling in Maryland *v.* Wirtz, for example, attempted to delineate how the federal Government could use their power over interstate commerce to impose wider regulation. The decision on Maryland stated:

"The Supreme Court has never declared that the Federal Government may use a relatively trivial impact upon commerce as an excuse for broader regulation of state or private activities."

Were something of the court's wisdom applied to the European Union, we could be spared meddlesome interventions concerning the milk content of chocolate, hairdressers' tea breaks—with which I am very familiar—and other such trivia.

Unfortunately, Brussels is an unlikely student of Chief Justice Rhenquist, not least because its governing ambition has been to achieve, and not—unlike John Locke

[Mr. Michael Fabricant]

and the American constitution—avoid, the total hegemony of government. In a perverse ordering of priorities, Brussels has failed to stop its constant distortion of interstate trade with public subsidies and price fixing. Let us consider the heavily subsidised farming in continental Europe, and the state airlines.

In any event, countries such as France do not seem to share the respect for law shown by Britain and the United States. We enforce European Union directives and law, while other countries seem to ignore them. This debate follows an earlier debate on BSE. The disrespect for law is exemplified by France's continued refusal—against EU law—to import British beef, though it be free of BSE.

I want to say something about defence, and in doing so to endorse the popular and correct opinion that the Atlantic alliance is in danger. A convenient myth has evolved in Europe that the Russian threat has—for want of a better word—evaporated. In fact, Russia's perestroika may prove vestigial, with the future election of an autocrat. Even some of Vladimir Putin's recent actions on control of the media should give some cause for alarm. Russia's present governing arrangement is more plutocratic than democratic, and remains highly volatile.

The notion that Europe can relax in the company of such a neighbour, and that the EU can pursue policies undermining NATO and establish a defence union characterised by underfunding, undermanning and tension between its competent nations, is misguided. We have already seen Russia loosen her criteria for the use of nuclear missiles, while Vladimir Putin made increasing military expenditure by 50 per cent. central to his presidential campaign.

A record 30 per cent. of Russia's defence spending was devoted to military procurement in 1999. Putin also backs the development of a new generation of multiple re-entry missiles, capable of penetrating the most sophisticated missile defence systems yet envisaged. Conversely, European nations have been making drastic cuts in their defence expenditure. In devoting, on average, less than 2.2 per cent. of gross domestic product to defence, they have in effect been freeriding on United States defence expenditure, fuelling calls by Condaleezza Rice—among many Americans—for US forces to withdraw from Europe completely. Following a decision rightly criticised by the US's outgoing Defence Secretary, William Cohen, Germany reduced her military expenditure in December 1999 to a pitiful 1.9 per cent. of GDP. The UK now spends just 2.5 per cent. of her GDP on defence.

Especially worrying is the establishment of the 65,000-strong European army at the 1999 Helsinki summit. It has neither adequate funding nor the necessary co-ordination to realise its aims. In fact, that may be just as well. President Chirac has said:

"The object of the European defence identity is to contain the United States".

How ridiculous!

Meanwhile, the Franco-German summit, which also took place in December 1999, contained declarations not only on a shared military intelligence satellite, Syracuse 3, and a rapid reaction force, but on a heavy-lift capacity. Dr. Jonathan Eyal of the Royal United Services Institute has estimated—excepting the unlikely prospect of the United States lending Europe a fleet of Galaxy aircraft—that acquiring heavy-lift capacity would cost the already overburdened European taxpayer $100 billion a year for the next 10 years.

The Western European Union, moreover, has now been folded into the EU. From France's perspective, subsuming the WEU is designed exactly to allow Europe one day to jettison NATO altogether. Why else, indeed, would the ambitious Javier Solana opt to leave NATO in order to head the—formerly unimportant—WEU? France's desire to undermine NATO resurfaced in January 2000, when Paris sided with China and Russia to argue that the Pentagon's proposed national missile defence system contravened the 1972 anti-ballistic missile treaty.

The question in Washington is, of course, why should we lend Europe the equipment that its defence ambitions require? While in joint command through NATO the US has shown herself prepared, when asked, to contribute to the solving of essentially European conflicts. The US air force dispatched some 90 per cent. of the bombs dropped on Kosovo. However, denied a commanding role, the US would be foolhardy to sign over its NATO equipment, especially when only a few days ago the President of the European Commission, Romano Prodi, said:

"The EU should aspire to be a world power—not just a trading bloc, but a political entity."

We now hear that the European army—for that is what it is—is looking to use discarded Ukrainian military equipment as a means of operating without US support. If it were not so serious, it would be laughable. The British Government may be too blind to see it, but it is just such anti-Americanism that continues to motivate French support for European defence. The decision to allow American members of NATO's operations centre, SHAPE, to sit on the new EU military committees, for example, was greeted in France with unbridled fury.

The conclusion to be drawn from all that I have said today is that there exists a yawning gap between our formal, treaty ties to the Europe Union on the one hand, and our cultural and trading ties with the United States on the other. The Government must be resolute and take action to narrow and close this gap. As a first move, they must press for the abolition of tariffs on Anglo-American trade—whether in co-operation with the EU or, if necessary, unilaterally. The Government must also resist the drive toward a fully fledged European army.

Smaller but no less significant measures could also be taken to bolster Anglo-American relations, such as allowing citizens of the US the same speedy passage through UK immigration as is enjoyed by EU citizens. Certainly, it is an indignity to thousands of former American and Commonwealth servicemen—who fought for Britain, whence many of them hailed—that they must queue as "aliens" to enter our country.

There can be no doubt that a special relationship exists between the US and the UK, but that relationship must find formal expression if it is to survive and prosper. As the loose relationship of Spain and Portugal with South America reminds us, cultural ties alone are not enough to foster close co-operation. The use of trade policy to bolster Anglo-American relations is now almost entirely denied to us, thanks to our membership of the European Union. The expression of the special relationship in defence co-operation must not be allowed to go the same way.

Britain is reaching a critical point in its history. It is being driven along, I fear, by the EU's desire to "contain the United States"—another phrase used by President

Chirac. How quickly France forgets its debt of honour to the American war dead who fell on the beaches of Normandy 57 years ago.

The Kaiser used to say, "Those who are not with us are against us." I hope that Britain will not be forced into a choice between the United States and the European Union. However, if such a choice were ever forced upon us, I have no hesitation in saying that our destiny should lie with English-speaking nations such as the United States. They share with us a common legal system, a respect for the rule of law, a common history, and a common sense of democracy and decency.

7.19 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): It is always a pleasure to respond to the speeches of the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant). I well remember my visit to Lichfield at his invitation in my previous incarnation when he was mobbed by his constituents in the high street, all asking for the name of his hairdresser.

It is a great pleasure also to see in the House my hon. Friend the Member for Hastings and Rye (Mr. Foster)—in my view, the best Member of Parliament that Hastings and Rye has ever produced. I look forward to visiting his constituency in March of this year.

This is an important and timely debate, as it is being held near to the visit of the Prime Minister to President Bush. We wish the new Administration well in their endeavours. As the hon. Gentleman knows, my right hon. Friend has just returned from a highly successful visit to the United States where he met the new and dynamic Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

Britain and the United States have a uniquely close relationship, based on common values, common interests and a common language. I want to mention a couple of those aspects. Our political systems are founded on a shared liberal outlook and values: freedom, free speech and free trade. Britain's strategic partnership with the US in NATO remains fundamental to the national security of both our countries. The US, as the hon. Gentleman said, is our biggest single export market. We are the biggest investors in each other's country.

There are close personal ties between our peoples at every level. More happens in the US that is relevant to Britain than in any other country. In the limited amount of time left to me by the hon. Gentleman, I hope to explore the fact that our position as a leading player in the European Union enhances this relationship.

The transatlantic relationship will remain strong because our vital national interests coincide now as much as they ever did. The Government are committed to working with the new Administration as we have done with previous ones in pursuit of our common interests. President Bush has confirmed to the Prime Minister that he shares this determination. The warmth shown to my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary by the Secretary of State bodes very well for the future. The visit of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to Washington from 22 to 24 February will re-cement this important relationship.

Last year, Britain sold £28 billion, or $40 billion, worth of goods to the American market, and bought about the same amount of American goods. We sell more to Boeing than we do to many countries. British interests in many of the 50 states individually outweigh our interests in most other countries. Year after year, Britain and the US are the biggest investors in each other's country. We are now the most important overseas investor in California, having just overtaken Japan. Some 5,600 American companies see Britain as their base in the European single market.

It is important to explore some aspects of what the hon. Gentleman said. First, he made a number of proposals which I shall dub "the Fabricant proposals", if I may. I will study them. If we can do anything that will enhance the relationship between the US and Britain, we are certainly willing to do it. If he would like to come to see me to discuss the proposals, I will be more than happy to do that. No doubt that will feature prominently on his website. I know that other meetings I have had with the hon. Gentleman have reverberated around the world.

The US seeks to ensure that Britain is a leading player in the EU. Since 1 May 1997, the Government have been committed to playing that leading role. We have been supported by the American Government and that has not in any way affected the special relationship we have with the US. It is because we are playing a role in Brussels and shaping the agenda in Europe that the US benefits, as do our business people and our own people.

The second point that the hon. Gentleman raised concerned defence and foreign policy. That gives me an excellent opportunity to clear up some of the misunderstanding sown by the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), the shadow Defence Secretary, as he travels like a weasel to Washington on various occasions trying to spread disharmony among those on the Hill.

We are absolutely committed to NATO, which forms the cornerstone of our defence policy and we will do nothing to undermine it. However, we believe that our relationship with our European partners through the new European defence policy will lead to NATO's enhancement. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Lichfield makes a funny face, but I assure him that we will act only when NATO does not wish to act. We will act only in co-operation and in consultation with NATO and on those key tasks—the Petersberg tasks—that have been agreed by successive Governments. I remind the hon. Gentleman that they were agreed by Sir Malcolm Rifkind when he was Secretary of State for Defence. The initiative is therefore not new, but has been on-going under several different Administrations.

Our discussions with our European partners and colleagues in the past year—certainly since the St. Malo conference when the matter was first raised between France and Britain—show an absolute desire to ensure a co-ordinated approach. Colin Powell and the American Government understand that, and have supported what we have said. That does not prevent an individual, usually from a former Administration, from appearing on "Newsnight" and being presented by Mr. Jeremy Paxman as a great authority on the subject. Of course, people have raised anxieties, but they do not need to worry. We will not act without our NATO partners. That has been agreed and approved by all the European leaders. My meetings in the European Council suggest that the matter will be developed in the next weeks, months and years.

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

We do not need to choose between the United States and the European Union. We are in the European Union, as are eight of our top 10 trading partners and 700,000 British businesses. A huge amount of trade takes place with other European Union countries, yet some Conservative Members, when they attend our proceedings, say that Britain should withdraw from the European Union. We believe in a stronger Britain in a wider Europe. That is why we support the admission of applicant countries to the European Union. The hon. Gentleman tries to be tough and macho on the issues that we are considering, but he does not need to be. I know he accepts that Britain is a European country and that our future is in Europe.

We can maintain strong relationships with Europe and the United States. Indeed, the stronger the ties with the United States, the stronger the ties with other European countries. We are determined that developments in Europe should strengthen, not undermine, our strategic partnership with the United States. Britain's pivotal role in the transatlantic alliance is valued by our friends in Europe and in the United States.

Any loss of influence in Europe would damage our economic and strategic relations with the United States. One of the best ways to maintain Britain's influence and interest in the United States is for us to continue the work of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary in the past four years and ensure that we are key players. The Prime Minister's role at the Nice summit last month further strengthened our influence in Europe and therefore our relationship with the United States.

As the Foreign Secretary has said, however, it is not a choice between the United States and Europe. There is no tension. The tension is created by those who want to sow mischief. I urge the hon. Gentleman, who I know thinks deeply about these matters, to reconsider some of the views that he has expressed today. Perhaps by the time that we meet to discuss the Fabricant proposals, he will be able to tell me that he strongly supports our relationship with the United States and strongly supports our relationship with our European partners.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 26 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Arts (North Yorkshire)

1. **Mr. Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What steps he is taking to widen access to the arts in (a) North Yorkshire and (b) Scarborough and Whitby. [149384]

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): Yorkshire Arts is strongly committed to widening access to the arts. Its budget from the Arts Council of England increased by 9.1 per cent. in 1999–2000 and in 2000–01 by 26 per cent., to £9.25 million. Among the excellent projects that are promoting wider access is Create, an arts development consortium working in partnership with Yorkshire Arts to promote residencies and participatory events at the Scarborough festival and, indeed, all the year round. That also benefits Whitby and rural areas in North Yorkshire.

Mr. Quinn: Such initiatives are extremely welcome in what are perhaps some of the most rural parts of the country. In the rural areas of North Yorkshire in particular, participation in the arts is difficult, whether in the performance arts or in other forms. I am especially pleased that many of the council estates in Scarborough and Whitby now have an opportunity to take part. This initiative from the Government is smashing and will make sure that we break down the barriers of exclusion in access to the arts. Will my right hon. Friend take an early opportunity to commend all the people at Yorkshire Arts for that important work?

Mr. Howarth: I very much appreciate my hon. Friend's comments. He is a great advocate of tourism and culture in his constituency and in Yorkshire. He and his constituents are fortunate of course to have Sir Alan Ayckbourn and the Stephen Joseph theatre in their midst. That theatre has been a priority for Yorkshire Arts.

Yorkshire Arts supports both the Crescent arts workshop—working to bring cultural opportunities to deprived estates in Scarborough—and the Whitby network, which provides a performance base in Whitby.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the Minister confirm that the restriction of school budgets in North Yorkshire poses tremendous difficulties for schools such as Thirsk school where, traditionally, pupils were bussed to venues in North Yorkshire and in Leeds so that they could experience arts to which their parents were unable to take them? Will the Minister speak to the Department for Education and Employment to ensure that the budgets are increased so that the trips continue to take place in future?

Mr. Howarth: We work closely with our colleagues in the DFEE. Education is of course a priority for my Department; a commitment to education is written into our funding agreements with the Arts Council and in the Arts Council's agreements with the regional arts boards. I hope that the hon. Lady will be pleased that North Yorkshire, which has 14 per cent. of the population of Yorkshire, receives 20 per cent. of the budget of Yorkshire Arts. Of that, a significant amount is committed to work with educational organisations—schools and other organisations—to ensure that culture and education reinforce each other, as she and I would both wish.

Heritage (Calderdale)

2. **Mrs. Alice Mahon** (Halifax): What steps he is taking to support heritage initiatives in Calderdale. [149385]

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): I was delighted to visit Calderdale last September, at the invitation of my hon. Friend, and to see for myself the exceptional regeneration project at Dean Clough. We must all admire what Sir Ernest Hall has achieved there. I also saw the restoration work on the 1855 station building and the Piece hall. The Government are committed to supporting the restoration of historic buildings for present-day use and I congratulate Calderdale on its success in attracting funding to preserve the best of the past.

Mrs. Mahon: I thank my right hon. Friend for the generous help that we have been given in the past. Does he agree that when an area such as Calderdale has a wealth of heritage, a regional strategy is a good way forward? Can we get the heritage lottery fund to speed up its grants? I am thinking, in particular, of the magnificent 15th century Shibden hall, which is falling into disrepair. It would be a tragedy if that continued.

Mr. Howarth: Halifax and Calderdale have a most remarkable built heritage but, as my hon. Friend says, that provides a huge challenge for a relatively small local authority. My hon. Friend understands that heritage; she loves and champions it, exactly as a Member of Parliament should. In recent years, English Heritage and the heritage lottery fund have given considerable sums—more than £5 million each—to Halifax. I hope that they will continue to respond to my hon. Friend's advocacy.

I note my hon. Friend's comments about the great importance of Shibden hall and, indeed, of the park. She is right that we need to take a regional approach. That is exactly why we have established the regional cultural consortiums.

Library Services

4. **Mr. Paul Goggins** (Wythenshawe and Sale, East): If he will make a statement on the level of investment in new books made by local authority library services in each of the past four years. [149388]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): Library authority expenditure on books was £74.2 million in 1997–98, £75 million in 1998–99 and £79 million in 1999–2000—a 5.3 per cent. increase on the previous year. For 2000-01, it is estimated that expenditure on books will have risen to £79.5 million—a further 0.6 per cent. increase on last year.

Mr. Goggins: I assure my right. hon. Friend that those improvements are reflected in my constituency, where Trafford and Manchester councils are investing in new books and new facilities. What action is he taking to encourage libraries to work with schools and colleges to extend the joy of reading those new books to the 7 million or so adults in our country who still cannot read any better than an average 11-year-old?

Mr. Smith: Libraries are, of course, important for the whole population, including young people and students. The use of libraries is extremely prevalent; about 10 million people visit their public libraries every fortnight. It is important that libraries, which are primarily run by local authorities, invest properly in their facilities and in their book funds, and make them available to their populations. Trafford is a good example of a council that has done precisely that. For the first time ever, we have instituted library standards, which we published on 12 February. Those standards put in place targets for library authorities in matters such as opening hours, library location and book purchasing, which will ensure that library facilities become increasingly available in the next three years.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The Secretary of State talks in rosy terms, as he always does, about the increase in spending on libraries and in reading and so on under the Labour Government. That would be wonderful if it were the case for all local authorities. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that many authorities such as Wiltshire county council—the sixth worst funded county in England—cannot afford social services, or to educate children or mend the roads? I fear that under those conditions, it certainly cannot afford to increase spending on libraries. If the right hon. Gentleman is so keen to increase spending on libraries, will he make a specific grant available to increase the number of new books in counties such as Wiltshire?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman implies that libraries should take second place to other council services. I remind him that libraries are a statutory service under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and that they are vital to the education of the whole population. Local authorities ought to pay attention to library services. The environmental, protective and cultural services block of the revenue support grant settlement, which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister recently put in place, has been increased by 4.3 per cent.

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): Is my right hon. Friend prepared to intervene if local authorities propose drastic closures, as is the case in Plymouth, where Trelawny library, Combe Dean library, Lipson community college library and the mobile library service all face cuts under our irresponsible Conservative council, which nevertheless finds it possible to axe parking charges for people who do not even live in our city?

Mr. Smith: I am indeed prepared to intervene where unwarranted cuts are threatened in library services, and we have done so on several occasions. I am pleased to say that when we have intervened in recent years, library authorities have either withdrawn or cancelled plans to close libraries and reduce services. That seems to be prevalent in Tory authorities. For example, Tory-controlled Kensington and Chelsea council recently proposed to close Notting Hill library; one of only six libraries in the entire borough. There was a lot of local unhappiness and we were contacted by many local residents. As a result of my chief library adviser's contacting the authority on two occasions, I am pleased to say that even the Tory party in Kensington and Chelsea has withdrawn its proposals

World Cup (Television Rights)

5. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): What correspondence he has had with Kirch sport regarding television coverage of the 2002 and 2006 football World cup finals. [149389]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): I wrote to Dr. Dieter Hahn, the managing director of Kirch Holding, on 29 January in response to his letter to me of 20 December. Dr. Hahn acknowledged my reply on 5 February. A meeting with officials has been arranged for 7 March. I am determined that all viewers in the United Kingdom, including those who do not have subscription television, should be able to watch live all games in the World cup finals and not just those involving the home country teams.

Mr. Grogan: Will my right hon. Friend give me the further assurance that if this Anglo-German contest between the will of Parliament—which first made the World cup finals a listed event as long ago as 1985—and the German media company Kirch goes into extra time and penalties at the European Court, he will make strong representations to both the court and to the Commission in defence of the United Kingdom's listed events? As he said, the list stipulates that every match in the World cup finals should be made available live and at a fair price to free to air terrestrial television.

Mr. Smith: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. When live rights are made available, they must be made available to all. That is part of the provisions of the listed events that have been put in place. We have made that view very clear, and we shall stick strongly to it.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Does the Secretary of State recognise that one of the most important points

about keeping major international sporting events on free to air television is the fact that youngsters from less well off backgrounds should have access to the highest quality sport? Does he agree that it is essential to preserve the concept of the listed events as set out in the Broadcasting Act 1996 which was introduced by the previous Conservative Government?

Mr. Smith: It is central to our policy for the protection of viewers and for the long term interests of sport to ensure that the provisions for listed events remain in force. We inherited excellent legislation on this matter from the previous Government and we increased the number of events on the list following the review that we conducted shortly after we came into government. The legislation is an example of good cross-party work on an essential matter that is important to all television viewers and to all sports enthusiasts in this country.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): Will my right hon. Friend reconsider the provisions for the World cup in 2002? Given the 12 hour time difference between here and Korea and Japan, many of the games will be shown live at 3 o'clock in the morning in this country. I do not quite see the logic of anyone having the rights to broadcast the games live at 3 o'clock in the morning because what really matters is when the games are first shown. In 2002, the first showing of matches—and not necessarily their live broadcasting—will be the key issue.

Mr. Smith: These are, of course, separate issues. Live events are important and despite the late hour at which some Olympic events were shown, they still attracted substantial interest. We should also remember that many people have video recorders and will want to record the live games so that they can watch them at the first opportunity available to them.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will the right hon. Gentleman join me in paying tribute to the late Sir Donald Bradman who was undoubtedly one of the greatest cricketers whom the world will ever see?

On the World cup, we entirely support the Secretary of State's campaign to retain the concept of listed events. It was the result of the settled will of Parliament and such an approach has cross-party support. It is right to defend the concept in this case because of all the other listed events. If the concept of listed events goes in this instance, what else will be lost?

Has the right hon. Gentleman spoken to FIFA? Surely it recognises that it must be in the interests of sponsors and the future of football that as many people as possible are able to watch the matches. Is there not a must-transmit clause in the contract with Kirch? Should pressure be put on BSkyB not to seek exclusive rights to the matches, because that would not be in the interests of football? Sky has done wonderfully well out of football and it must also be in its interests that as many people as possible watch the World cup so that they will watch other football matches in the future.

Mr. Smith: I certainly join the hon. Gentleman in paying tribute to Sir Don Bradman, who was one of the greatest cricketers, if not the greatest, that we have seen for many years. His loss is deeply felt by many people.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for his general remarks about broadcasting. FIFA requires that the opening match, the semi-finals and the final, as well as matches involving the national team of any one country, should be shown on free to air television. That is included in the FIFA sale of rights. However, FIFA does not go beyond that, but our listed events requirement does because it includes matches other than home country matches. In the previous World cup, viewing figures for some games that did not involve England or Scotland were remarkably high; Jamaica-Croatia, Brazil-Chile and Nigeria-Denmark each had more than 10 million viewers. These events are important to many millions of viewers in this country, and we shall ensure that we stand by the will of Parliament on this matter.

National Collections (Access)

6. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): How many items from the national collections are on loan to private sector organisations; and how many of them cannot be viewed by members of the general public. [149390]

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): Inquiries to the national museums and galleries show that 1,202 items are on loan to private sector organisations, including privately funded art galleries. It is estimated that, of those items, 86 per cent. are available to public view.

Mr. Prentice: My calculation is that 14 per cent. of items from the national collection are not available for the general public to view, which is unfortunate. At any given time, the public can see only 15 per cent. of the Tate's collection, only 18 per cent. of the national collection in the national portrait gallery and less than 5 per cent. of the science museum's collection. Why is it not possible to show items from our national collections in public spaces such as airport and railway concourses, with proper protection, and introduce our citizens to the glories of those collections?

Mr. Howarth: I have a great deal of sympathy with what my hon. Friend says. Works of art are regularly lent and borrowed within this country and throughout the world. That is the only basis on which we in Britain have the opportunity to see wonderful special exhibitions of international importance.

As my hon. Friend says, a significant proportion of items in the national collections are not on display at any given time, and it is highly desirable that more people should have the opportunity to see them. That is why I am very encouraged by the network of relations that the Tate gallery has developed with regional galleries, which will enable more people in the regions to see items from its collection. The science museum will be able to display much more of its collection on the new site at Wroughton, near Swindon. We supported the museum in obtaining that site. Lord Evans, the chairman of Resource, fully sympathises with my hon. Friend's views and is considering the matter as part of his review of regional museums and galleries.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I wholly endorse the remarks of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). It is well known that despite the enlightened trusteeship

of the national gallery and the national portrait gallery, the lending of pictures in this country is niggardly. While we all welcome the opportunity for some great pictures to be lent to other galleries, the hon. Gentleman is right to suggest that many other spaces could be provided for their display so that a much broader section of the general public would have a chance to see them, to their great advantage.

Mr. Howarth: I would not agree that the lending policies of the institutions are niggardly. As I have said, if we were not prepared to exchange items, we would not have the exhibitions that we do. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that much more can be done, and we are keen to encourage that.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): As the national museums and galleries are unable to display their entire collections, does my right hon. Friend agree that, instead of lending out items to private organisations, it would be fairer and better if they followed the example of the science museum, which has links with the national railway museum, York and the national museum of photography, film and television in Bradford? Both those museums are extremely popular and enable people from the north to see those wonderful collections.

Mr. Howarth: My hon. Friend is quite right to draw attention to the remarkable quality of those collections in York and Bradford. As I have said, we are keen that more of our national collections should be available to a larger number of people in all parts of the country. I fully agree with her.

Schoolchildren (Creative Activities)

7. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Pursuant to his oral answer of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 334, when he will be able to announce further initiatives for encouraging sport and artistic talent among schoolchildren. [149391]

The Minister for Sport (Kate Hoey): We announced last month our intention to offer children an entitlement of two hours a week of high-quality school sport and physical education. Earlier this month, the appointment of a further 55 school sport co-ordinators in 12 new areas were announced, including in the London borough of Southwark, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the location of 16 areas for the new creative partnerships. The London borough of Southwark—in which, of course, the hon. Gentleman's constituency lies—was again one of the areas chosen.

Mr. Hughes: Obviously I am grateful to the Minister for those initiatives and the Government's interest. Today, we will debate criminal justice measures to deal with young people, many of whom go off the rails during their school years. Does the Minister agree that one of the best things that we could do to ensure that they stay on the straight and narrow and become good—rather than troublesome—citizens would be to give them opportunities to get involved in an activity that they want to pursue and which motivates them? Will she talk to her colleagues at the DFEE and the Home Office to see whether every youngster who leaves primary and secondary school can be given the chance of finding out what he or she would like to do and provided with the chance of doing it? That would enable youngsters to box, swim, sail, dance or get involved in drama instead of hanging around on street corners and getting into trouble.

Kate Hoey: The hon. Gentleman is right about the motivation that sport gives to young people. Clearly, that is happening in schools. However, he is talking about young people who are alienated from school, perhaps through truancy. Many such youngsters are in our constituencies and they are precisely the people whom the school sport co-ordinators try to influence through their outreach work. More importantly, we are using some of the money for young offenders to put in hand work with the Home Office. Some of the young people who concern us are not yet offenders, but we need to get access to them before they are. I take the hon. Gentleman's point, and we will be working closely with the Home Office and the DFEE on that matter.

Mr. Phil Hope (Corby): My hon. Friend will know that the quality of pitches is one barrier to participation in football that young people experience locally. Grassroots football cannot take off if pitches are flooded, fences are broken or pavilions are in disrepair. I recently chaired a meeting of football club representatives in my constituency. They want investment in pitches to get young people playing football and to raise talent at the highest level. The difficulty is the lack of resources: The Football Foundation provides some resources, but will the Government work with it to ensure that cash is available year on year to support and help grassroots football, so that we can get young people back into sport?

Kate Hoey: The Football Foundation will make a significant difference to grassroots football, particularly to the facilities that many of our young—and older—people have to use for weekend matches. It has £18 million in the first year to invest in grassroots football. The working group that will make the decisions will be closely involved with county football associations, local authorities and schools. Change will not happen overnight, but the investment, coupled with the money that is being provided through the space for sport and the arts programme and the improvement in school sports facilities, will make a long term difference to the opportunities that our young people have to play not just football, but other sports as well.

South East Arts (Administration)

8. **Mr. Crispin Blunt** (Reigate): What proportion of the South East Arts budget for 2000–01 is spent on administration. [149392]

The Minister for the Arts (Mr. Alan Howarth): The actual figures for 2000–01 will not be available until the audited accounts are released later this year. I understand that the forecast figure for operating costs is £1.642 million out of a total expenditure of £7.21 million. Operating costs are therefore estimated at 23 per cent. of the South East Arts budget for the year.

Mr. Blunt: Does the Minister appreciate that, between 1999 and 2000, there was a 30 per cent. increase in

administration costs—representing a doubling of the 2000 figure—and that a 25 per cent. administration charge by a major charity would be of significant concern? Given that the treasurer of the local music society writes to me to report that it takes up to two years to get a grant of £500 or £1,000, that the grant application form is a major piece of creative writing and that it counts only if he has had discussions with the bureaucrats at South East Arts before its completion, there is some evidence for his conclusions that South East Arts is

"self-serving, intolerably wasteful and inefficient".

Will the Minister inquire into the administration of South East Arts?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman is very disparaging about South East Arts, but it does a very great deal of very useful work. Of course the figure for administrative costs is much too high. We are working to bring it down, principally by increasing grant in aid to South East Arts. That provision was so niggardly under the previous Government that spending on administration was inevitably a very high proportion of South East Arts total budget. We increased its grant by 16.7 per cent. last year, and have done so by 31 per cent. in the present year. The Arts Council is reducing the number of special programmes that carry high administrative costs. We are setting targets for the reduction of administrative costs and we have asked the quality and efficiency standards team—QUEST—to offer advice.

I should add that the task of South East Arts has been made significantly harder as a result of the hon. Gentleman's local authority—Reigate and Banstead borough council—last year withdrawing its contribution to South East Arts and its support for the arts development officer in his area, which South East Arts co-funded. Support for the arts must be a partnership between central and local government. If the hon. Gentleman's borough council refuses to play its part, heavier administrative and financing costs inevitably fall on South East Arts. The hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) should be concerned, because his constituency covers that council, too. Is he happy that Conservative-controlled local authorities should behave in such a way?

Recreational Shooting

10. **Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): If he will make a statement on his policy on recreational shooting. [149394]

The Minister for Sport (Kate Hoey): The Government strongly support the sport of shooting which, as with other sports, can help with character building and the development of interpersonal skills and personal discipline.

Mr. Leigh: I am very glad to hear the Minister's ringing endorsement; she, of course, has a fine record on such subjects, particularly hunting. She must be aware that the League Against Cruel Sports—I have seen literature from it—has recreational shooting firmly in its sights, believing that it is a cruel sport and that it is wrong that game should be artificially bred. We have heard such false arguments applied to hunting. Will the hon. Lady give a commitment that under no circumstances will the Government whom she represents introduce any Bill that could be used as a vehicle, under a so-called free vote, to put at risk recreational shooting, as hunting is at the present time?

Kate Hoey: As Minister for Sport for this Government, I certainly give that commitment.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham): My eyesight is now too bad to allow me to be let loose with a gun, but in my youth I went rough shooting and recreational shooting. Many of my constituents enjoy the sport. I should like to reaffirm from the Labour Benches the view that hunting with guns—recreational shooting—is part of our countryside tradition, and that the Labour party remains firmly committed to it.

Kate Hoey: I absolutely agree with everything that my hon. Friend has said. We are very successful at the sport. I had the privilege of seeing Richard Faulds win the Olympic gold medal in the double trap event. Ian Peel won the silver medal at the Paralympics; people with disabilities can take part in the sport on an equal footing. I also saw Isabel Newstead win a gold medal and Deanna Coates win a bronze. We want to support the sport and see continued success in it.

National Athletics Centre, Picketts Lock

11. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement on progress in establishing a national athletics facility at Picketts Lock. [149395]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The project team is making good progress to develop the new Lee Valley national athletics centre. The design team is producing outline plans for the stadium and associated facilities, and technical studies are at an advanced stage. The project team expects to be able to submit a full planning application by the end of May.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful for that information, but will the Secretary of State confirm that no design has yet been accepted and that the project is therefore not really up and running? Will he assure the House that, however great the current delays, facilities will be available for the world athletics championships in 2005, which means that they must be completed by the preceding year?

Mr. Smith: Design work is under way and I have every confidence that the stadium will be in place, up and running and of a world-class nature ready for the world athletics championships in 2005.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): Few people share the Secretary of State's confidence. Questions about Picketts Lock arise directly from his ill-informed and wrong-headed decision to kick athletics out of Wembley. If Wembley with planning permission and a detailed design is not to be ready until 2004, what are the chances that Picketts Lock will be ready by 2005? What are the chances of London hosting the world athletics championships if there is nowhere for them to be held? What are the chances of a successful bid for the Olympic games in 2012 if there is no

Olympic stadium? To each question, the answer is the same: about as good as the chances of the Secretary of State keeping his job after May.

Mr. Smith: If we had not taken athletics out of Wembley in December 1999, we would now face the prospect of having to abandon any hope of hosting the world athletics championships. It is because we took that decision—the right decision—to take athletics out of Wembley and to begin work on the Picketts Lock site in the Lee valley that we now have the opportunity to host the championships. Dave Moorcroft, chief executive of UK Athletics, said recently:

"It was right to revisit Wembley one more time but Picketts Lock was always our first choice . . . It really is the number one choice for a national athletics centre as it will create a dedicated, purpose built stadium, high performance centre, throwing field and warm up track."

That is what we shall provide at the Lee valley stadium, and it is about time the Tories put their voices behind that national project and stopped their ill-informed carping and criticism.

Millennium Dome

12. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): If he will make a statement on the future of the millennium dome. [149396]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Janet Anderson): On 15 February, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the Government had terminated the existing competition. Although Legacy plc made progress towards meeting the preferred bidder terms, it did not meet them and its exclusivity therefore expired. The Government have now asked English Partnerships to invite any interested parties to lodge expressions of interest for the dome and the regeneration of the peninsula.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful for that answer, even though it was an essay in complacency. Given that Lord Falconer said on "Newsnight" on 15 February that the point might come at which he felt that he had to resign and that he has handled the running of the dome appallingly, botched two bids for it, faced calls from almost every national newspaper to quit his post and arrogantly refused to apologise for what everyone now sees is a national scandal, why does the noble Lord not have the decency, the dignity and the sense of responsibility to resign his office forthwith?

Janet Anderson: I very much resent the hon. Gentleman's attempts to make cheap party political points. My noble Friend Lord Falconer has conducted an extremely difficult exercise with great skill and judgment. As for the latest position, I remind the hon. Gentleman of a comment made by one of his hon. Friends:

"The Government should end the talks with Legacy and reopen the competition and try to get real value out of the site."

That comment by the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth) was quoted in the *Financial Times* of 12 January.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): The resignation of Lord Falconer is a matter not of party politics, but of national and public probity. Having bungled two attempts to sell the dome, the Government are now in the process of bungling the third; it is a story of mind-blowing incompetence. Will the Minister confirm that, however many 8 ft hamsters the Government sell, the dome will continue to consume more than £3 million a month for the foreseeable future? What is the real cost to the public of insisting that the dome remains on site? If it is not £300 million, will the Government kindly show us the proof?

If the dome is to remain in place, why on earth are the Government pulling the contents out before they know who will buy it? I apologise for not attempting the accent but, in the words of P-Y Gerbeau:

"I think that, for the money that's been spent, the British public deserve something better."

Indeed, they do; they deserve a better Government.

Janet Anderson: May I deal, first, with the auction, which will take place from tomorrow? As the Government have always said, nothing will be done that would prejudice future uses of the dome, including the option of a new leisure attraction. The Government have no plans to subsidise the operation of the dome.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned running costs. The current monthly running costs of the New Millennium Experience Company are between £2.5 million and £3.5 million, excluding physical decommissioning costs. It is intended that monthly running costs will reduce as the company moves towards solvent liquidation. Following decommissioning we estimate that the running costs of the dome will be £500,000 a month.

In line with the advice of the hon. Member for East Surrey (Mr. Ainsworth), who said that the competition with Legacy should be ended and that a new competition should be opened, we will soon announce details of that and are determined to get value for money. However, the Government are also determined that the dome should stay on site, as it is recognised as an icon around the world. It is the most successful tourist attraction in this country, and attracted 6.5 million visitors in the course of a year. We are determined to get the best deal in future.

Mr. Ainsworth: In the context of the dome, the words "value for money" are, frankly, laughable. As the future of the dome is inevitably mired in past and present controversies, will the Minister give the House an absolute assurance that at no time did Mr. Alastair Campbell solicit sponsorship money from commercial companies?

Janet Anderson: I can certainly give the hon. Gentleman that assurance. While we are on the subject, may I remind him that the dome has been a major catalyst for regeneration activity on the peninsula, which less than a decade ago was one of the most derelict sites in England? The first residents have moved into the millennium village, an exciting new venture of mixed housing. A new primary school has just opened and will soon be followed by brand new health centres, a state-of-the-art cinema and major retail outlets. The Government are convinced that that would not have happened without the dome acting as a catalyst for regeneration.

Ryder Cup

13. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): What discussions he has had with the National Assembly for Wales about the hosting of the Ryder cup in 2009. [149398]

The Minister for Sport (Kate Hoey): Neither I nor my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have discussed the Welsh bid with the National Assembly. The sports cabinet discussed the need for co-ordinating bids for major events at its recent meetings.

Mr. Edwards: I was delighted to attend the launch of the 2009 Ryder cup bid to be held, I hope, at the Celtic Manor hotel in the beautiful Usk valley, near my constituency. I should like to pay tribute to Mr. Tony Lewis, the chairman of the Welsh bid. Does my hon. Friend agree that bringing the Ryder cup to Wales would be a tremendous boost for golf and for Wales? Will she join me in commending Mr. Terry Matthews for all the investment that he has made in the business and sporting life of south-east Wales?

Kate Hoey: My overall aim is to bring the Ryder cup to the United Kingdom. My hon. Friend has been involved with the Welsh bid and has done a great deal to support it. There is also a Scottish bid and a bid from north-east England, so there are three UK bids. All those bids are commendable and are worth considering. At the end of the day, we will have the UK bids and one eventual winner. Co-ordination is important to ensure that different parts of the United Kingdom do not compete against one another. However, the Ryder cup is specifically not a governing body-led event; it is led by an organising team. I wish all the bids great success.

Children's Sport

14. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What plans he has to implement his policy of ensuring that all children take part in sport every week. [149400]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Mr. Chris Smith): The teaching of physical education in the national curriculum is statutory at key stages 1 to 4—for ages five to 16. On 11 January 2001 we set out our intention to offer children an entitlement to two hours a week of high-quality sport and physical education both within and outside the school day. We will consult schools, professional associations and all other interested parties to identify how best to make this happen and how to monitor it.

Caroline Flint: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer, but I should like to raise two issues, the first of which is the sometimes erratic way in which schools organise inter-school tournaments. The organising of such fixtures is lacking, and Ofsted should look into that. My right hon. Friend should ensure that it is a condition of good Ofsted reports that inter-school competition is very much a feature of sport activity.

The second issue is transport, problems with which often prevent children from taking part in after-school or weekend activities. It is a disadvantage for schools if they have to raise money and use the bulk of their sports budget on transport.

Mr. Smith: My hon. Friend makes two extremely important and valid points. We are in discussion with Ofsted about inter-school competition. Children's sport and sporting opportunities are key parts of their development. In many parts of the country, the provision of inter-school competition is not only erratic in far too many areas, it is non-existent. Under the stewardship of the Tory Government, there was a massive decline in inter-school sport. We are rectifying that, and the appointment of 1,000 school sports co-ordinators throughout the country to encourage and facilitate inter-school competitive sport is one of the ways in which we are doing so.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): It is nice that the Government believe in some degree of competitiveness in schools, albeit only on the non-academic side. The Secretary of State says that the Government intend that pupils should have up to two hours of sport a week, but it is not clear what part of that will be within the school working day. Will the right hon. Gentleman at least give an undertaking that 50 per cent. of that time will be within the school working day? Otherwise, was that not a typical meaningless Government announcement?

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman is talking nonsense. We believe fundamentally that competitive sport is excellent for children. It teaches children a great deal about how to win and lose, how to live their lives and how to work in teams. It prepares them for citizenship. Competitive sport is good as a sports policy and as an education policy.

Provision should be in school, after school and at weekends; good-quality school sport has always been about that. We want to see sport covered in the in-school curriculum and in after-school work.

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): Will my right hon. Friend commend the running of football in the community schemes for children? They are organised by clubs such as Lincoln City FC, which is to be congratulated on having become the first community owned and run football club in the country. Will he ensure that his Department and Supporters Direct, both of which have been extremely helpful in giving critical support to Lincoln City FC, put the involvement of children at the heart of their work in cementing the relationship between football and the community?

Mr. Smith: We warmly commend the work that Lincoln City has been doing in that respect. I congratulate the supporters trust, which has taken over the ownership of Lincoln City football club. I am pleased that we put Supporters Direct in place nearly a year ago. It has been working hard with supporters trusts around the country to assist groups of supporters in local areas to take a stake in the equity of their clubs. Lincoln City is an excellent

example of that work coming to fruition. I commend the club and the policy of community ownership that that represents.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I agree with the Secretary of State about the importance of out-of-hours opportunities for sport and for the arts. What discussions has he had with his colleagues and with teachers about possible bottlenecks resulting from the fact that teachers may not be eager to undertake such work without additional resources?

Mr. Smith: We have been in close discussion with the Department for Education and Employment and teachers. Because of the current difficulties facing teachers, we are putting in place school sports co-ordinators and extending the provisions of the new deal to enable sports assistants to be created in schools. We realise that teachers cannot do the work all on their own. They need support, help and assistance with co-ordination, which school sports co-ordinators will provide.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Church Repairs

28. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What he expects the timetable will be for the reduction of VAT on church repairs; and if he will make a statement. [149414]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): The Government are continuing their discussions with the European Commission in relation to a reduced VAT rate for repairs to listed places of worship. A preliminary reply indicated that the matter would be considered by the Commission in its general review of reduced rates, which will take place in 2003. I am encouraged to note that, in the interim, the Government are considering special arrangements to help congregations to pay for repairs to listed places of worship.

Miss McIntosh: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Commission has ruled the application to be illegal under the treaty and as a result of a decision taken by Finance Ministers, which can be overruled only by a unanimous decision? Is the hon. Gentleman aware that it may be possible to submit an alternative application proposing that churches should be considered as historic buildings rather than dwellings, which is the current rule? Would that bring forward the timetable set out by the hon. Gentleman, so that a decision could be taken before 2003?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady, who was a Member of the European Parliament and therefore understands these matters. I am not aware that the Commission ruled any discussion with Her Majesty's Government illegal. It decided that there ought to be a proper review of VAT rates and reduced rates in relation to annexe K, of which the hon. Lady is well aware. The VAT group of the Church is discussing the matter with Customs and Excise. I refer the hon. Lady and the House to press speculation that the Chancellor of the Exchequer may be generous towards VAT on church repairs in his forthcoming Budget.

Mr. Andrew Reed (Loughborough): It is pity that the rate was raised from 8 per cent. to 17.5 per cent., which has put us in the present difficult position. Does my hon. Friend agree that for small congregations with very old churches that require a great deal of work—my own in Cossington, for example, requires expenditure of £400,000 and has a congregation of 30 or 40—the rate of 17.5 per cent. will have made an enormous difference to the amount of work that can be done to repair those historic buildings, which are vital not just to the congregation but to the small communities that use them during the rest of the week?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. We should remember that the Chancellor of the Exchequer is the first Chancellor in 25 years who has agreed to reduce the rate of VAT from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the sudden rise in the rate to 17.5 per cent. in 1979 created a severe distortion in VAT on church repairs and has been an impediment to the repair of my hon. Friend's church.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Chancellor excited expectations that he now has a moral duty to fulfil? Will he convey from both sides of the House the message that we expect an announcement on 7 March?

Mr. Bell: I am not entirely sure how my right hon. Friend the Chancellor would respond if I told him what he should include in his Budget, but we can hope and pray. The hon. Gentleman has been in the forefront of those who have asked for a reduction in VAT on church repairs in the past 20 years. I ask him and the House to read carefully the words used by my right hon. Friend in the announcement. He said clearly that the matter had to go to the European Commission and that discussions would follow. The Government have never suggested that the matter would be one of expediency. I will convey to my right hon. Friend the feeling throughout the House that a measure should be taken to balance the disequilibrium and that a substantial effort is needed to help churches by reducing VAT on church repairs.

29. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle): How many Church of England churches there are in England; how many and what percentage of them require repairs to the roof, tower or steeple to keep them dry and structurally sound; and what steps the Church Commissioners are taking to help impoverished congregations finance the repair work. [149415]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): There are some 16,000 Anglican parish churches in England, 13,000 of which are listed. The Church holds no statistics on the number of buildings needing high-level repairs or work of a more general nature. The total repair cost to Church of England parishes in 1998 was about £123 million, with VAT accounting for at least £18 million.

Mr. Prentice: I am disappointed that there are no statistics on the number of churches that require major

repairs, especially in the light of the information provided by my hon. Friend the Member for Loughborough (Mr. Reed) about the £400,000 cost of repairing his local church. I am unsure of the mechanism that the Church Commissioners use to distribute cash to the localities, but may I make a practical suggestion? Would it not be fair and equitable for them to use the index of deprivation, which extends down to ward level, in determining how much money goes to each diocese in the country?

Mr. Bell: I should point out to my hon. Friend that the Church Commissioners have no general power to assist with the repair and maintenance of churches. The costs are borne by individual parishes, upon whose energy and commitment the preservation of this important part of the nation's built heritage depends. My hon. Friend will be interested to know that the Churches Conservation Trust exists to preserve church buildings that are of exceptional quality, but which are no longer in parish use. The body is jointly funded; 70 per cent. of its funding is provided by the state and 30 per cent. by the Commissioners. We have
£12.6 million in that budget for the next three years.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Will the Second Church Estates Commissioner confirm that the Church Commissioners make a significant contribution to the 16,000 parishes through help with clergy stipends and pensions? As so many of the churches are part of our glorious English architectural heritage, does he further accept that it is incumbent on the state not only to limit—if not abolish—tax charged on repairs to church roofs, but to be generous with grants? On any score, but especially that of built heritage, these buildings are worthy of protection and financial help.

Mr. Bell: Some £10 million is given each year in state aid by English Heritage and a further £10 million is provided from the heritage lottery fund. That is a small amount compared with the huge repair bills faced by the Church, and, of course, it is offset by VAT on church repairs, which wipes that out. We must understand and accept that the churches throughout our land are part of our rich heritage and our nation's culture, and deserve greater state aid than they are getting.

30. **Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): What recent representations he has received from churches on the level of VAT on church repairs. [149416]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Parishes and dioceses of the Church of England have submitted substantial evidence underlining the burden borne by them in VAT costs on repairs to listed and non-listed church buildings. I know that the Church of England VAT group and others continue to work towards the hoped for reduction in VAT.

Mr. Leigh: Up and down the country, the hopes of congregations were raised by the announcement that VAT might be reduced, but a European Commission announcement is now setting matters back to 2003. Will the hon. Gentleman and the Chancellor please make the strongest possible representations to the European Commission that this is one area where it should get its sticky fingers out of the nooks and crannies of our crumbling heritage? We are talking about our culture and history and our churches and congregations—a matter not for the European Union, but for this House.

Mr. Bell: After such a sterling speech, I hesitate to remind the hon. Gentleman that a Conservative Government got us into the EU in the first place. However, setting aside that partisan point, I hope that the Chancellor hears the hon. Gentleman's comments. We seek grant in aid from the Chancellor to compensate our churches while the Commission, with help from our Customs and Excise, Members of Parliament and the Government, consider and unpick a delicate matter.

Mr. Bruce Grocott (Telford): Will my hon. Friend discount any representations that he receives on VAT on church repairs or anything else from Tories, especially former Tory Ministers? Not only were they responsible for rocketing VAT but they imposed a stealth tax on our churches.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his assistance. We try to be bipartisan on Church matters. However, as the Leader of the Opposition has announced a general election on 5 April, that may be too much to ask.

Criminal Justice

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the Command Paper "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", copies of which are available in the Vote Office, together with the criminal justice system business plan for 2001-02. Both are published today.

Throughout their period of office, the Government have been determined to tackle crime and the causes of crime, and to build a fair, effective and swift criminal justice system, which commands the full support and confidence of victims and the public.

Reducing crime carries wider responsibilities than those of the criminal justice system alone. The Government have invested in a range of cross-cutting programmes, which tackle the underlying causes of crime. They include sure start for pre-school children, the new Connexions programme, the children's fund, the welfare-to-work programme and the new national treatment agency, which deals with drug abuse. The programmes are a key element in our approach to crime reduction, but they must go hand in hand with changes in the criminal justice system. I am pleased that profound improvement is already under way.

Following an inquiry under Sir Iain Glidewell, the Crown Prosecution Service has been restructured in line with police force boundaries, and a local chief crown prosecutor is now in place for each area. Criminal justice units, which are responsible for processing cases to court, and are now collocated with the police, are being trebled.

The youth justice system is being transformed. The national Youth Justice Board and a network of local youth offending teams are co-ordinating effort against youth crime as never before. Repeat cautioning of juveniles has ended. Graduated court sanctions are helping to ensure that young offenders, and their parents, take greater responsibility for their behaviour, and allow for the active involvement of victims in the process.

From April, for the first time, police, probation, CPS and magistrates will operate in the same, coterminous boundaries. Statutory partnerships between the police, local councils, the health service and voluntary organisations have been established across the country to ensure that everyone works together effectively to reduce crime and disorder. Those partnerships benefit from significant investment under a three-year crime reduction programme, including the biggest ever expansion of closed circuit television, to help drive crime down locally. New antisocial behaviour orders have removed a climate of fear and intimidation from many neighbourhoods, while more than 1,100 successful prosecutions have taken place for new offences of racial violence and racial harassment.

The system for community punishments is being reformed to ensure better enforcement by a new national probation service. The Prison Service is investing large sums in drug prevention, accredited offending behaviour programmes, better education and training, and an extra 2,660 prison places.

The strategy is bearing fruit. Against demographic projections that crime would rise between 1997 and the end of 1999, the British crime survey shows that overall crime fell by 10 per cent. in that period, with reductions of 4 per cent. for violent crime, 15 per cent. for vehicle crime and 21 per cent. for domestic burglary. Since 1997, overall recorded crime has fallen 7 per cent. to a total of about 5.2 million offences, with reductions of 28 per cent. for domestic burglary and 20 per cent. for vehicle crime.

I pay tribute to the efforts, commitment and dedication of the police, all the others who work in the criminal justice system agencies, and the hundreds of thousands of volunteers in victim support, neighbourhood watch and many other local organisations for that achievement.

The recent improvements have, however, taken place in the context of more fundamental and deep-seated problems. Over the past 20 years, the performance of the criminal justice system has kept pace neither with long-term trends in crime nor with new types of crime. Too few offences are detected and prosecuted successfully. Between 1980 and 1995 the number of recorded offences doubled, but the number of convictions in respect of those offences fell by a third. To put it mildly, the system has not been as successful as it should have been in catching, prosecuting and punishing criminals.

Cases still take too long, and sentencing is too variable, and insufficiently focused on reducing reoffending. Within two years of starting a community sentence or finishing a prison sentence, more than half of all offenders will be back in court to be convicted and sentenced for further offences. The legacy of those failures is that crime in this country is still too high, in comparison not only with the levels here 20 years ago but with those of many other western countries. Furthermore, the British crime survey showed that although violent crime has fallen by 4 per cent., there are worrying increases in street crime, including robbery.

In the Command Paper, the Government have set out to tackle the longer-term problems. Alongside the continuing improvements put in place over the past four years, the paper describes our further strategy for reducing crime and reforming the criminal justice system. It describes a demanding programme for delivering the targets set out in the criminal justice service public service agreement, and identifies a wide range of new areas in which we are seeking improvements.

Those improvements are focused on four key themes. The first is crime prevention, and dealing with the factors that appear to increase the chances of a person's getting into crime in the first place. The second is catching and convicting more offenders—especially persistent offenders—to close the justice gap between crimes reported to the police and those resulting in a criminal being brought to justice. The third theme is ensuring that punishments fit the criminal as well as the crime, thus reducing reoffending and crime itself. The fourth is radically improving treatment for victims, to ensure that their need for information, support and advice is better met at every stage of the criminal justice process.

Research that we have undertaken shows that a small group of hard-core, highly persistent offenders—fluid, but probably no more than 100,000 strong at any given time—may be responsible for about half of all crime. Our strategy, involving both investment and reform, is intended to help catch and convict more of those serious and persistent offenders, and to do so more often.

The police will have the means to give priority to those serious and persistent offenders. The entire active criminal population will be on the DNA database by 2004.

The national intelligence model will be adopted by every police force to establish a consistent basis for gathering, sharing and using intelligence. In addition to previously announced measures to increase the number of police officers to the highest-ever level by March 2003, the document details proposals to improve detective capability, leadership and the management of senior careers in the police service, and to enhance the prospects of those who make a career of being a front-line constable.

As a whole, the criminal justice system will receive the biggest injection of new resources in 20 years. This will deliver more staff, more capacity, and the modernisation of information technology systems for all those working in the criminal justice agencies. A 23 per cent. real terms rise in funding for 2001-02 will enable the Crown Prosecution Service to recruit scores of extra prosecutors, remedying the underfunding that has bedevilled the service ever since it was established.

With that investment and reform must come results. There will be a criminal justice system-wide target for 2004 to increase by 100,000 the number of recorded crimes ending in an offender being brought to justice.

The document sets out why we also want to consider fully and carefully the scope for improving court organisation and procedures and the rules of evidence, and codifying and clarifying the criminal law itself. In December 1999, we asked Sir Robin Auld, a Lord Justice of Appeal, to conduct a comprehensive and independent review of the criminal courts. The Government will take final decisions after carefully considering his recommendations.

To achieve our broad goal of punishment that fits the criminal as well as the crime, we aim radically to reform the present sentencing structure, focusing on preventing reoffending as well as on punishment, and ensuring that persistent offending leads to an increased severity of punishment. There will be a new approach to community punishments and better enforcement.

From April this year, the new national probation service will have its funding increased by more than a fifth in real terms over the next three years, to deliver a 5 per cent. reduction in reoffending. There will for the first time be proper supervision of short-sentence prisoners after their release, and a new emphasis on sentence management and review. In making final decisions in this area, we shall take full account of the review of the sentencing framework under Mr. John Halliday, a senior Home Office official.

There will be a range of new measures to deal with young offenders, including a commitment that every young offender in custody will get a minimum of 30 hours a week of education, training or similar development work.

Many of the 100,000 most persistent offenders are hard drug users. We must better target our efforts to break the link between drugs and crime. New measures include the introduction nationally of drug treatment and testing orders. There will be more referrals into treatment at the point of arrest, and drug testing at the point of charge, to ensure that we identify drug misuse problems and intervene much earlier. Over the next three years, spending on drug treatment is due to rise by 70 per cent., to more than £400 million.

There will also be a lot more money to help to educate prisoners and ensure that they are able to get work on release.

Finally, I would like to speak about victims and witnesses. Support for victims in the United Kingdom is already high by international standards—I am delighted during my period as Home Secretary to have doubled the amount of financial support available to victim support—and we have the most generous criminal injuries compensation scheme in the world, but the Government are determined to do still more to deliver a better deal for victims and witnesses.

Tomorrow, I will publish a consultation paper that will include details of our proposals for a new charter of victims' rights and a victims' ombudsman. That will include a commitment to ensure that victims are kept properly informed throughout the progress of their case.

We want the criminal justice system and everyone working within it to focus on two clear and linked outcomes: the delivery of justice and the reduction of crime. That is the goal of the programme that I have set out today. I commend the Command Paper to the House.

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I thank the Home Secretary for his customary courtesy in providing the Opposition with a copy of his statement well in advance, but I draw his attention to the fact that, despite the supposed Home Office embargo, the press have had the details of the announcement drip-fed to them by Downing street over the past week. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman would comment on that and tell us precisely who authorised it.

I welcome the Home Secretary's intention to expand the number of secure training places by 400, but does he accept that that is modest compared with the 1,000 places that we have already announced we will provide? If the menace of youth crime is all that he claims it to be, why will the right hon. Gentleman not match our proposals? However, bearing in mind his opposition when the previous Government introduced secure training centres, I suppose that we ought to welcome the U-turn.

I also welcome the Home Secretary's decision to consult on a new victims' charter. Will he be implementing the proposals that we have put forward for statutory rights for the victims of crime and if not, why not?

The right hon. Gentleman's document says at paragraph 3.109 that victims and witnesses—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members just do not want to hear this, Mr. Speaker; that's okay. The document says:

"Victims and witnesses want to be kept informed. Current performance is not good enough."

Is that not a damning indictment of the record of this Government, who in their manifesto four years ago pledged to ensure that victims were kept fully informed of the progress of their case? That manifesto pledge was broken and now we are supposed to rejoice at a consultation document, just a few weeks before a general election.

The right hon. Gentleman said that antisocial behaviour orders had removed a climate of fear and intimidation. How many orders did the Home Office estimate would be issued, and how many have actually been issued over the past two years? Are the 2,660 extra prison places on top of the 12,600 extra places over the 15 years to 2011 that

[Miss Ann Widdecombe]

were announced by the previous Government in March 1996? Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that at any one time around 2,000 prisoners are out early on the Government's home detention curfew scheme, in which case the extra places that he has announced should be occupied by those prisoners anyway?

Will the Home Secretary tell the House—no doubt his special adviser will have told him—how many prisoners will be released earlier than they are at present as a result of the proposals in his document, especially those on custody-plus sentences? Will he also spell out in detail exactly how persistent offenders will receive tougher sentences under the Government's proposals? Will those sentences be mandatory and, if not, what guarantee is there that they will be imposed?

What exactly is the status of the Home Secretary's so-called crime plan? Despite the spin doctors' efforts to convince us otherwise, there are hardly any firm detailed proposals on the courts or on sentencing. Throughout the document, the words "consider", "examine, "might" and "possibly" are used in relation to proposals that the right hon. Gentleman's spin doctors have been putting forward over the past week as the Government's firm plans for action.

Why is the right hon. Gentleman making what is billed as a major 10-year announcement on the court system and sentencing before either the Auld report on the criminal court system or the Halliday report on sentencing have been produced? Is he aware of Lord Justice Auld's statement last week that the Lord Chancellor has assured him that, pending receipt and consideration of the report, the Government do not intend to take final decisions on issues within his terms of reference? Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Lord Justice Auld has said that his review is

"unassociated with and uninfluenced by current Governmental and political initiatives"?

So, is what is in this so-called crime plan final or not? If not, how can the Home Secretary claim any credibility for proposals with which the senior judge conducting the Government's own review of criminal justice clearly wants nothing to do? Should there not be a "check against delivery" sticker on the plan as well as on the right hon. Gentleman's statement?

Under this Government, police numbers have been slashed by more than 2,500, violent crime is rising and more than 30,000 criminals have been let out of jail early. Many of the right hon. Gentleman's flagship policies have been abject failures. In other words, the Government have produced endless spin and no delivery. Even the Prime Minister said this morning, "Clearly we haven't done enough." What he actually meant was that, clearly, he has done very little.

Is it not the reality that the right hon. Gentleman was rushed into his announcement by a Prime Minister who has realised that his Government have failed to be tough on crime and to deliver on their promises? The Prime Minister thinks that the solution lies in making another set of promises in time for the election. The reality was stated by the Home Secretary's own special adviser, Mr. Justin Russell, who said that the right hon. Gentleman's policy "doesn't look very impressive", and that it would be, in practice,

"a significant softening of sentencing arrangements".

In reality, is not today's announcement a desperate attempt to cover up the failure of child curfew orders, antisocial behaviour orders and the special early release plan, which has created more than 1,000 victims of crimes committed by perpetrators who should still have been in jail, and who would have been in jail if we had been in office? Does not the announcement attempt to cover up the first rise in crime in six years and a huge decrease in both regular police officers and specials?

Far be it from me to reject a repentant sinner, but let me say this. When we proposed measures to give victims more rights, the Home Secretary was silent. When we proposed to expand secure training centre provision, he said that it would be too costly. When we proposed cops in shops and better use of part-timers, the right hon. Gentleman shrugged. When we proposed more purpose in prison regimes, he laughed. Yet today he proposes all those things. If it has taken him so long to catch up with the Opposition, he should make way for us, which is exactly what he will have to do in a couple of months' time.

Mr. Straw: As usual, I shall endeavour to answer the right hon. Lady's questions. She spoke of the time when her party was in office. Indelible from the record of the previous Government are the facts that crime doubled while the number of people convicted of crime fell by one third. They did nothing to bring together the disparate aspects of the criminal justice system. If one thing, above all others, led to the degradation of our criminal justice system, it was the botched reorganisation of the Crown Prosecution Service in the mid-1980s and its continued underfunding throughout the remainder of the Conservatives' period in office. That is one of the many things that we have determined we will put right. Now that the economy is on track, we are able to do so by increasing total spending on the CPS by 23 per cent. in a single year.

The right hon. Lady asked a series of questions. She noted that we are promising 400 extra secure training centre places for young offenders, but asked why we would not match her pledge of 1,000 places. The reason is simply that we are not in the business of spraying promises around like confetti without any resources to pay for them, as the previous Administration did with catastrophic electoral consequences.

The best illustration of the difference between what the Conservatives said and what they would have done had they returned to office in May 1997 lies in the spending plans that they published in the month of the election. They promised 5,000 extra officers, but, as the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) will remember well, they also promised less money in real terms. That was the reality. Time and again, they made promises and refused to match them with money. We have matched our manifesto promises with action, and we have put those promises into practice.

The right hon. Lady asked about persistent offenders and whether the changes that we are flagging up would necessarily result in mandatory sentences. We shall not make a final decision on that point until we have received

the report from John Halliday. What is plain, however, is that the Criminal Justice Act 1991, which established the present sentencing framework, is fundamentally flawed in that it does not give proper weight to the persistence of offending. That sentencing framework certainly needs to be changed. How exactly that is to be done remains to be seen, but I do not rule out the use of more mandatory sentences or of steps to ensure a proper gradation into custody if people do not accept the opportunities to get out of crime offered through more effective community punishments—just as we have provided similar steps for young offenders.

The last of the charges made against us by the right hon. Lady is that the Command Paper has, from time to time, used the words "consider" and "examine". I plead guilty to that charge. We do indeed say that we will consider and examine a number of proposals. If only the Opposition considered and examined ideas and proposals before they spoke about these matters, they would be much more effective as an Opposition.

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): I welcome the emphasis on victims in the Home Secretary's statement. Does he agree that many communities throughout the country experience the occasional relief of seeing an individual or a small group of people consigned to prison and a consequent reduction in crime in their area, but fear a fresh wave of crime when those people emerge from prison? Does he agree that the strong message must be, first, that if people reoffend, punishment will be strict and will follow quickly; and secondly, that there will be the hope of rehabilitation—not least through a job—for those who chose an alternative way of proceeding?

Mr. Straw: I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. We have to tackle the causes of crime. We have to provide convicted offenders with a better opportunity to get out of their life of crime, but as my right hon. Friend makes clear, we must also raise the game against persistent criminals. That is what we propose to do by ensuring effective supervision of short-sentence prisoners.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) asked me about the number of prisoners who were released early. Last year, 95,000 prisoners were released early under her sentencing legislation.

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): No Opposition party can fail to welcome a Government who take an interest in trying to deal with crime and its causes—to that extent the Home Secretary's statement is welcome. However, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the launch of the plan comes after we have followed a four-year road that has been paved with failed intentions and full of falsely raised expectations? The Labour party still has a long way to go before it can persuade people throughout the country that it is effective in dealing either with crime or with the causes of crime.

On the deterrence and detection of crime, will the Home Secretary admit that it was a terrible mistake to let police numbers fall by 2,500 over the past two years? There should be a target, with a Government guarantee, that, within a few years at most, there will be no community in the country that does not have enough police officers to do the job.

On conviction rates and the prevention of reoffending, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we must do much better than we have done over the past year, when convictions dropped by 60,000? We must do much better on constructive activity in prison than at Pentonville, which he visited this morning, where such activity dropped from 24 to 20 hours a week under the previous Tory Government, and from 20 to 17 hours a week under the Labour Government. There should be a guarantee that every prisoner—not just young offenders—will have a full working week of constructive activity with, in addition, a full system of continuing rehabilitation for as long as they need it when they leave prison.

On victims, especially the victims of the alcohol and drug-related offences that are such a terrible scourge, will the Home Secretary reconsider the Government's refusal thus far to accept the establishment of a permanent advisory body, like a royal commission, on the abuse of alcohol and drugs? Victims should have the right not only to give written statements—that is welcome—but to appear before the court after conviction and before sentence if they choose to do so. Such initiatives would be much more effective than either the gimmick of curfews or the attempt to get rid of the right to choose jury trial on which the liberties of many people depend.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his constructive approach to the proposals. I do not accept what he says about our record. He would be hard-pressed to find another incoming Administration in the past 50 years who have had a better record in reducing crime. Crime increased by 40 per cent. in the first three and a half years of the Major Administration and by 20 per cent. in the first three and a half years of the Thatcher Administration, but in the first three and a half years of the Blair Administration, crime has decreased by between seven and 10 per cent. That is the truth of our record.

I regret the fact that police numbers had fallen until about a year ago, just as I regret the fact that they fell, from 1993, under the previous Administration. However, I regret very much more the fact that there were boom-and-bust policies in place that would have led, and would have continued to lead, to an even larger reduction in police numbers under the previous Administration's published spending plans. That is the truth, and the simple fact is that we have put more money into the police service than the previous Administration had planned to do. In many cases, chief constables chose to spend the money in other ways, and the number of civilian officers has increased by 1,000 while the number of uniformed officers had decreased by 2,500, but that is now turning around. There is a 75 per cent. increase in the number of new recruits going to the training schools, and the number of police officers will rise to record levels within two to three years.

I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is correct to say that convictions dropped by 40,000. The figures, which I looked at this morning, show that convictions increased from 300,000 in 1996 to about 340,000 last year.

We want a clearer definition of purposeful activity. At the moment, it includes, for example, time spent seeing visitors, which is important but does not stop people reoffending. We are doubling the number of places in education available to prisoners and doubling the number of opportunities for prisoners to go straight from prison to work, and I think that that will work.

[Mr. Straw]

The hon. Gentleman is right to talk about the problems of alcohol abuse. I do not think that a royal commission would solve that problem at the moment, but I am willing to consider the matter. I believe that, although people are increasingly aware of the problems of hard drug abuse in this country, we are only beginning to understand how serious is alcohol abuse, which is linked not only to violent crime, but to many other crimes. We are doing a lot in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, which is currently before Parliament, but I know that there is a lot more that we should do.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Will my right hon. Friend tell the House more about the plans to deal with those who reoffend and commit further crimes when out on bail—a matter of intense frustration to the police in Greater Manchester? Is he aware that the Greater Manchester police—whose numbers have risen, are rising and are programmed to rise still further—are being caused great offence by posters scattered around Manchester from the Conservative party that describe the police as paper shufflers? Given that civilianisation has reached 90 per cent. among the Greater Manchester police, is it not time that the Conservative party supported the police instead of insulting them?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. Only last week I had the privilege of discussing the problems, especially that of bail bandits, with Mr. David Wilmott, the chief constable of Greater Manchester, and his colleagues. I am pleased to say that, last weekend, the Minister of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) announced changes, which will be included in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, to make it easier for courts to place on remand young offenders who break their bail. That is long overdue. We strongly support the change, which is suggested in "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", to the way in which the Bail Act 1976 is drafted so that there should be a presumption against bail wherever bail or its conditions are broken. My right hon. Friend and I hear far too many stories from police officers about cases where courts have granted bail—often on certain conditions—but where, when the offender has been brought back before the court for breaching those conditions, instead of immediately remanding him into custody, which is where he should be, the court has either continued the bail with conditions or, in far too many extraordinary cases, has abandoned the bail conditions altogether. That is simply an invitation to those offenders to continue spree offending, and it must be ended. That requires changes to the law, but we already expect changes in practice by the courts.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gorton about paper shuffling. The police do not take kindly to the near insult that they have received from the Conservative party about their work. The simple truth is that, under our Administration, we have cut by a third the paper burden on the police. We introduced the Narey reforms and they are reflected in the indicators of police morale, which show that sickness rates have gone down very significantly and that assaults on the police have dropped by a quarter.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): When will the Home Secretary abandon his ludicrous practice of comparing his performance with that of the first four years of the incoming Conservative Government more than 20 years ago—a Government who themselves inherited from their predecessors a legacy of apparently inexorably rising crime—and start to compare his performance with that of the final four years of the previous Government, when crime fell by an unprecedented 18 per cent? That was the legacy that he himself inherited.

Given the unprecedented rebuke that Lord Justice Auld administered to the Government last week, may I also press the Home Secretary on the relationship between his proposals and the Auld report? In view of the Lord Chancellor's assurance that no final decisions would be taken on anything within the terms of reference of the Auld report until the report had been received and considered, how many of the proposals that have been issued with such a fanfare today should have been marked "purely provisional"? Would it not have been better to wait until the Auld report had been received and considered?

Mr. Straw: The right hon. and learned Gentleman became something of a connoisseur of rebukes from the judiciary when he was Home Secretary. Under our proposals, his offending record would certainly qualify him for a lengthy period inside while, even under the stricter regime that I am proposing, I would probably get off for a first offence—and it is a first offence—with a caution.

I do not recognise the description of Lord Justice Auld's remarks as a rebuke. His work is independent and I am quite clear that his report will be independent. He placed the emerging themes of his report on a websjte for everyone to see. They were not his recommendations, but they were themes and we have drawn on them. I happen to think that the whole House will welcome this indication of the direction in which we wish the criminal justice system to go.

With regard to the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first point, he cannot have it both ways. At the last election and the previous one, he campaigned time and again on the Conservative Government's record on the economy and many other things. He cannot pick and choose the dates that suit him. [HON. MEMBERS: "You did."] I am picking a date when there was an election—May 1997. The right hon. and learned Gentleman cannot continue like some Pol Pot figure declaring a year zero—but if wants to pick and choose, I have the figures for his period with me. Between April 1991-92 and April 1996-97—that is the period he wanted—total violent crime increased by 28 per cent. and robbery increased by 52 per cent.

Mr. Robin Corbett (Birmingham, Erdington): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and wish to point out that West Midlands police has, in the past year, achieved a cut of one in eight in the number of burglaries, improved by one in five the number of robberies detected and is charging substantially more people with offences involving cocaine and heroin. Given that too many prisoners return to prison, can my right hon. Friend confirm that he expects the Prison Service to set and meet high targets for work on rehabilitation and resettlement as the most effective way of preventing reoffending, and that it will have the resources to do that?

Mr. Straw: Yes, I can. I also pay tribute to the West Midlands police service, which with a budget similar to

those of many other services increased its police numbers by nearly 240 between April 1997 and September last year.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): The Home Secretary has said that at last there will be a significant increase in the budget of the Crown Prosecution Service. Will he confirm that the service remains independent? Will he explain what is meant by the criminal justice system-wide target to increase by 100,000 the number of recorded crimes ending with an offender being brought to justice? Does that mean that, this year, 100,000 such recordable crimes are going unprosecuted, or are we to expect an increase of at least 100,000 in such recordable crimes? Is it not a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service to decide where and when it is right and fair to prosecute, and not for the Home Secretary?

Mr. Straw: Of course the Attorney-General and the Director of Public Prosecutions properly remain independent of, for example, the Home Secretary. However, the antediluvian approach that the right hon. and learned Gentleman has exhibited shows precisely why we need far better to co-ordinate the work of the criminal justice agencies. Independence in decision making on individual cases cannot equal immunity from any effective management or co-ordination of the different criminal justice services.

Mr. Joe Ashton (Bassetlaw): Is my right hon. Friend aware that, all too often, criminals on council estates go free because witnesses are terrified to give evidence? They know that when they go to the police, their name will somehow get out, and the next day they find that their car has been vandalised, they get phone calls at midnight from heavy-breathers and they are abused and shouted at in the street. Those witnesses come to their MPs and give us names and addresses, and we take the matter up with the police, but the culture of fear goes on.

Even in drugs cases, people on council estates who let the police take pictures or film a video from their bedroom window have their name read out in court, which is a load of nonsense. Communities in Northern Ireland and New York, for example, have realised that there should be rewards, even cash rewards, for giving evidence. There must also be protection for witnesses who live on the estates and who have to suffer the consequences even after the criminals have gone to jail. Until we eradicate that fear, more and more criminals will get off scot-free.

Mr. Straw: I share my hon. Friend's concern about the intimidation that takes place not only on council estates but elsewhere. Fortunately, although there has been only a relatively small increase in the grand total, the number of people being brought to justice is going up while crime is going down. A great deal more needs to be done to rebalance the criminal justice system so that there is a fair balance between the defendant, the public and the victim.

I was astonished to discover that when the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) was Attorney-General, fees for defence counsel were allowed to grow significantly in advance of those available to the prosecuting counsel in the same cases. That was a scandalous situation—which arose I am sure inadvertently, but under the right hon. and learned Gentleman's nose.

We are including in a Bill currently before Parliament much better protection for witnesses, particularly in cases involving antisocial behaviour orders. The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) asked me about the number of ASBOs, which I found extraordinary because the Conservatives' policy is to tear up that law altogether so that people in those communities would have none of the protection afforded by those orders. Some 150 ASBOs have been put in place, which is 150 more than there would have been under the previous Administration. We want that number greatly to increase, but the Conservative party would leave communities without any proper protection.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the great concern in rural areas about low police numbers? When will he introduce the recommendation of the external consultants whom he employed that the sparsity factor in the police funding formula should be increased? When the right hon. Gentleman has taken advice, will he tell the House when he proposes to pay special constables?

Mr. Straw: On the right hon. and learned Gentleman's first point, although the standard spending assessment formula for next year does not provide for that, we have followed a different route and provision is made in the formula for Lincolnshire. *[Interruption.]* No, I am talking about the next three years. Rural forces will receive £30 million over the next three years, based on the equivalent of the sparsity formula. We believe that we are greatly helping rural forces.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): My right hon. Friend knows that I always welcome statements that announce his intention to deal robustly with offenders, especially persistent young offenders. I am happy to say that I represent one of the safest boroughs in London. It is so safe because its police have welcomed my right hon. Friend's policies and have targeted persistent young offenders. Is he aware of the pioneering system that they use to get the local community to help them to find persistent young offenders? As part of the "ringmaster" system, the police forewarn people about possible crimes in their areas, which encourages members of the community to be more vigilant and respond more quickly to the police. In targeting persistent young offenders, especially those who consistently offend in particular areas, can my right hon. Friend say how we can expand the Lewisham system to ensure that such people are brought to book?

Mr. Straw: I pay tribute to the Lewisham police and local authority and to everyone else who has helped to reduce crime in that area. Lewisham's experience shows that, for the same resources that are available to many equivalent London and other metropolitan boroughs, a great deal can be achieved by having good leadership and management and a clear focus on crime reduction. My hon. Friend asks about the "ringmaster" system. I do not know a huge deal about it, but I am looking forward to receiving further details on it, especially on how we can make better use of it, for example in the crime reduction plan and crime reduction toolkits that we are making available across the country.

Mr. Robert Maclennan (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): The Home Secretary mentioned codification

[Mr. Robert Maclennan]

of the criminal law. Does that mean that he recognises that annual legislation on criminal justice has not proved helpful in removing inflated expectations of change? Bearing in mind that the Law Commission's proposals for codification have been lying on the table for many years, what does he intend to do about it?

Mr. Straw: I have in front of me the Canadian "Pocket Criminal Code" from 1996 which contains in one volume Canada's human rights Act, all its substantive criminal law, its procedural law and matters of jurisdiction. We should aim to have such a simple code. I am aware that the Canadian Parliament regularly amends the law. I do not accept that the sensible and widely welcomed amendments that I have introduced over the past four years could not happen under a codification system. However, if we move towards a codification process, Parliament will need to examine its internal procedures. We have sensible procedures to deal with consolidation, but do not have up-to-date modern procedures to deal with codification. We would need those if such a code were to be kept regularly up to date.

Mr. Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Can we have an assurance that the next Labour Government will hit the ground thinking on drugs policy? We will soon be marking the 30th anniversary of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. During that time, the greatest failure in almost every European country has been an inability to reduce drug use, drug death and drug crime, which have increased by 2000 per cent. Can my right hon. Friend re-examine the Police Foundation report and consider the examples of Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, which have redefined drug use? As a result, they have reduced drug-related crime and have redirected money to other purposes. That has saved money, especially with regard to crimes that create victims. Are we going to be one of the last countries in the world to continue to use our criminal justice system to persecute and imprison seriously ill people for using a drug medicinally?

Mr. Straw: Of course, we shall continue to think very carefully about this issue. We make our own decisions on cannabis, as does the House, but we are led by scientific evidence. That does not come full square to my hon. Friend's view. He needs to bear in mind the fact that, although we all recognise his evangelical zeal for a particular solution, it does not follow that just because everybody thinks about an issue, they come to only one conclusion: the one that he happens to draw.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Does the right hon. Gentleman still hold the view that successful prosecution of local criminals is based very much on the willingness of local witnesses to come forward to assist the police? That depends to a considerable extent on magistrates courts being near the community that they cover. Therefore, will the right hon. Gentleman have words with the Lord Chancellor to try to overcome the right hon. and noble Gentleman's desire to close magistrates courts throughout the country? The closure of seven near or around my area of Devon is quite unnecessary.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor would be very interested in any evidence—and I mean evidence—of a shift in the numbers of people prosecuted as some courts are closed. I have not seen that evidence, but I am sure that my right hon. and noble Friend would be open to argument about it. We are concerned with a modernised criminal justice system, end to end, better to get the criminals who have committed offences into justice.

Ms Ann Coffey (Stockport): An anti-crime strategy depends on effective partnerships at local as well as national level. I wonder what my right hon. Friend thinks about the decision of the Lib-Dem council in Stockport to remove funding for a post on the youth offending team, which shows very little commitment to tackling youth crime. Will my right hon. Friend be tough not only on crime but on the councils that fail to deliver their part of the crime bargain?

Mr. Straw: I was not aware of that; I shall certainly look into it with some care. I am of course aware that not a day goes past—indeed, not an hour goes past—in this place without the Liberal Democrats promising to spend even more than the Conservative party on one thing after another. It is a different story locally. I know the youth offending team in Stockport; I have high admiration for it. One of its greatest success stories—ensuring that a persistent young offender got custody and then moved out of criminality—is highlighted on page 31 of the Command Paper.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Is the Home Secretary aware that, shortly, when Sevenoaks police station is closed, there will not be a single fully manned police station in my constituency, and that all these cross-cutting programmes and partnerships are no substitute for proper, locally based policing of our streets and villages? Does he also accept that one cause of the justice gap to which he referred is the police gap that he created?

Mr. Straw: I am aware that at any time individual chief officers will make judgments about how they use their resources. As people's patterns of life change, there will be some changes. That led to the closure of many more police stations while the Conservatives were in office. In North Yorkshire—I speak from recollection—75 police stations were closed during the five years immediately preceding this Administration.

As for Kent, David Phillips and Kent constabulary have one of the best records of any chief constable and of any police service in the country. I should have thought that, rather than whingeing about that, the hon. Gentleman would be praising the success of a very good police service.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that drugs are the root cause of many crimes? On a recent visit to Armley prison in Leeds, I was told that more than 80 per cent. of offenders there had some connection with drug abuse; yet, when they are released, they are too often and for too long left to their own devices, and return to the cycle of drug abuse. What measures can be taken to encourage former prisoners to adopt a more positive and productive, rather than destructive, life style?

Mr. Straw: I entirely accept my hon. Friend's observation. A significant proportion—at least half and

probably two thirds—of the hard core of 100,000 persistent offenders are heroin or cocaine abusers. We are intercepting drug abusers at the point of arrest through arrest referral schemes. Compulsory testing at the point of charge will ensure that that information is available to the courts when deciding whether to grant bail: in general, a court dealing with a persistent drug abuser should not provide bail, as that will simply lead into a continuing cycle of drug abuse. We are also setting specified community punishments, such as drug treatment and testing orders. Persons going into custody will have clear through-care, with detox, education and treatment in custody and steps taken to ensure that they continue that treatment on release. That is one of the reasons why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and I are establishing a national treatment agency for drug abuse and increasing its funds by 70 per cent.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Home Secretary asked for evidence of the effect on the criminal justice system of the closure of magistrates courts. Victims of crime in my constituency tell me—and, through me, the Home Secretary—that they do not want to travel two hours to have their case heard in a magistrates court. How can the people of Wales, especially those living in rural areas, have any faith in the latest bunch of promises when the Government propose to close two thirds of the magistrates courts in west Wales?

Mr. Straw: I know that my right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor is always open to representations. However, as people's pattern of life changes, so, too, does public service provision. Police numbers in every police service in Wales have increased since 1997, and the crime reduction record of those police services has been exemplary. South Wales has had one of the best records in the country, with a reduction in crime of more than 20 per cent. since 1997.

Foot and Mouth Disease

4.27 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): With permission, I wish to make a statement about the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

As my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Hayman reported on 21 February, the first case of foot and mouth disease in the United Kingdom for 20 years was confirmed on the evening of last Tuesday, 20 February, in pigs at an abattoir and in cattle on a neighbouring farm near Brentwood in Essex. The number of confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease rose to nine this morning; two further cases, bringing the total to 11, have been confirmed early this afternoon.

Today's cases are, first, in sheep at Hatherleigh near Okehampton in Devon at another farm in the same ownership as the one confirmed yesterday; at Bromham near Chippenham in Wiltshire, in sheep at an abattoir that received animals from the Devon source; in a farm between the two cases in Northumberland, which is likely to have been windborne spread; and at a farm near the Welsh border in Herefordshire, which had also received sheep from Devon. Infected area restrictions are being imposed. A decision was taken at lunchtime today to kill the remaining animals on the several premises in Devon under the same ownership, and on one neighbouring farm, as dangerous contacts.

Investigations are continuing into a number of other premises where there is reason to believe that there may be disease. The Government's overriding priority is the containment and eradication of this disease. On 21 February, the United Kingdom Government and the European Commission acted swiftly to prohibit temporarily the export of live animals, meat, fresh milk and other animal products from the UK. Given the acutely infectious nature of foot and mouth disease, that was a necessary step in helping to prevent the spread of the disease to other countries. We are able to export non-susceptible animals and their products, provided that they meet certain conditions and are accompanied by veterinary certificates. Appropriate certificates are now available for issue from MAFF animal health offices.

We immediately ceased issuing export health certificates for export to third countries for any animals or products which cannot also be exported to other European Union member states. Let me make it absolutely clear to the House that that applies whether or not the import conditions for a given country would allow us to export. We are urgently tracing all exports of foot and mouth disease susceptible animals from areas under suspicion to other member states since 1 February, but before the export ban came into effect. The European Commission has been kept informed at every stage, along with our EU partners. I shall be updating the Council of Agriculture Ministers tomorrow. In particular, we advised the German authorities of a consignment of sheep from the Devon outbreak, and those sheep were slaughtered by the German authorities yesterday.

Some of the cases have been on premises which are associated with substantial movements of animals. The confirmation of the cases in Northumberland on Friday 23 February showed that the disease was not confined to Essex, and had been in the country longer than had at first been apparent. In those new circumstances, the chief

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veterinary officer advised that stringent controls were needed. After discussion with the food and farming industries, and with the devolved Administrations, I announced later on Friday 23 February that there should be a seven day standstill of livestock movements throughout Great Britain. That exceptional measure was imposed at 5 pm on Friday, and is due to expire at midnight on Friday 2 March.

The Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency have confirmed that foot and mouth disease has no implications for human health or food. The disease causes serious loss of condition, and therefore commercial value, to the main farmed animal species of cattle, pigs and sheep. The presence of disease also blocks our export markets. The disease is highly infectious between animals and it can be transmitted by movements of people and vehicles. Unlike classical swine fever, which we had to deal with in East Anglia last year, it is carried through the air.

Firm control measures had to be taken. The Government are well aware of the disruption that the temporary controlled area in Great Britain has caused to farming, the food chain and the wider rural community. I pay tribute to the responsible approach that the industry and the public are taking. During the course of this week, the state veterinary service, under the chief veterinary officer, will continue its huge task of tracing and controlling the disease. It has been assured of all of the resources that it needs for that task. The Government are calling on the private veterinary profession and other countries' state veterinary services for assistance.

Baroness Hayman, the Minister of State, will be meeting industry and veterinary representatives tomorrow with the chief veterinary officer. Among other matters, they will discuss whether it is possible, consistent with a rigorous approach to the control of disease, to allow for some tightly controlled movement of livestock for slaughter. Consideration is also being given to the temporary closure of footpaths and rights of way. We are keeping in the closest touch with retailers and food producers to ensure that there should be no serious disruption to food supplies. I am grateful to consumers who have, as I requested, continued their normal pattern of buying.

The House will know that the policy of successive Governments has been that compensation is paid only for animals which are slaughtered for disease control purposes—in the case of foot and mouth disease, at full market value. Foot and mouth disease presents a relatively clear clinical picture. Incubation periods tend to be short. I therefore hope that the movement restrictions necessary for disease control will not have to be too protracted.

The Government are determined to eliminate this disease. My ministerial team, my Department's staff and I will give this work the highest priority. I welcome the firm support that we have received from the industry, people throughout the country, our European partners, and others further afield in our efforts to do so.

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I welcome the Minister's statement. I am grateful to him for letting me have a copy of it about 45 minutes ago.

This matter is extremely serious. I am sure that every Member will join me in expressing profound sympathy for farmers who are affected and in the front line of the crisis, and full support for everyone who is involved in the struggle to contain the disease.

The Opposition will give full backing to all the measures that are needed to contain the spread of foot and mouth disease, to assist livestock farmers through the crisis, to maintain food supplies and to restore export markets. We fully support the steps that have already been taken by the Government. I join the Minister in recognising the work of the state veterinary service, other vets and the many other people who have been under great pressure. It is likely that the work will have to continue for some time.

Will the Minister make it clear, at least in principle, that the Government recognise the problems of farmers who cannot move animals off their farms? Given the confirmation in his statement of further cases of foot and mouth disease, can he confirm that the seven day standstill of animal movements announced on Friday is likely to have to be extended? Does he appreciate that cashflow problems for many farmers will quickly become extremely acute? What help does he expect to offer those farmers and when is it likely that he will be able to make an announcement about such help? Does he agree that the £200 million of unclaimed agrimonetary compensation on the table in Brussels, much of which is due to the livestock sector, should be claimed in full immediately?

Containment is clearly the top priority, but understanding how foot and mouth disease came to Britain is crucial if the risk of a recurrence is to be minimised. What steps are the Government taking to identify the source of the outbreak? If it appears that the source was imported meat, is the right hon. Gentleman ready to tighten controls on imports? Is he able to confirm reports that the unit in Northumberland was feeding pigs on swill, and bought its supplies from airports whose own sources may have been overseas?

I endorse the Minister's advice to the public to avoid visiting livestock farming areas. Reports over the weekend suggest that not everyone has heeded that advice. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to conclude his consideration of whether action can be taken temporarily to suspend the use of footpaths and close rights of way. The Opposition will strongly support such moves. If parliamentary action is needed, we shall give it as fast a track as we reasonably can.

Does the Minister agree that the crisis is sufficiently important to warrant an urgent debate in Parliament? It is a pity that the Government have not seen fit to change their business this week. I can announce that the Opposition will use half of our day on Wednesday for a debate on the matter, to provide an opportunity to explore the subject in more detail.

Does the Minister agree also that the industry is too weak to survive such a crisis without urgent help? Does he recognise that the heartbreaking prospect for many farmers is not only the loss of their livelihood, but the destruction of their life's work? Does he understand that the risk of human tragedies in these circumstances is real? Will he therefore assure the House that no stone will be left unturned in tackling the threat that faces one of Britain's most important industries?

Mr. Brown: That is a very welcome change of tone from the hon. Gentleman. I confirm that no measure will

be left untaken and no stone left unturned in suppressing foot and mouth disease. The Government's policy is to contain the disease and then to eradicate it.

I do not welcome the idea of an urgent debate. It will divert both ministerial resources and scarce veterinary resources from the front line that is bearing down on the disease—*[Interruption.]* This Opposition have just said that they will do everything they can to help the Government to suppress the disease. If their idea of helping is to divert resources, including ministerial time, from dealing with the disease outbreak to dealing with a parliamentary debate, I am glad that they are not setting out to disrupt us—*[Interruption.]*

On the question whether we will close the—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mr. Brown: It is absolutely disgraceful that the Opposition should try to shout down a Minister who is trying to respond to questions that they raised under the pretence of trying to help, but with every intention of gaining party political advantage from what ought to be an issue that unites us all in the national interest.

On access to the countryside, as I said in my statement, we are considering taking legal action to close rights of way temporarily.

On our understanding of the origin of the infection, I have already said in public that I have asked officials, first, to type the strain and give Ministers a list of potential sources if they cannot narrow it down to one; secondly, to consider whether our control measures are being enforced adequately—clearly, the law is firm, but the question is whether controls are being enforced adequately; and thirdly, to examine the way in which the food chain works nowadays, with intensive farming and just-in-time delivery, and to consider whether that makes us more vulnerable to disease.

On compensation for consequential losses, no Government have ever paid compensation for consequential losses. The previous Government did not; the present Government have not, except where animal welfare issues were involved in the recent outbreak of classical swine fever in East Anglia. The question of agrimonetary compensation is a separate one and is being considered separately.

As for future movement restrictions, of course that issue is being kept under review. As I pointed out in my statement, it is likely that the regime will have to be reshaped, and, subject to veterinary advice, that will happen.

I have to tell the House that I have just had a twelfth case confirmed to me—a further Devon case, which is linked to the farm near Okehampton.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on moving so quickly and comprehensively to freeze livestock movements. Does he agree with the British Veterinary Association that vaccination is not currently a viable policy? Vaccinated animals carry the virus, so all susceptible animals would have to be vaccinated repeatedly. That would mean that the disease would become endemic and would block exports from this country to a large section of the world.

Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the outbreak is further evidence of the importance of a well-equipped state veterinary service? Does he recall that under the Conservatives, between 1992 and 1997 the number of state vets was allowed to fall by about a third? Will he make it his objective in the medium to long term to restore the state veterinary service to its previous strength?

Mr. Brown: I have pledged to the chief veterinary officer, Jim Scudamore, all the resources that he needs to contain the outbreak, and he assures me that he is getting the resources that he needs.

On vaccination, I am advised not just by the chief vet, but by the National Farmers Union, the livestock industry and the major processors and retailers, that they would not welcome the use of vaccination to control the disease, rather than the use of movement restrictions, quarantine and extinction. There are two reasons for that: we would lose our export markets for a very long time, and we would be acknowledging that we had foot and mouth disease here in the United Kingdom. Our intention is not to acknowledge that it is here, but to exterminate it and get back to our disease-free status.

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I thank the Minister for his statement and for his usual courtesy in providing an advance copy.

I have a few questions. The ban on livestock movement will expire this Friday. What regime of controls is the right hon. Gentleman considering to follow the present ban? On the importation of food supplies, is he satisfied that food is being imported from foot and mouth disease-free countries? What consideration is he giving to banning the importation of food from countries that are known to have endemic foot and mouth disease?

Will he comment on the position of farmers with cattle that are approaching 30 months of age? Such farmers may have significant problems in respect of the over-30-months scheme. If they are prevented from selling cattle that are currently of 29 months of age, they will suffer considerable loss when those animals are more than 30-months-old. Finally, who has overall decision-making responsibility within the United Kingdom, bearing in mind the devolved responsibilities? What liaison is under way with Scotland in particular?

Mr. Brown: The devolved authorities and the Ministry are working closely together and are devising common approaches. Before any change is made, we speak at official level and, if necessary, consult on the telephone at ministerial level. What the hon. Gentleman said about the over-30-months scheme is true and we are keeping the matter under review. I cannot promise a relaxation of the regime to deal immediately with animals that are caught by the current circumstances, but I have it at the forefront of my mind. When veterinary authorities tell me that is possible to relax movement restrictions, that will be a priority for consideration.

On the question of food imports, it is already unlawful to import from an area where foot and mouth disease is endemic any product that might bear the virus. On livestock movements, although I cannot make a comprehensive statement to the House today, I can say two things: there is bound to be a successor regime

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following the expiry of the present regime this Friday, and I am considering how it should be shaped and what exceptions should be allowed.

Dr. David Clark (South Shields): May I join those who have said how awful this tragedy is, not only for farmers but for all those who live in the countryside? My right hon. Friend has the support of men and women of good will for the rigorous manner in which he has approached the situation. That is clearly the right way forward. I have two brief questions. First, will my right hon. Friend ensure that every facility is made available to local authority trading standards officers, who are responsible for monitoring the movement books for cattle and other animals? Secondly, will he reconsider the issue of imported feedstuffs? I understand what the regulations say, but there is a feeling in the farming community that they have not always been adhered to.

Mr. Brown: I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks. We have been inundated with expressions of support for the approach that we are taking—expressions that have come even from those who are most affected by it. My right hon. Friend is absolutely right to stress the importance of the work of trading standards officers. Of course, they are employed by local authorities, but we are in touch with their central co-ordinating body and they will be present at our meeting tomorrow with other interested parties. On imported feed, I have asked for work to be done to consider whether our enforcement of the current rules is as rigorous as it should be, or whether there is some other area that we need to address. The continuing inquiries into the source of the outbreak will inform that trawl of the regulations.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): The Minister will understand the great shock in my constituency and the fear within the local farming community, which has been reinforced by the billowing smoke that is over Warley. Over the weekend, I spoke to Mr. Gemmel, a farmer who is one of the victims of the foot and mouth disease outbreak. He is showing great restraint and dignity while seeing his life's work destroyed. I spoke a short time ago to Mr. Cheal, the owner of the abattoir, who is working to eradicate the disease. He commends to the Minister and the House the sharp-eyed veterinary officer who spotted it. If that had not happened, the outbreak would undoubtedly have been more serious.

A couple of lessons can be learned from farmers in my constituency. The Minister will recall that I rang his office on Friday to ask that farms in the immediate vicinity receive information and advice. I am pleased to say that they have now done so. I hope that that is now commonplace where outbreaks occur. Unhappiness was expressed over the weekend because the Ministry website, the prime source of information, had not been updated. I am pleased that that has now happened.

Farmers in my constituency, especially those affected by the restrictions, stressed that the nature of farming has changed since 1967. Much diversification has happened into, for example, farm shops. Such activities are affected by movement restrictions. The problem that my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) raised is therefore acute. I hope that, when examining the new regime which will replace the current system on Friday, the Minister will carefully consider that problem and realise that farming in Essex is on a knife edge.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman makes four fair points. He is right that farmers and abattoir owners are the victims, not the cause, of the problem. They deserve sympathy and support, not blame. The best thing that the Government can do is to eliminate foot and mouth disease and help return the industry to normal trading as quickly as possible.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments about sharp-eyed vets and abattoir workers. Their prompt action in alerting the Ministry may well have helped contain the spread of the terrible condition, and the hon. Gentleman is right to praise them.

I want to provide information as quickly as possible and to be candid with the public. Circumstances are changing quickly, and there is a great hunger in the media for information. We are therefore holding regular briefings to tell them how matters have advanced. The media provide information immediately and everything that is said is broadcast at once. Many people may well find out about developments for the first time through the media. That is the way of the modern world. We are doing everything we can to ensure that the National Farmers Union and other interested parties get information as quickly as possible. However, the media tend to get there first nowadays—and that applies not only in the circumstances that we are discussing.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the prompt and rigorous action that he and his officials have taken, not only in the United Kingdom but with our European partners, to try to counteract the deadly and frightening outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Does he recognise that all reasonable people, not only in the House but throughout the country and especially in farming communities, will strongly support the measures that he has to pursue, however widespread they may become, to eliminate the sources of the infection? Will he refuse to be deflected by Opposition calls to take action on compensation that the Conservatives never took when in government?

Will my right hon. Friend pursue with Ben Gill, the president of the NFU—who has shown more statesmanship than the Conservative spokesman ever displayed—and the farming communities and their representatives all necessary action to eliminate foot and mouth disease and thus remove the threat from the thousands of farmers who are living in fear and trepidation?

Mr. Brown: The approach that my right hon. Friend outlines is right. Everyone contrasts the attitude of the NFU and others who earn their livelihoods in the livestock and food processing sectors with that of those who try to make political capital out of a national tragedy. My right hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to the irony of demands for agrimonetary compensation from a political party that did not pay a penny when it was in government.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The Minister will realise that the main suspect is a waste food feeder

and that that was not the case in the swine fever epidemic. Will he focus attention on that and tell the House when there is something to report? Identifying the cause is crucial.

Does the right hon. Gentleman acknowledge that footpaths and bridlepaths were heavily used in, for example, North Yorkshire at the weekend? The Government should take urgent action to close them, albeit temporarily, and perhaps issue red notices to bring home to people psychologically the importance of what is at stake. Will the right hon. Gentleman also bear in mind that farmers have to take their stocks to abattoirs, and that we do not want thousands of trailers running round the countryside trying to deliver livestock? What attention will he give to using some form of collection centres, such as auction marts, where proper disinfectant can be applied and where vehicles that we can be sure cannot transmit the disease can be provided?

Mr. Brown: On the right hon. Gentleman's third point, consideration is being given to exactly that matter, and I hope to have something to say on it relatively soon. It is being considered in the context of the way in which the current movement restrictions work. The right hon. Gentleman asked a perfectly fair question about footpaths, and consideration is being given to whether more needs to be done. I am grateful to those members of the public who have heeded my request that they stay away from livestock farms for the time being. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, laws work best when they have consent behind them, but there are obvious questions of enforcement.

Of course, we all want to get to the absolute root cause of the matter, and as I said earlier to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), work is under way in the Ministry to get as close to that as we can. The right hon. Gentleman invites me to say more, but I am afraid that I cannot—at least in part for legal reasons.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the anxiety among the people in the west of Newcastle and in southern Northumberland at the events of the past week at Burnside farm, which is partly in my constituency? That anxiety has been fuelled by the further revelation today of a suspected outbreak at Westerhope farm, which is probably almost entirely in my constituency.

There is an overwhelming demand from all those within and outside the farming community that politicians do not bicker about this matter but deal with the real problems. Those people are asking how this could possibly have occurred at this farm in our area. I know what my right hon. Friend said in response to an earlier question, but will he say what time scale will apply to any investigation into the root cause? It has been reported that some of the conditions at Burnside farm partly contributed to the spread of the disease. Will my right hon. Friend confirm whether his officials have identified that as a possible reason for the spread?

Mr. Brown: I agree with my hon. Friend that this should not be a party political issue. Indeed, the entire nation should unite behind the Government in our stated objective of containing and eliminating the outbreak. The farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall is believed to be the farm at which the outbreak has been in the United Kingdom for the longest time and, therefore, as far as we know at the moment, the first source of the disease. Investigations are continuing, and I do not want to say any more on that—again, partly for legal reasons.

It is likely that the spread to the farm in my hon. Friend's constituency was windborne, and we have placed the area under strict quarantine. By far the best thing we can do is to quarantine the problem, bear down on it and eliminate it, and get back to a disease-free status as quickly as possible. I am grateful for what my hon. Friend said about the Government's approach.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): There has been a number of confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease in my constituency and, given the parlous state of agriculture, that is a catastrophe for farmers and for many in the allied industries. I have spoken to Mr. Cleave in my constituency a number of times; he tells me that the work of MAFF and the MAFF vets is excellent and wants me to pay tribute to them. Nevertheless, I must raise a number of points on behalf of my constituents.

The first point relates to agrimonetary compensation. The Minister will be aware that all the eligible European Union countries draw that down. We hoped to hear from him a date when the money could be drawn down for our agriculture industry.

My second point concerns consequential loss. There is now much feed and fertiliser that is unusable. Agriculture has lost a great many markets. The market for exporting sheep has disappeared, and towards the end of last week the sheep price was about 30 per cent. less than the day before the announcement. Will the Minister consider some heads of consequential loss, not least, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) said, for cattle that are nearing the 30-month limit?

My third point is that the compensation that will be due and payable should be paid at once.

Mr. Brown: Where we have an obligation to pay compensation at 100 per cent., with independent valuation and an arbitration system, we try to get the money out to the farmer as quickly as we can.

Of course I cannot promise compensation for consequential loss—no previous Government have, and I do not believe that any future Government will. Am I taking a hard look at what could be done in the circumstances? Of course I am, and I am especially mindful of the animal welfare consequences, just as I was during the classical swine fever outbreak in East Anglia. There is a distinction between those farms that have suffered consequential losses as a result of their animals having been purchased and destroyed for disease control reasons—I understand that it is possible to insure against that—and those that are caught by movement restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of the condition but are not affected by it themselves. It is harder to get insurance against that.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, discussions are continuing between the Ministry and industry representatives, including from the NFU and the National Pig Association, on how we should handle the problem, because I believe that a scheme should be put in place. The discussions arose out of the classical swine fever outbreak.

The key issue on agrimonetary compensation, as always, is that there is not a pot of money waiting in Brussels for me to collect. The problem is not a lack of

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political will but the fact that 81 per cent. of the cost of the measures comes directly from the United Kingdom taxpayer and has to take its place in the public spending round with competing priorities from other Departments.

Mr. Barry Jones (Alyn and Deeside): Can my right hon. Friend give any details on the situation in Wales, and specifically in north Wales, where there is great anxiety? Does he remember the occasion, a year or more ago, when I brought a deputation of the leadership of the Flintshire NFU to see him? He received them well, discussing matters with them for well over an hour. They have asked me to ask him what help he may give, in any way, shape or form, on loss of earnings, and whether there is to be any compensation, bearing in mind the terrible blow that is now falling on family farms. I express my thanks to him for his reception of the earlier deputation.

Mr. Brown: My right hon. Friend and the leadership of the NFU in Flintshire did indeed make a very persuasive case, and I am not surprised that he echoes it now. I cannot add anything on Wales to my statement on the current foot and mouth outbreak, which covers the whole of the United Kingdom, not just England.

We have been able to confirm positives relatively swiftly, but it takes longer absolutely to confirm a negative, because the virus could be incubating but not yet showing up in laboratory tests. All the comfort that I can give to my right hon. Friend's farming constituents today is that we have not had any further positives confirmed, and the passage of time, with continued negative test results, is a cause for hope.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): The Minister will be aware of the role it is thought was played by imported meat in the recent outbreak of swine fever in East Anglia. He will also be aware of the huge anxiety in the industry about the effect of illegally imported meat and, indeed, imported meat generally. He will also be aware that the supermarkets and those who speak for the food industry have been saying that there will be no problems for consumers because the shortfall that results from the current restrictions on our domestic industry will be made up by imports of foreign meat.

What measures does the right hon. Gentleman plan to put in place to ensure that there is the greatest hygiene and safety surrounding legally imported meat? He will know how much anxiety farmers and others have about that.

Mr. Brown: The regulatory regime is essentially the one that I inherited from the right hon. Lady when she was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. She will readily understand that the problem is not the regime itself but whether our enforcement of it is working as thoroughly as we who make the laws intend.

It is fair to say that there is a trade problem with import substitution. I am very conscious of that and want to do everything I can to help the domestic industry, consistent with doing the most important thing which, as the right hon. Lady will appreciate, is to isolate and extinguish the disease.

As for imported meat being the root cause of the problem, it is clear to everyone that something imported into this country must be the root cause of the problem because we have had disease-free status for 20 years. The disease has not been hiding somewhere in the United Kingdom, only to emerge suddenly. Precisely where it came from is not known; work is continuing to find a single source, or a range of possible sources, and then to work back and see what new public policy decisions, if any, must be taken to ensure that we block that potential route of infectivity as well.

Mr. Martyn Jones (Clwyd, South): I, too, commend my right hon. Friend on his prompt action in trying to stop this terrible outbreak. What discussions is he having with the industry on possible insurance-based arrangements for consequential loss?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Discussions were opened with the industry—including, in particular, the NFU and the National Pig Association—as a result of the classical swine fever outbreak. Controlling diseases in pigs necessitates movement restrictions, which may well have to be placed on farms that do not actually have the disease and will never have it. Such restrictions are imposed entirely for reasons of disease containment. Because of the modern ways in which the industry works, that can have economic consequences for the farm businesses.

Who should pay for those losses? I am making it absolutely clear that it is not the taxpayers' responsibility—no previous Government have ever thought that it was. However, it is fair to consider whether it is the responsibility of the industry as a whole to make some arrangement to compensate farms that are under movement restrictions for the burden that they bear on behalf of the whole of the industry—which, of course, has a vested interest in disease control. Those discussions, which are a result of the classical swine fever outbreak, are continuing.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I am sure that the Minister will sympathise with the two farmers in my constituency who were the innocent victims of the outbreak which, sadly, started at a third farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall in my constituency. Both men were reaching retirement age and have seen their life's work destroyed at a stroke. Those commuting into Newcastle this morning will have had the reality of the situation brought home to them at the sight of the 150 yd long funeral pyre of burning carcases by the main road leading into the city.

An animal welfare group based near Norwich first reported this farm and the conditions on it in mid-December. That led to an investigation by the RSPCA, but I understand that no further action was taken. There were subsequent visits to the farm by Northumberland trading standards officers and MAFF officials, yet nothing was done about the conditions at the time. Will the Minister thoroughly investigate that situation?

Mr. Brown: I have looked into that last point. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that when veterinary officials inspected the farm, there was no trace of disease in the farmed animals. The chief veterinary officer has satisfied himself that that is the case. Nor were any welfare infringements discovered. As the hon. Gentleman rightly

pointed out, the inspection was made primarily for welfare and environmental reasons, rather than for reasons of disease control.

The hon. Gentleman's constituents have my sympathy, and that of every right-minded person, for what they are being put through. He is absolutely right to say that the huge blaze at the edge of the motorway last night and in the early hours of this morning provided a highly visual reminder to those travelling into Newcastle of the consequences of this terrible outbreak.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): How should I respond to a farmer who exploded, saying that it would be grossly irresponsible of politicians to hold a general election, with people trampling around the countryside? What thought is being given to that serious issue?

Mr. Brown: I am appealing to members of the public to avoid unnecessary visits to farm premises, regardless of the reason or justification for them. As for the remainder of my hon. Friend's remarks, I shall ensure that they are passed on to those who take more interest in those matters than I can.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Will the Minister re-emphasise that he understands that we face not just an economic catastrophe for rural industries and a financial disaster for individual farmers, but a growing animal welfare problem, since beasts that should be at the slaughterhouse are accumulating on farms? How optimistic is the Minister that the discussions that he has mentioned will lead to controlled transportation—perhaps under licence; certainly supervised by the Meat Hygiene Service—from individual farm to slaughterhouse so that we can get the food chain moving again?

I welcome the statement made by the Minister on "Breakfast with Frost" yesterday that, if they remain disease free, the countries of Scotland and Northern Ireland could have the ban lifted early. What time scale do he and his colleagues envisage for that most desirable objective?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that it may be possible at some future stage, although we most certainly have not reached that stage now, to regionalise the ban. The initial beneficiaries of such an approach would clearly be those areas that could demonstrate to our trading partners that they were free of foot and mouth disease and that measures were in place to keep them so. I have an open mind on whether that would be the correct approach for us to take. We shall have to see how the disease develops, since further cases from the primary source may remain to be reported. However, we may very well end up taking that approach.

On the food chain, I am conscious of the points made by the hon. Gentleman. I hope to be able to make an announcement soon, by which I mean within a matter of days. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that any responsible Government would want to keep animal welfare consequences closely under review. We must balance animal welfare considerations with disease control considerations, but disease control must be the priority. If it is necessary to find an alternative route by which to deal with animal welfare problems, the Government will have to do so.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): May I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend on his decisive action?

Farmers in Cornwall tell me that they are unable to obtain disinfectant. Is my right hon. Friend aware that that is an emerging problem, and will he act to resolve it?

Mr. Brown: The issue of disinfectant supplies was raised with me by the president of the NFU earlier today, and I am asking for urgent inquiries to be made to ensure that we have sufficient supplies of materials essential to helping control the outbreak.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Does the Minister accept that farmers in my constituency, who are deeply apprehensive about the current position, will have been appalled to hear him say that, because the Government have to contribute 80 per cent. agrimonetary compensation, even with the massive war chest that they have built up by stealth taxes, they will not make that money available to farmers?

Secondly, on the legal reasons that the Minister mentioned, does he agree that, if there is any responsibility or any question of negligence on the part of officials as regards the place in Northumberland where the initial outbreak occurred, those officials should not invoke Crown immunity, and that consequential loss could thus be payable?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is on to entirely the wrong point, given the thrust of his final question. As for his first question, he should tell his constituents that the Labour Government have paid out about £630 million in agrimonetary compensation. The previous Conservative Government, whom he did not support as enthusiastically as he might have done, paid nothing at all in agrimonetary compensation. The state of the public finances is the result of good stewardship by the Labour Government; it ill behoves the Conservative party to tell us how such money should be spent.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I visited the MAFF website today, to find out what a pig infected with foot and mouth disease looked like—its snout looked very strange indeed. It is intriguing that the farmer at the centre of this—at the farm in Northumberland—was unable to spot the virus for so long. Is my right hon. Friend happy that farmers nationwide know how to spot the symptoms of this and other diseases? If they cannot do so, what educational programmes is he putting in place to ensure that such a horrific disease never takes hold again because of the ignorance of the people who should be looking after the animals?

Mr. Brown: We have not had the disease in this country for 20 years, so many people will not have seen it. The disease is called foot and mouth disease because that is the literal description of its early symptoms. As for the other matters that my hon. Friend raises, I hope he will understand that I do not answer them for pretty obvious reasons.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Minister pay tribute to the organisers of the countryside rally that

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was due to take place on 18 March on taking the sensible decision to postpone that march? That could not have been an easy decision, but it is the right one in the circumstances.

The Minister says that he is not prepared to consider any consequential compensation. Does he accept that many abattoirs and auction markets throughout the country are currently operating at the margins? If they fall through, that could have even more damaging consequences for this country's agriculture industry once foot and mouth disease is completely eradicated.

Mr. Brown: I am looking at what we can do to help, but I cannot, on behalf of the taxpayer, accept an open-ended commitment to compensate for the consequential losses arising from an outbreak of animal disease and the steps that the Government have to take to control it.

I have not requested the postponement of the countryside march, but I pay tribute to the organisers for having postponed it as a contribution to the national effort to control this foot and mouth outbreak. I congratulate them on the decision that they have made.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Many contributions to this discussion have highlighted the cashflow problems for farmers and those in other sectors of the farming industry. Can we look at that matter, rather than compensation, as a key priority? It might be possible to consider ways in which loans and advances against future moneys payable into the sector could be brought forward so as to assist people who are currently in desperate trouble.

In the longer term, once we have eradicated this disease, may I urge my right hon. Friend to reflect on whether we need to examine further the mechanisms currently in place—intensive farming and increasingly large abattoirs that are ever further apart—and the possible contribution of such methods to the rapid spread of this disease?

Mr. Brown: I have already asked for the work that my hon. Friend requests—on whether current structures in the industry make us more vulnerable—to be done. He is absolutely right to ask for an examination of such matters, and he is also absolutely right to want to help. I have to be mindful of the state aid rules and of the cost to the British taxpayer of any commitment that I make, but I want to help and am looking very carefully at what the Government can properly do.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Does the Minister recognise the devastating impact that the outbreaks could have on such a prime livestock-producing area as Northumberland? Although he cannot make an open-ended commitment, will he consider the interdependence of those farmers who are affected by the movement restrictions and the hauliers, traders and other rural businesses, whom he must take into account in future measures because of the outbreak's effects? Although he cannot now comment on the rumours about whether airport pigswill was used in this case, surely we must be certain that no airport or ship docking place anywhere in the country will provide pigswill or other animal feed now that the seriousness of the matter has been recognised.

Mr. Brown: The right hon. Gentleman is right; I must not comment on the specific case. More generally, he is absolutely right to point out the dangers to farmers in Northumberland and elsewhere. I am considering what I can do to help. A number of avenues are open to the Government, and I hope to have more to say about that in the future.

Angela Smith (Basildon): It always comes as a surprise to some hon. Members to hear that there are farms in my constituency. Earlier today, I spoke to Mr. Ian Frood, who is a farmer and an NFU regional organiser for the area. He put to me points similar to those made by the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) about information and stressed how important it is that MAFF officials locally keep the NFU fully informed because they are better placed with local farmers to do away with the kind of rumours that circulate in these circumstances.

A further issue was raised with me by a farmer in my constituency. Today, a national newspaper reporter walked through his farm and knocked on his front door to ask questions about the outbreak, even though he is in an area where no cattle can be moved. That is completely irresponsible. My constituent did not take my advice and hose the reporter down with disinfectant, but, given the problems that we face, would it not be wise for reporters to realise that the best story for farmers is that there are no new outbreaks, and that all reporters and members of the public should act with the utmost responsibility?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is absolutely right on both points. I have already appealed to print journalists and those in the broadcast media to stay away from farms and, if they absolutely have to go on to farms, to ensure that they take the appropriate precautions. I have also asked those in the media organisations not to fly over the infected areas in helicopters. The virus is airborne, and stirring it up with helicopters is a very bad idea indeed, so I appeal again to people not to do it.

On information and input from the local NFU, my hon. Friend is on to a good point, which I discussed in some detail with the president of the NFU at our meeting earlier today. The NFU has offered information contacts, area by area, and we are putting in place a departmental structure to make full use of that because local knowledge can sometimes play a valuable part in helping to control the outbreak locally.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Farmers in my constituency and in that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), on whose behalf I also speak, will have been devastated by the announcement that the case in Bromham has been confirmed. They will have welcomed much of what the Minister has said today, but will he accept that although farmers and other people in the area accept the restrictions that he describes, many of them have no idea what to do? For example, those in the village of Lacock, which is a tourist attraction and 1 mile from Bromham, or in the town of Chippenham, which is covered by the restriction, do not have a clue about what the restrictions will mean.

Will he clarify that and find ways to pass information on to the public so that they know what they may or may not do?

In response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who requested a debate on the subject, the Minister said that he had no time for such a debate. Is it not a rich irony that the House will spend 10 hours tomorrow discussing foxhunting, but we will not have an opportunity to discuss this appalling catastrophe for the countryside?

Mr. Brown: It is not a question of not wanting to debate important countryside issues—in normal circumstances I am very willing to come to the House to take part in a sensible discussion of the issues. However, in the middle of a disease management problem the proportions of which are not yet properly understood, it would not be right to divert ministerial, administrative and, above all, veterinary resources away from controlling the disease and into discussing it here. Perhaps we can hold a debate after the outbreak has been brought under control, and not in the middle of a rapidly changing situation.

The hon. Gentleman's other point was perfectly legitimate. Many people earn their livelihood in the tourist industry and in areas that attract visitors. There are, of course, difficulties when such activities take place side by side with the livestock sector. All I can do is repeat the advice that I have given, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will echo it locally: the public should refrain from going on to livestock farms or near to farmed animals.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the decisive steps that he has taken to isolate and eliminate this dreadful disease in this country and on the actions that he has taken to ensure that the disease does not spread to other countries. That is in marked contrast to the attitude that the previous Government took to BSE. BSE has had incalculable consequences on world trade, particularly in third-world countries, but, if we consider the lessons that we can glean from that, is it not true that modern, intensive, globalised management grossly magnifies the risk of the spread of disease? Has anyone tried to calculate the cost-effectiveness of cheaper food when it is compared to the enormously increased risk of the spread of disease, considered whether we should have huge global regulation to prevent the spread of disease or less intensive, less globalised food production?

Mr. Brown: The implications of the modern methods of agricultural production for the livestock industry and other processes further down the food chain are issues that I have asked my Department to consider. When we have its report, we shall consider the consequences for policy makers. Indeed, we may even want to debate them here. My hon. Friend says that we are trying to contain and then exterminate the problem and must not export it. He is absolutely right.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): No one in the House envies the Minister in his job, but we all wish him and his officials every possible success in what they are trying to do. That remains the case despite one or two of the slightly unfortunate partisan remarks that he has made today.

I wish to press the Minister on one issue. He talked about the possibility at least of providing new advice on the closure of footpaths and other points of access. He was quoted—possibly inaccurately—over the weekend as advising walkers to go into national parks instead of on to farm land. Parts of two national parks are in my constituency, so may I point out that 80 to 90 per cent. of the area of national parks is made up of farm land? I have received reports today that, unfortunately, very large numbers of people ignored the warnings and walked over livestock land this weekend. Will the Minister therefore work with the national park authorities to deal with that issue as part of the many other measures that he needs to put in place?

Mr. Brown: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have time after time appealed for people not to go near farmed livestock. When I suggested that they visit a national park instead, it was of course implicit in my remarks that I meant national parks that do not have farmed livestock. I understand his point, but there are areas where it is perfectly possible to go for a walk in the country without going near farmed animals. There should be no disagreement on that point. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for the measures that the Government are taking.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): It is impossible to overestimate the gravity of the situation facing us. In his responses to Labour Members, my right hon. Friend has said that it might be possible to undertake a wide-ranging investigation into animal health, the problems that we have come to realise recently and their link to intensive farming. Will he go as far as to say that he will include other parts of the food chain in that investigation, so that farmers are not singled out? Other parts of the food chain may bear some responsibility for the risks that we now face.

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend is right. The study that I have asked for does not focus exclusively on farming practices; it is designed to consider more broadly whether the industry's current structure, throughout the supply chain and including the catering sector and export industries, makes us more vulnerable to disease outbreaks than the way in which it operated some years ago.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): I do not think that I have heard any Opposition Member criticise the work of the admirable state veterinary service or, indeed, that of MAFF to contain this wicked disease. It is therefore all the more surprising that the Minister should cavil at the prospect of a debate in Opposition time on such a fundamental matter affecting the survival of agriculture in this country.

Having said that, may I ask the Minister to take a more robust line on footpaths? I urge him to work with local councils to enable farmers to shut paths if they feel it necessary to do so, because people are tramping across those paths without disinfectant, and, when asked not to do so, are often extremely abusive to the farmers concerned.

Mr. Brown: I would be grateful to the Opposition if they could postpone their debate and let me and my officials get the disease under control. The hon.

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Gentleman made a perfectly fair point about footpaths. We have that matter under review, and I anticipate announcing further measures shortly.

Mr. Alan W. Williams (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his immediate introduction of robust measures. That contrasts with the action taken on BSE, which was always too little, too late. It is much wiser to take vigorous action from day 1.

If the newspaper reports are accurate, the living conditions of pigs on the farm in Northumberland give serious cause for concern. It defies belief that the farmer involved could not recognise the symptoms of foot and mouth when they were well advanced—seven or 14 days into the outbreak on his premises. MAFF's animal health inspectors inspected the farm two or three times in December and January, but apparently did not comment on how bad the animal welfare conditions were. Do we not need a full inquiry into animal welfare, particularly for intensively farmed livestock, including pigs and poultry? There is something badly amiss here.

Mr. Brown: The veterinary inspectors' reports on the farm at Heddon-on-the-Wall are consistent with what we know about the incubation time of the disease. The chief vet is satisfied that the disease was not present on the farm when the inspections took place. The whole issue is being considered by the appropriate authorities, and it would be wrong for me to say more about that now in the House.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): My constituency abuts that of the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett). As south Devon is a peninsula, has the Minister considered asking local authorities to put matting on all roads leading into the area? Is he aware that farmers are having problems because disinfectant supplies are drying up?

Will the Minister say something not only about national parks but about the south Devon coastline, which has a heritage trail that people have continued to walk during the weekend and today? Those people, who include farmers from Norfolk, have walked on livestock farms.

Mr. Brown: As a result of the NFU president's representations to me earlier today, I have asked for inquiries to be made so that we can be certain that we have sufficient stocks of disinfectant. That is a perfectly proper point for the hon. Gentleman to raise.

It is hard to make regulations that enable people to enjoy the countryside while ensuring that they stay away from livestock and other farmed animals. However, I appeal to people to do so. The most important point is to make sure that we do not spread the disease, and then we can contain and extinguish it. As the disease is primarily spread by the movement of animals, we have halted that practice so that we can isolate and extinguish it. I appeal to people to stay away from farm animals. Although it is a more remote possibility, there is a chance that such a virulent strain of the disease will be spread by people and vehicles.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Since the 1967 outbreak, fundamental changes have altered the risks that the farming community and society face. People are more mobile, animals are moved more frequently, vets and farmers see the early evidence of this virulent disease infrequently and, indeed, some of the animals at risk are kept as pets. Although information on the MAFF website about the more advanced stages of the illness is good, is my right hon. Friend satisfied that farmers and veterinary practitioners receive sufficient scientific training on the early stages of the condition? The Leahurst faculty of Liverpool university's large veterinary school is in my constituency and has a worldwide reputation. However, I suspect that a generation of veterinary scientists has left there without seeing the disease in its very early stages.

Mr. Brown: I am satisfied that the veterinary profession can identify the disease. I think it is harder for farmers to identify because we have not seen it in this country for 20 years. Nevertheless, we have a two-way method of control. In addition to our vets following up the cases that might have got the disease from contact with infected areas, we rely on farmers and their private vets to ring the Ministry and prioritise what they believe are suspicious cases. My hon. Friend is correct to say that the vulnerable animals are sometimes kept as domestic pets.

Mr. Ieuan Wyn Jones (Ynys Môn): There is a considerable sense of foreboding and anxiety in Anglesey because there is a suspected case of foot and mouth at the abattoir in Gaerwen. I understand that tests have taken place. Can the right hon. Gentleman say when the results will be available? If they confirm the first case in Wales, will that be announced by his officials or the Welsh Assembly, or will a joint statement be issued?

Does the right hon. Gentleman know about the reports of people walking in Snowdonia at the weekend, although there were requests not to do so? There will be considerable support in Wales for the temporary closure of footpaths and rights of way. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that farmers in Anglesey in particular are concerned about the operation of the over-30-months rule and the delay in taking animals to market. What hope can he give to those farmers, bearing in mind that the animals might be more than 30 months old when the restrictions are lifted?

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is right. Those people who are proposing to submit animals under the over-30-months rule could be caught by the restrictions on movement. As we reshape those restrictions—although that is conditional on our getting a firm grip on the outbreak of the disease—I promise to keep the over-30-months scheme and those affected by it at the forefront of my mind. I am afraid that I cannot say more than that now.

There is close co-operation between my Department and the officials who work in the agriculture section of the Welsh Assembly. There is also close communication between myself and my counterpart in the Welsh Assembly. We are trying to take a common approach to the temporary closure of public rights of access. What has happened in Snowdonia is one of the matters at the forefront of our minds as we consider this difficult issue. I am grateful to people who have taken heed of appeals not to go near farms, livestock or animals, but I am aware that not everyone has responded in that way. We must consider what else we have to do.

I know that the suspected case will be a cause of great anxiety to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. It is a tentative hope rather than anything firmer, but we do not yet have a positive finding—at least, I am not aware of it. The passage of time gives more grounds for optimism in that local case; it takes longer to confirm a negative than to confirm a positive.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): We have heard what the Minister has had to say about compensation for consequential loss, and we might want to return to the issue when we see for how long the ban on movements continues, but he could do two specific things immediately to help farmers, who are already in a difficult financial position, who suffer such loss. One of those things, for which many have asked, is to claim the agrimonetary compensation. I think that the £202 million must be claimed by the end of April, if at all. More than three quarters of it would go to the livestock sector. The Minister might point out to the Chancellor that our friends in the European Union pick up 20 per cent. of the costs of very few public spending programmes.

Secondly, when the Minister this evening meets our friends in the EU, will he suggest that farmers who are having to keep animals on their farms for longer than planned might be allowed temporarily to graze them on set-aside land in order to alleviate the problem of having to buy additional food? That was permitted during the BSE crisis. It is something for which the right hon. Gentleman could ask which would cost nothing.

Mr. Brown: I am looking at whether there are derogations that we could seek from the Commission in the management of the current outbreak that would give some help and assistance to those who are caught by it. I have a range of points, such as the one that the hon. Gentleman makes, that I want to take up informally with Commissioner Fischler before we make formal representations. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about agrimonetary compensation. I remember him as a Treasury Minister; I wonder whether he would have taken the same view of the 19 per cent. EU contribution and the domestic contribution of only 81 per cent. when he was at the Treasury.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Although the right hon. Gentleman deserves unqualified support for the measures that he has taken—he has received it from those of us on the Conservative Benches—does he accept that he would better create a mood of national unity if he treated this House with a little more respect? His answers on appearing before Parliament have been disgraceful. To suggest that we should not have a debate is quite wrong. Will he bear it in mind that, when this country was at war, Churchill constantly reported to the House? Does he remember his former colleague Lord Robertson, former Secretary of State for Defence, reporting to the House day after day when we were engaged in hostilities? The Minister's prime duty is to be answerable to the House. Will he therefore reconsider his ill-judged remarks and give a categorical undertaking that he will make regular statements at that Dispatch Box?

Mr. Brown: No, I will not. My priority is to confront and extinguish the disease. The hon. Gentleman's remarks are distinctly unhelpful. I have always treated this House with courtesy and restraint, but to haul Ministers here as part of an Opposition day debate when we will be in the middle of disease control seems highly irresponsible.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I thank the Minister, his Department and the veterinary service for the very prompt response to this hideous virus. Is he aware, however, that Thirsk auction mart—and, I understand, many auction marts throughout the country—has received a very confusing briefing from the Meat and Livestock Commission? Entitled "UK Foot and Mouth Update No 1", last week's MLC briefing said that the foot and mouth export ban will be in place for six months

"after the last confirmed outbreak has been fully dealt with".

That is totally confusing; it seems to contradict advice from MAFF and the Commission that there will be only a one-month export ban. Will the Minister please explain the provenance of that briefing? Did it come from his Department? Will be please eradicate the confusion today?

May I also ask the Minister to take the prompt legal action to close footpaths which he said he is considering? Confusion arises when livestock are inside and the public simply do not know that livestock are present.

Mr. Brown: On the issue of footpaths, I give the hon. Lady the assurance she seeks. I have the matter under active consideration with the devolved authorities and I hope to make a further announcement shortly.

As the hon. Lady probably knows, I do not have direct responsibility for the activities of the MLC. She asks about the likely duration of the export bans. It will differ, depending on whether European Union trade or bilateral trade with third countries is involved, because all have slightly different rules of their own. However, we shall never get the bans lifted until we have disease-free status—confirmed disease-free status. In future, we might be able to get the ban regionalised so that parts of the United Kingdom can export again, but it is premature to speculate along those lines today. We simply do not know whether there are animals still incubating the condition, so further quarantine and disease-control measures are required.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): I believe that the Minister terribly misjudged his response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack). At a time of national crisis, which this is, the Minister's real duty is to report to the House at every necessary opportunity.

None the less, I thank the Minister's private office because, on Saturday afternoon, its staff were most helpful in arranging a licence to be given to my constituent Mr. Richard Bradshaw, who had 17 decomposing carcases in his yard and could not move them without a licence. However, this morning, anomalies have been revealed in the regime for fallen stock and casualties, in that Mr. Bradshaw has been told that he cannot move cattle that have an OTM22 form; although they have been deemed healthy enough for human consumption, the animals must be left on the farm to decompose for seven days. The arrangements have been made in haste and the Minister is caught on Morton's fork. Will he give me a clear answer tomorrow on how casualties will be dealt with while the crisis lasts?

Mr. Brown: As well as dealing with the problems of the hon. Gentleman's constituent, my private office now

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has to help to prepare for the debate, as do veterinary authorities and senior officials in the Ministry. I repeat that it is distinctly unhelpful to try to make me do things in addition to bearing down on the disease. Nevertheless, I shall ensure that the perfectly proper point the hon. Gentleman makes about how fallen stock and casualties are dealt with is addressed. He is right to say that we have been licensing movements under very strictly controlled conditions to deal with the problem, but complications arise in connection with issuing general licences for normal disposal routes: because they go from farm to farm, such established routes provide a means by which the disease might be spread.

Iraq (No-fly Zones)

5.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should like to make a statement about coalition operations to enforce the no-fly zones over Iraq.

Ten years ago today, we celebrated the success of Operation Desert Storm, the coalition operation to expel Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait. The contribution of the United Kingdom, which included the deployment of 50,000 service personnel, was a significant one on which we can look back with immense pride.

Since the end of the Gulf conflict, the overall aim of the policy adopted by successive Governments has been to contain the threat to regional security posed by Saddam Hussein's Iraq. That policy has been successful: without our efforts, Saddam would have been free to maintain and develop his weapons of mass destruction and conventional military capability, and free to bully and threaten his neighbours with impunity, as he did in the past.

A further aim of our policy has been to limit Saddam's ability to kill and terrorise his own people. That is why we have conducted patrols of the no-fly zones since the early 1990s in support of United Nations Security Council resolution 688, which demanded an end to his brutal repression. The zones have served a vital humanitarian purpose over the past decade in constraining Saddam's ability to carry out such repression, particularly in relation to the Shias and the Kurds.

The patrols are justified in international law as a legitimate response to prevent a grave humanitarian crisis. Without them, Saddam would be free, as he was prior to their establishment, to use aircraft and helicopter gunships against innocent civilians. The humanitarian consequences would be as unconscionable as they were in 1991. Many tens of thousands would be displaced from their homes, thousands would lose their lives, perhaps—as happened in 1988 at Halabja—following the use of chemical weapons.

Since January 1999, Saddam's air defence units have made sustained and concerted efforts to shoot down United Kingdom and United States aircraft. During that period, there have been more than 1,200 attempts to target them, using surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery. Coalition aircraft are legally authorised to respond to those attacks in self-defence. They do so entirely in accordance with international law, attacking only those military facilities that contribute, as part of the Iraqi integrated air defence system, to the threat to coalition aircraft.

Military commanders must manage the risk to service personnel. Over recent weeks, the Iraqis have significantly increased their efforts, amounting to a qualitative and quantitative increase in the threat. In January, there were more surface-to-air missile attacks than in the whole of 2000. The Iraqis have used new tactics, including the use of radars and command centres located outside the southern zone to cue offensive systems within it. That threat to our service personnel is real and present.

The operation on the evening of 16 February was therefore planned and carried out against that background. It was a proportionate response in self-defence, taken solely to reduce the risk to our aircrew carrying out routine humanitarian patrols of the southern no-fly zone.

As such, it was entirely in keeping with all such operations conducted over the period since January 1999, when Iraq started attacking our patrols. The operation was planned and cleared by Ministers on both sides of the Atlantic. Targets were carefully selected and precision-guided weapons used to minimise and, if at all possible, avoid any risk of civilian casualties.

Six targets were engaged, comprising elements of the Iraqi integrated air defence system, including military radar, command and communications sites. Five were north of the zone; all were directly involved in threatening coalition aircraft. Aircraft conducting patrols of the northern no-fly zone have previously engaged targets south of the 36th parallel, but this was the first occasion on which coalition aircraft had attacked targets outside the southern no-fly zone—that is, above the 33rd parallel—since Operation Desert Fox.

RAF participation included four Tornado GR1 strike aircraft, supported by two Tornado F3 air defence aircraft and two VC10 tankers. A Nimrod reconnaissance aircraft was also airborne at the time. All our aircraft returned safely, as did those from the United States. The operation was a success. Both weapons dropped by the RAF hit their intended target, a military communications site. Overall, we are confident that the coalition caused significant disruption to the Iraqi integrated air defence system, degrading its ability to threaten our aircrew. We will, of course, monitor the situation very carefully over the coming weeks.

There have been Iraqi allegations of civilian casualties. No military action is without risk, and we deeply regret casualties, if any were caused. We have no means of verifying Iraqi claims, but we learned long ago to distrust them. In 1999, for example, Iraq claimed on some 30 occasions that there were civilian casualties on days when coalition aircraft did not actually release any weapons, and on several days when they were not even patrolling over Iraq. We know that, on a number of occasions, Saddam has alleged civilian casualties when only military personnel have been injured.

The operation was conducted in response to a deliberate escalation on the part of the Iraqis. Our action does not represent a change in policy. RAF aircrew undertook a difficult and dangerous mission with great skill and great bravery. Faced with a substantial increase in the threat in recent weeks, it was right that we took the minimum necessary steps to reduce that threat.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): First, let me thank the Secretary of State for his courtesy in giving me a copy of the statement in advance, to assist me in my response. May I make it clear from the outset, on behalf of the Opposition, that we support the decision to carry out the air strikes? I disagree fundamentally with those who say that the strikes were provocative and will only make matters worse. I agree with the Secretary of State that, while we seriously regret any civilian casualties, the figures for such casualties, as given by Saddam Hussein, are not necessarily to be trusted.

I should like to pay tribute to the RAF and other service men in the Gulf. The events of the past few weeks have clearly shown us that they continue to risk their lives in the service of their country and in support of its allies. The House owes them a debt of gratitude for that service alone.

Whatever anyone says, there is no question but that the weapons' radars were targeting allied aircraft, as the Secretary of State said. When I was in the United States, that was made clear to me, and it has also been clear from briefings over here. I understand that, apart from the radars, missiles and anti-aircraft guns were fired in the last few weeks. Will the Secretary of State clarify that? Admittedly those weapons may not have been as accurate, because the Iraqis kept switching their radars off, but will the Secretary of State confirm that our aircraft were genuinely under threat in the period preceding the strikes?

It makes no difference if the sites that were attacked were outside the no-fly zone, because the Iraqis were targeting aircraft flying within the no-fly zone. That point has often been missed. Those sites therefore became legitimate targets. Does the Secretary of State agree that those who talk about heightened tension in the area miss the point that it is Saddam Hussein who destabilises the whole region and that he alone creates the problem to which we have to react strongly?

Does the Secretary of State agree, and will be say so before the House, that Saddam Hussein has continued to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons of mass destruction and the means to deliver them through ballistic missiles? Although there have been many reports on that from the UK and the US, I was intrigued to learn that, at the weekend, German intelligence was reported as showing that Iraq is now capable of producing nuclear weapons within the next three years. That intelligence also confirmed that Saddam Hussein continues to work on his biological capability and can produce such weapons at short notice, should he require to do so. Does not all of that confirm the view of Richard Butler, ex-head of the United Nations Special Commission, who made it clear that that capability continues to grow, regardless of sanctions?

I want to press the Secretary of State on that point. As someone who has fully supported the sanctions regime and the no-fly zone—I do not vary from that—let me ask him this: does he not agree that there is a problem over the implementation and effectiveness of the policy as it stands? Will he confirm that some nations, including one or two that are members of the European Union, do not appear to wish to stand by the sanctions? Regardless of the fact that they signed up to them, they continue to breach them. Does he not agree that the reaction of some of his European Union partners to the bombing is regrettable? Is it not regrettable that they were not able to support the action, and does that not throw some light on the fact that they are still unable to give full support? Is the Government's position on the Euro defence force not thrown into relief, as they have had to act, not for the first time, with the United States?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that Saddam Hussein is using nations in Europe and elsewhere, including those that are proliferating weapons of mass destruction for hard cash, to bypass sanctions and grow his threat? I was concerned that, during a television interview yesterday, the Secretary of State seemed to indicate that there is a difference of opinion between the US and the UK on the overall purpose of our policy on Iraq. Will he clarify that? He indicated that British policy stopped short of any involvement in toppling Saddam Hussein. I am aware that that has been a continuing policy. However, given that we know with whom we are dealing and that Saddam Hussein has demonstrated on

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many occasions that he abides by no treaties, has no regard for human life and continues to regard himself as a legitimate threat to others in the region, is it not time to consider whether it is still feasible to deal with him as we have so far tried to do? Is it not fair—the US is perhaps now coming to terms with this—to try to deal, not with him, but with what we do ultimately to replace him, and find another regime that will be more peaceable, reasonable and less threatening in the region?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support. I shall endeavour to deal with the various points that he has raised.

I made it clear that there was a change in both the quality and the quantity of the threat to our aircrew. During January, there were as many attacks on our aircrew and aircraft as there had been throughout 2000. We judged that it was right to make efforts to protect aircrew during their legitimate and lawful patrols over the southern no-fly zone. I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman that Saddam alone is responsible for the situation. He is the author of the policy that leads to the attacks on our aircrew. We understand that he offers a substantial bonus to anyone who is capable of bringing down a coalition aircraft.

I accept the hon. Gentleman's observations about the importance of identifying precisely what Saddam Hussein is capable of producing in the way of weapons of mass destruction. That is why we were so determined, as part of the negotiations leading to UN Security Council resolution 1284, that an effective system of inspection should be in place. It is important that we should be able to inspect whatever it is that Iraq is trying to produce, given its history, our suspicions and the revelations that are made from time to time.

I accept that there is criticism of the effectiveness of certain sanctions. That is why we consistently review them to try to find ways of making them still more effective in damaging Saddam Hussein's regime, rather than allowing them to be targeted against the people of Iraq, with whom we have no quarrel.

I resist the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there is a difference of opinion with the United States. Our regime-change policy is that of successive British Governments, and the hon. Gentleman knows that full well. In relation to the television interview, that is the only area where there is a difference of opinion between this Government and the United States Government. It is a difference of opinion that has been shared by successive United Kingdom Governments. There is no other difference in policy between the two countries.

Mr. Tony Benn (Chesterfield): Is the Secretary of State aware that the United Nations charter explicitly prohibits military action by one country against another without the authority of the Security Council, which has never authorised either the no-fly zones or the bombing? Is it not clear that, for that reason, any persons killed in Iraq could in law be regarded as victims of international terrorism, if not war crimes, and that by following American policy, Britain is absolutely isolated in the international community? Not one other country supports the policy—except for Israel, which has weapons of mass destruction, has invaded the Lebanon and is persecuting the Palestinians.

Is it not true that after 10 years of the policy which the Secretary of State praises, Saddam is stronger than he has ever been and has more support among his neighbours, whom the Government claim he threatens? Has the time not come to end sanctions and open proper peace negotiations to enable the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Iraqis and their neighbours to be brought to the table, which is the only way in which problems of this sort have ever been satisfactorily dealt with in the past?

Mr. Hoon: I do not agree with my right hon. Friend's interpretation of international law. The legal position is that we are entitled to patrol the no-fly zones for humanitarian reasons. We are there to protect people on the ground, whose condition would be significantly damaged if we were not present. That deals also with my right hon. Friend's second point, which was about whether Saddam is or is not stronger. Had we not taken the action that we have over the past 10 years, Saddam Hussein would undoubtedly have been still stronger and still capable of threatening his own people and other peoples in the region. Our policy has certainly improved the condition of people, not least in the northern no-fly zone, where they have been able to go about their lives without interference by Saddam Hussein's regime. In the southern no-fly zone, people are undoubtedly in a much better position than they would have been if we had not pursued our policy.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I begin by saying that the Secretary of State is right to assert that whenever British forces are deployed it is the Government's duty to take every possible step to protect them? I remind the right hon. Gentleman that Liberal Democrat Members have supported military action when necessary against Iraq since the invasion of Kuwait by Saddam Hussein about 10 and a half years ago. He will know that I have raised with him and his predecessor the fundamental question, which is whether RAF aircraft should be operating over southern Iraq. Resolution 688 does not give express authority, and there are widespread doubts about the legality of the operations, not least in the Arab capitals, whose political support we urgently require to maintain a coalition of political opinion against Saddam Hussein.

Is it not the case that air operations have not had the effect of protecting Shias from ground operations by Iraqi forces? Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, for some weeks prior to the air strikes, the Ministry of Defence was considering withdrawing RAF aircraft from the southern no-fly zone operations?

Does not this all underscore the urgent need for a review of Government policy towards Iraq, including a review of a sanctions regime that is withering on the vine? It has had no effect on Saddam Hussein, nor on his programmes of manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. It has given him a heaven-sent propaganda weapon, which he has used to justify the brutal repression of the Iraqi people. Can we not now accept that non-military sanctions should be lifted, and that a policy of containment can be continued with the credible threat of military action, but with a sanctions regime confined to military and dual-use equipment?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his support on behalf of the Liberal

Democrat party. The legal justification for the patrolling of the no-fly zones does not rest on Security Council resolution 688. That has not been the Government's position. In terms of humanitarian justification, we are entitled to patrol the no-fly zones to prevent a grave humanitarian crisis. That is the legal justification in international law. It does not rest on resolution 688, although that resolution supports the position that we have adopted.

Were we not patrolling the no-fly zone in the south, the position of the Shias on the ground would be significantly worsened. That is strong justification for the action that we are taking. We have not contemplated withdrawing RAF aircraft, but it is right that we constantly review the operation of our forces, as we constantly review sanctions. We need to ensure that sanctions are effective and are having the consequences that we desire. We recognise that in some areas they are not working as we would hope. It is important that we target sanctions still more effectively against Saddam Hussein's regime, not against Iraqi people.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Is it not weird that, 10 years after the liberation of Kuwait, when we recall the murder, torture, rape, looting and pillaging that accompanied Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait, there should be Members who still seem to have greater sympathy for the murderer than for those he murdered? Is it not a fact that, whatever fraying there may be of sanctions, if we had not taken action and if we were not continuing to do so, which my right hon. Friend has said is wholly within international law, Saddam Hussein would by now be in occupation of at least parts of Saudi Arabia, parts of Iran and other parts of the middle east? When Members talk about "international terrorism", it is not the Government and our United States ally who are responsible for such terrorism, but a killer who has no hesitation in killing his own people in vast numbers. It is about time that people thought before they uttered ridiculous and stupid statements, which they stick to after 10 years.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support. I simply add to his observations the fact that very recently, Saddam Hussein repeated his claim to the territory of Kuwait and made it clear that, given the opportunity, he would again invade that country and subject it to appalling atrocity. Many Kuwaitis are still missing as a result of the original invasion more than 10 years ago. I agree with my right hon. Friend, and he is right to make his points so sharply.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Will the right hon. Gentleman please pass my respects and admiration to the Royal Air Force crews who so bravely pressed home those militarily necessary attacks? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we need to give serious consideration to reforming the sanctions regime? It is imperative that we get the weapons inspectors back into Baghdad to assess clearly the continuing weapons programme of that wicked man.

In order to get the weapons inspectors back, we should offer the carrot of a revised sanctions regime along the lines proposed by the nearly-always-right spokesman for the Liberal Democrats, the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). Does the Secretary of State agree that we should maintain a vigorous sanctions programme on all military imports, but that we should drop sanctions on all non-military imports in exchange for getting the weapons inspectors back into Baghdad?

Mr. Hoon: I will certainly pass on the hon. Gentleman's congratulations to the RAF crews involved, who conducted the operation with considerable skill and precision and very great bravery.

With regard to the hon. Gentleman's observations about the sanctions regime, I invite him to study carefully Security Council resolution 1284. It is a long, detailed statement by the international community setting out the points that the hon. Gentleman makes—the opportunity that is available to Saddam Hussein to have sanctions lifted, in the event of his allowing a proper inspection regime into Iraq. I believe that the hon. Gentleman will be satisfied by the terms of resolution 1284, and I hope that he is not suggesting that we should further dilute 1284 by attempting to draw up a new resolution.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On my way to the House from Heathrow airport this morning, I called at 16 Princes Gate, which is the embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian ambassador confirmed that his Government—who, heaven knows, have more reason than anybody else on the planet to loathe Saddam, after the million lost in the Iran-Iraq war—are against sanctions and are against bombing, partly on the ground that, far from weakening Saddam, they strengthen him.

May I put a direct question to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, who referred to the bullying of neighbours? With the exception of the al-Sabah family in Kuwait, can he name one organisation or Government in the Arab world who support the recent bombing and the sanctions policy?

Mr. Hoon: It would be sufficient that the one Government of the one country that has been subject to an invasion in the past 10 years still remain fearful, given Saddam Hussein's recent remarks about his territorial claim to Kuwait. I am sorry that my hon. Friend does not recognise that. I am sure that he did not condone the invasion of Kuwait, and I am sure that he would not condone it if it were repeated. Without the policy of containment of Saddam Hussein, which has operated successfully over the past 10 years, there would be the fear that the atrocities perpetrated against the people of Kuwait would be repeated.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): So long as the no-fly areas exist, it must be right for military action to be taken to safeguard allied aircraft. I have no criticism of what was done in that regard. However, as one who played a modest part, as Minister of State, in the formulation of policy with regard to sanctions, I am becoming very uneasy about their moral base.

The sanctions were put in place to get rid of Saddam, or at least to contain him. If we are honest with ourselves, we must acknowledge that they have not in any way damaged Saddam, but have substantially damaged the people of Iraq. I would like to think that it might be possible for us further to examine the sanctions regime so

[Mr. Douglas Hogg]

that the consequences are narrowly confined to excluding military and other material, and do not weigh down so oppressively on the ordinary people of Iraq.

Mr. Hoon: I understand the proper way in which the right hon. and learned Gentleman has made his point, not least given his responsibility formerly for developing the sanctions regime, but he will know the difficulties of precisely targeting an effective sanctions regime, as he suggests, and explaining to people the effect of the sanctions. For example, since the end of the Gulf conflict, food and medicine imports have never been prohibited at all by sanctions, as the right hon. and learned Gentleman knows. Saddam Hussein and his regime have been responsible for preventing food and medicine from being properly distributed among the Iraqi people.

I accept a degree of responsibility, in the sense that it is important that Governments who are successfully policing sanctions should explain the effect of those sanctions and make it clear that the responsibility for the suffering of the Iraqi people lies firmly in the hands of Saddam Hussein, not in the hands of the international community, which is seeking to do what the right hon. and learned Gentleman describes: to ensure that sanctions target military equipment and do not affect the people of Iraq.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Is not the real reason why Saddam Hussein has the resource and the confidence to attack coalition military equipment the fact that the coalition powers, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States of America, have failed properly to enforce the sanctions regime? For the past six years—some of us have protested about the matter for six years, in both London and Washington—oil revenues, illegal under the terms of the United Nations resolution, have been raised through the export of oil into Turkey and through the Gulf under the watchful eyes of the Americans and the coalition powers.

Is not that money which Saddam Hussein has raised now funding the attacks on our resources and his programme to develop weapons of mass destruction? We are to blame. It is our responsibility. We did not properly enforce the sanctions regime. We have been telling Parliament that for the past six years, and the same has been said in the US Congress, but nothing has been done.

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept responsibility in quite the way that my hon. Friend sets it out, but I agree with him that there are difficulties about the enforcement of the sanctions regime. That is why, as I told the House earlier, it is important that we continue to monitor and review the effectiveness of the sanctions and find more successful ways of making them bite on the regime, not on the Iraqi people.

I do not accept that there has been a lack of resolve on the part of the United Kingdom or the United States in seeking to enforce sanctions. Indeed, tribute has been properly paid to British service personnel for their bravery in flying over the no-fly zones. Equal tribute ought to be paid to British service personnel who are responsible for the enforcement of the sanctions. They, too, conduct difficult operations, sometimes in awkward circumstances, and it is right that they should be praised for their efforts.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Many of us greatly admire the courage and professionalism of the RAF and fully accept the legitimacy of the actions last week. None the less, we are beginning to wonder what the endgame is. The concern in many Arab capitals has nothing to do with the UN Security Council and everything to do with the huge growth in weapons of mass destruction capability, which it is widely known in the Arab world Saddam Hussein is developing. In pursuing our policy towards that evil and increasingly powerful man, the overriding consideration must be how we can rebuild the coalition, which may become all the more important as he gets more and more powerful.

Mr. Hoon: On the endgame, I again refer the hon. Gentleman to Security Council resolution 1284, which was concluded after months—at times it seemed like years—of negotiation and careful, thoughtful and considered diplomacy. It sets out an opportunity for Iraq to return to the international community should Saddam Hussein and his regime choose to accept it. Allowing inspections can lead to a suspension of sanctions leading ultimately to their removal, but that depends on Saddam Hussein's willingness to co-operate with the international community in allaying our understandable suspicions about his efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. That is, indeed, an endgame—it provides a perfectly proper way for Saddam Hussein to end the present stalemate.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): May I declare an interest, as I was in Kuwait a short while ago with an all-party delegation? When we visited the RAF base in Kuwait, we were presented with clear information about how seriously RAF personnel take their responsibilities in identifying legitimate targets and carrying out their activities, for which they are accountable when the Tornados return home.

While I was in Kuwait, Uday, the son of Saddam Hussein, released a press statement to the media in the Arabic world, saying that all the maps in Iraq were being redrawn to include Kuwait within Iraqi borders. More than 600 prisoners of war, including women and children, were seized from Kuwait and taken into Iraq. Saddam Hussein has refused to ease the suffering of the parents and families by telling them whether their relatives are alive or well. Is there anything that we can do in terms of sanctions? I understand that there is a freeze on Iraqi assets abroad, but if we are to make sanctions bite, can we do anything more to uncover the whereabouts of the tens of billions of pounds that I understand to be held overseas? Can we take action to find that money and ensure that it is frozen?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her comments and I congratulate her on making the effort to go to Kuwait to see our aircrew, who, as other hon. Members have said, perform a remarkable task in very difficult circumstances. I encourage hon. Members to go and see for themselves the efforts that are made by our aircrew in support of the policy of the British Government and the coalition. A determined effort is being made to make sanctions more effective, especially with the new US Administration, who are carefully considering ways of targeting sanctions still more effectively. I shall certainly

consider my hon. Friend's suggestion, as we are determined that sanctions should bite effectively on the regime and not harm the people of Iraq.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It would help me to include more of the hon. Members who are seeking to catch my eye if questions could now be kept much more concise.

Mr. Martin Bell (Tatton): The Secretary of State rightly drew attention to the success of the military operation 10 years ago. I was there, I rejoiced in it and I was a witness of it. But that operation had proper backing in the Arab world and the international community. Where are our friends this time, outside Washington and Jerusalem? Is the right hon. Gentleman not concerned about our friendlessness in the world as we pursue this course?

Mr. Hoon: I have answered that question already. The hon. Gentleman was in Kuwait, and there is no doubt that Kuwait strongly supports the action that we have taken. Indeed, it provides a base from which RAF crews and pilots can operate.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): It stretches credulity to say that the bombing is a humanitarian act to save Kurds given that the Turks, our NATO allies, are killing Kurds and that we are sending back to Baghdad Iraqi Kurds who have sought asylum. It simply does not make sense—it is a mess. As we are in a hole internationally, is it not time for us to stop digging and do as my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) suggests—start talking? Even if we do so through a third party, please let us start talking and stop killing.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend has rightly made a reputation in the House for concern about the rights of minority groups and organisations both in this country and around the world. I am surprised that she is not prepared to recognise the rights of, say, the people of Kuwait and of people who live on the ground in the northern and southern no-fly zones. That is why we are there and are protecting those people. My hon. Friend knows from the facts of Saddam Hussein's regime that if we were not there, they would suffer the sort of damage and harm that they have suffered in the past. However much she wishes otherwise, that is the reality of the circumstances with which we have to deal.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Some of us have believed for some time that a grave error was made 10 years ago when the coalition forces were stopped so soon, before they had the opportunity to cut off Saddam Hussein's republican guard north-east of Basra. Some of us have believed for 10 years that there can be no peace in the middle east while Saddam Hussein remains in power. From what the Secretary of State has said, I think that he rather agrees with that view. If the right hon. Gentleman agrees that Saddam Hussein is the problem, not Iraq or the Iraqi people, and if the new US Administration intend to act more personally against Saddam and his regime, will the Government's policy be to support the US Administration in deposing Saddam? Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that if we are to be criticised for bombing Iraq, it might be more helpful to target more closely Saddam's palaces and Saddam himself?

Mr. Hoon: As it is the 10th anniversary of the end of the Gulf war, today is perhaps an appropriate time to be reflecting on those events. I can only remind the hon. Gentleman of what the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), said yesterday, I think, in Kuwait. He said that he had not judged it appropriate to continue the effort further, and argued that it would not have been justified in international law. Furthermore, he said that there was no military argument for continuing to attack Iraq once the legitimate objective of freeing Kuwait had been achieved. I think that that is a complete answer to the hon. Gentleman's observations. It has been a consistent policy of United Kingdom Governments not to work for regime change in the manner that the hon. Gentleman describes. I make it absolutely clear that we are convinced that Iraq would be a much better and safer place without Saddam Hussein and his regime, but that is a matter for the Iraqi people.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the debate is not about the nature or malevolence of Saddam Hussein's regime, but about the most effective way of building broad support for controlling it? The problem with UN Security Council resolution 1284 is that Saddam's regime has no interest in compliance, so it is not a way forward. Does my right hon. Friend accept that we cannot achieve a proper resolution with the UK and the US alone? Is a thoroughgoing review being conducted across the MOD and the Foreign Office to consider how to rebuild broad support for an effective way forward in dealing with Iraq as part of a broader middle east policy?

Mr. Hoon: The difficulty with my hon. Friend's argument is that she is describing precisely the process that led to the formulation of Security Council resolution 1284. An enormous and determined diplomatic effort was made by the international community to achieve the broad consensus that my hon. Friend fairly describes. I was involved in that process for a short time as a Foreign Office Minister, so I can assure her that every effort was made to solicit opinion from around the world in order to achieve precisely the degree of consensus for which she argues. If she is suggesting that we should start that process again and repeat it, all that I would invite her to consider, after looking carefully at resolution 1284, is whether we would achieve anything different at the end of it. The resolution provides an opportunity for Saddam Hussein and his regime to end sanctions completely if they accept the need for inspection and the legitimate suspicions of the international community about their past efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. I invite my hon. Friend to read the resolution again and to consider whether any alternative would be more attractive to Saddam Hussein.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): Is it the case that any country that helps Saddam Hussein to rebuild his radar defences is in breach of United Nations

[Sir David Madel]

resolutions, and that the sanctions regime cannot be changed until United Nations weapons inspectors have got into Iraq and started their essential work?

Mr. Hoon: The answer is yes to both points. Sanctions are targeted against military equipment, and our actions have been directed against equipment that threatens our aircrew who patrol the no-fly zones. The hon. Gentleman is right to stress his second point.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does not my right hon. Friend find it strange that he has the support of the shadow Defence Secretary, given that, at a time when some of us stood on platforms to support the Iraqi resistance and oppose Saddam Hussein, Tory Governments helped to arm him?

May I also ask what effect my right hon. Friend believes the current bombing of Iraq is having on the wider middle east peace process?

Mr. Hoon: The issue is not party political. The Labour Opposition supported the then Government's position on the Gulf war and their subsequent action. We are not talking about party politics. I accept that others hold legitimate and reasonable opinions and different views about international law. However, I have set out clearly the Government's policy and position.

I do not believe that any recent action to enforce the no-fly zones has any consequences for the middle east peace process.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) asked about the endgame. The Secretary of State's reply concentrated on an endgame whereby Saddam Hussein ends matters, but we are worried about the endgame from our point of view. Given the Secretary of State's anxiety about Saddam Hussein's development of weapons of mass destruction, does he believe that it is possible to prevent it through a combination of economic sanctions and aerial bombardment alone? If not, what is his recommendation for solving the problem in the long term?

Mr. Hoon: I remind the hon. Gentleman that our policy is not a combination of economic sanctions and aerial bombardment; it is a policy of sanctions. The use of weapons to protect our aircrew is a consequence of Saddam Hussein's attacks on them. If he did not attack our aircraft, there would be no need for "aerial bombardment", in the hon. Gentleman's words.

On an endgame from our point of view, the hon. Gentleman should propose practical and sensible suggestions about the way in which the policy of successive Governments—whom he may have supported from time to time—can be changed to deal with the problem. Resolution 1284 is a proper, diplomatic response by the international community to try to further the endgame to which the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) referred earlier.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As one who stood on the mountains of Iraq and Iran in 1991, and saw the hapless Kurds trying to flee Saddam Hussein's helicopter gunships, I cannot doubt the trust that they put in the patrolling of the airspace: they never want those things to happen to them again. I know no Iraqi Kurd or Shi'ite who wants an end to the no-fly zones. People forget that ethnic cleansing, torture, and execution are daily occurrences in Iraq. No one who watched the parade of military might, lasting five hours, which took place in Baghdad recently under Saddam Hussein's supervision, could minimise the extent of the threat that the regime poses to the safety of the world.

Although I agree with the policy on no-fly zones because we have a right to protect the safety of our aircrew, the sanctions regime needs overhauling. May I commend to my right hon. Friend the report on sanctions of the Select Committee on International Development? It proposed smarter sanctions, which, if adopted, would mean that the regime would not get away with its current actions. It is a disgrace that allies such as Turkey allow 800 lorries a day to cross the border without checking their contents. Those lorries return laden with oil. The sanctions regime needs overhauling—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady has taken far too much time.

Mr. Hoon: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's consistent and well-balanced approach to a difficult issue and her efforts to highlight it reasonably and thoughtfully. I shall re-examine the Select Committee's recommendations.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is it not the case that, although Saddam Hussein was isolated internationally 10 years ago, the American-British action is currently isolated? Does it not worry the Secretary of State that a regime as murderous as that of Saddam Hussein can gather international prestige and support? Does that not suggest that there must be a better way of approaching the matter? Will the Secretary of State inform hon. Members of any observations and suggestions about the American-British action that he has received from members of the Security Council?

Mr. Hoon: I simply do not recognise the world that the hon. Gentleman describes. I cannot think of any country that regards Iraq as having "prestige", to use his word. The international community's position was set out in resolution 1284, which is supported by a range of international opinion. If Saddam Hussein chose to accept it, it could lead to Iraq's restoration to the international community.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State accept that there should be some consistency in policy in the region? In that context, can he explain the reason for his belief that he has the legal authority to bomb Iraq while uttering no criticism of Turkey for its frequent military actions against Kurdish people, incursions into Iraq and denial of Kurdish people's human rights? Similarly, there is no condemnation of, let alone action against, Israel's development of weapons of mass destruction, which is well known, and equally contrary to any United Nations resolution.

Mr. Hoon: I have set out the position in international law on the justification of no-fly zones in northern and southern Iraq. That position does not apply to Turkish action or to

circumstances anywhere in the world, except in the case of the grave humanitarian consequences that we could reasonably anticipate if we did not patrol in north and south Iraq. We can say that because of past events, which substantiate our concerns for the future.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): No one envies the Secretary of State his difficulties in framing a policy—difficulties that were evidenced by his problems in replying to the question of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). However, does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the longer the Anglo-American strategy of no-fly zones continues, based on legal authority to prevent a grave humanitarian crisis, the flakier it becomes while it is difficult to establish a direct link between the no-fly zones and the stability of the Kurdish autonomous zone and the condition of the Shi'a people in the south? The thesis of the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) almost needs to be tested for Anglo-American strategy to continue through military action on the ground. Does the Secretary of State accept that this cannot continue for ever as an Anglo-American military strategy unsupported by anyone else and with no other strategy in view?

Mr. Hoon: That might have been an interesting intellectual analysis if the hon. Gentleman had not reached a rather lame conclusion. We are considering not a military strategy, but a strategy for ensuring the prevention of a grave humanitarian crisis in the northern and southern no-fly zones. There would be no need to resort to military action if our aircraft were not attacked when fulfilling that humanitarian responsibility. We responded to protect those aircraft, and to allow them to continue to protect people on the ground. That is not a military strategy in the sense that the hon. Gentleman describes.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that intelligence information suggests that biological weapons, which we know Saddam Hussein will use without compunction against the Kurdish people, are currently being manufactured? Does not that underline the necessity for us to get back to a proper inspection regime? In the absence of such a regime coming into force, we cannot feel a sense of safety for the people on the ground, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) mentioned, or for other nations.

Mr. Hoon: Without in any way wishing to confirm the premise of my hon. Friend's observation, I certainly agree that it is important to have an effective inspection regime. That is why we worked so hard to incorporate such a regime in resolution 1284. We must have the strongest suspicions about what Saddam Hussein is trying to do inside Iraq, given his previous history. In those circumstances, it is right that we should be allowed an inspection before relaxing the sanctions in any way.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): The Secretary of State mentioned support from Kuwait and from the international community for UN resolutions. However, if the position on the bombing is as clear in international law as he suggests, and the logic of that bombing is as clear as he suggests, why does he think that international support for that bombing has been non-existent?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that it has been non-existent. I have set out the reasons why it is necessary for us to protect our aircrew while they are performing a humanitarian task over the northern and southern no-fly zones. That remains clearly justifiable in international law.

BILL PRESENTED

Register of Drug Trafficking Offenders

Mr. Desmond Browne, supported by Fiona Mactaggart, Ms Sandra Osborne, Mr. John Robertson, Mr. Jim Murphy, Mr. Eric Joyce and Mr. David Stewart, presented a Bill to amend the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 to establish a register of drug trafficking offenders; to prescribe the circumstances in which, and by whom, the register may be consulted; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 March, and to be printed [Bill 50].

Orders of the Day

Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill *[Lords]*

Order for Second Reading read.

6.42 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Mr. David Lock): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill seeks to clarify two points arising out of the Access to Justice Act 1999. It has become apparent that the powers taken in that Act are likely to be insufficient to maintain the current levels of legal assistance available to those involved in criminal investigations and proceedings. It is essential to remedy that so that we can bring in the criminal defence service. I want to place on record my gratitude for the support that the Bill has received from all parties in the other place, and I hope that it will not be contentious today.

First, there is a doubt that the interaction of sections 13 and 14 of the Access to Justice Act allows for advice and assistance to take the form of advocacy in certain proceedings. Secondly, the Bill would ensure that advice and assistance were available to those involved in criminal proceedings, rather than only to those involved in criminal investigations.

Criminal legal aid is currently governed by the Legal Aid Act 1988, which makes it possible for those involved in criminal proceedings or investigations to receive advice and assistance, including limited representation in court or in certain other hearings. That is known as advice by way of representation, or ABWOR, which is commonly used in a magistrates court at first hearing. The Government always intended that that important form of limited representation should continue to be available when the relevant provisions of the Access to Justice Act were brought into force on 2 April 2001. These provisions replace criminal legal aid with representation orders from the new criminal defence service. The criminal defence service is to be administered by the Legal Services Commission, which is the successor to the Legal Aid Board.

During the drafting of the detailed secondary legislation necessary to support the new criminal defence service scheme, my officials raised doubts as to whether the Access to Justice Act achieved all that was intended. As hon. Members may recall, the Access to Justice Bill was amended considerably during its passage through this House and another place in response to issues raised by hon. Members on both sides of the House. The original draft of the Bill would have maintained the provision of advice by way of representation. One inadvertent result of those amendments—which was not spotted by anyone on either side in either House at the time—appears to be that the continued provision of limited representation in those circumstances would probably not be possible.

The Bill therefore clarifies the extent of the Legal Services Commission's duty to fund advice and assistance as part of the new criminal defence service from April. The limited form of representation for which the Bill provides will be known as advocacy assistance, and it will be the basis of the court duty solicitor scheme. That scheme provides that, when an individual is remanded in custody or when there is risk of imprisonment, a duty solicitor at court can give advice and representation at the first hearing. The benefit of the scheme is that vulnerable individuals will be properly represented. However, the criminal justice system as a whole will benefit as delay will be avoided in cases in which there is no time for the individual to apply for a full representation order—formerly criminal legal aid, as I have mentioned.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that clause 1(2) provides for section 13(1) of the Access to Justice Act 1999 to have retrospective effect, will the Minister explain the significance of that retrospection in practical terms? It would be helpful if he would provide an example. Will he also tell the House whether—and if so, to what extent—the policy has public expenditure implications?

Mr. Lock: I shall certainly deal with the retrospective nature of the Bill in relation to amendments made in another place. If the hon. Gentleman will give me a moment to deal with the substance of the Bill, I shall come to the retrospective parts in due course.

Mr. Bercow: And the costs?

Mr. Lock: I shall indeed deal with the costs.

The second point that the Bill addresses is to ensure that advice and assistance is available for those involved in criminal proceedings as well as in investigations. Section 13 of the Access to Justice Act refers only to investigations. It is arguable that once an individual appears in court he is no longer under investigation, so the Bill clarifies that point.

Since the Bill was published, the Government have introduced three amendments on Report during its progress through the House of Lords. The effect of the amendments taken together is to allow the Bill, on enactment, to have retrospective effect, as the hon. Gentleman just mentioned. Amendment No. 1 provides that the Access to Justice Act will be read as though it had always been amended by this Bill. Amendment No. 2 provides that secondary legislation made under the powers in section 13(1) of the Access to Justice Act may also have retrospective effect, and amendment No. 3 changes the commencement date of the Bill. There is no longer any need for the Bill to commence on 2 April, and it will commence on the day on which it receives Royal Assent.

The reason why the Bill needs to have retrospective effect is—*[Interruption.]* I encourage the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) to listen to the answer to his question. Originally, it was envisaged that the Bill would receive Royal Assent in time for its provisions to be in force before the criminal defence service was introduced on 2 April 2001. In practice, that meant that it needed to obtain Royal Assent by 9 March. That would have allowed time to make the secondary legislation, using the power in the amended section 13 of the Access to Justice Act, to maintain the current levels of legal assistance available to those involved in criminal investigations and proceedings.

However, concern was raised that we might not be able to guarantee Royal Assent by the deadline of 9 March. That would have resulted in a lacuna in which

the powers under the unamended section 13 of the Access to Justice Act were thought to be insufficient to maintain the current levels of legal assistance. For that reason, the Bill was amended so as to have retrospective effect, ensuring that there would be no such lacuna. Any secondary legislation will also be capable of having retrospective effect.

I hope that the Bill will complete its progress in good time and that the introduction of retrospectivity will prove to have been over-cautious, in which case no harm will have been done. However, if the House of Commons business managers cannot accommodate the same swift passage, this action will remove the possibility of gaps in our provision of legal support to those facing criminal charges.

I am very grateful to the Opposition for their support in the other place for the principle of retrospectivity, which was endorsed by the shadow Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): We have yet to reach the programme motion, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I hope that you will allow me to ask a question based on its content. Should the Bill be given a Second Reading—and the more I hear of what the Minister has to say, the more doubt I have about that—the Committee proceedings are envisaged to end on 8 March. As there must also be a Report stage and Third Reading, and not least the possibility of the Bill moving between here and the other place, what will happen if the general election should intervene before it can receive Royal Assent?

Mr. Lock: The timing of a general election is entirely a matter for the Prime Minister. We are to debate the programme motion following Second Reading. Given that this is a one clause Bill of extremely limited purview, and that it has caused no controversy so far—although I recognise that the right hon. Gentleman may want to change that—I hope that the Committee stage may not take the full time allowed for in the motion. Should it do so, the matter will come back on Report in accordance with that motion.

I am grateful to Lord Renton, who said that we had advanced "valid and strong reasons" for supporting the retrospective provisions introduced as an amendment. I hope that hon. Members will agree that this is an important Bill, clearing up any doubt about whether the Legal Services Commission will have the power to fund advice and assistance, as was originally intended.

As the provisions will merely continue the duty solicitor scheme as currently operating, they do not in themselves have any public expenditure implications.

Mr. Bercow: My ears prick up, and I am immediately suspicious at the words "in themselves". How are we to interpret that? Could it mean that there may be a public expenditure connotation by some other means? It might not be obnoxious, but we should know about it.

Mr. Lock: The expression "in themselves" was meant to refer to the limited effect of the Bill, which merely allows the duty solicitor scheme to continue as currently operating, and as all parties intended it to operate, after the introduction of the criminal defence service on 2 April.

I hope that the House will agree that this limited but important Bill should have a smooth and speedy passage and reach the statute book before the Access to Justice Act 1999 comes into force in April. I commend it to the House.

6.53 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The Bill arises from the unintended consequences of the relationship between sections 13 and 14 of the Access to Justice Act 1999. The junior Minister and his counterpart in the other place readily acknowledge those consequences, but they have not acknowledged that this little Bill is itself a direct consequence, unintended no doubt, of the Government's decision to crash through the Access to Justice Bill in 1998 and 1999 without thinking seriously about the problems that could arise. The 1999 Act is a Christmas tree that allows the Lord Chancellor to aggregate to himself 37 powers to make secondary legislation, the effects of which we are now having to correct.

Mr. Forth: I agree that this is a good example of how the Government handle their business in both Houses of Parliament. We are being expected to nod through the correction of an error caused in large part by their mishandling.

Mr. Garnier: Indeed. The problem is that if we do not correct the error, a considerable number of people will be disadvantaged and denied access to justice.

The Government fancifully called the original legislation the Access to Justice Act. My view is that it should be called the Denial of Access to Justice Act, and the Bill demonstrates why. Under the Legal Aid Act 1988, the initial advice and assistance available to those facing criminal proceedings includes limited support in court. By contrast, it is unlikely that section 13 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 will now allow the Legal Services Commission, via the criminal defence service, to fund advocacy services in situations such as making a bail application or representing an accused person who is at risk of being imprisoned. Equally, it may well inhibit the representation of someone at risk of being imprisoned for failure to pay a fine or obey a court order.

Those are injustices that the Bill is, sadly, needed to correct, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is entirely correct to draw to our attention the deficiency of the original Act and the arrogant and high-handed way in which the Government introduce important legislation.

Help granted in accordance with section 14 and schedule 3 of the 1999 Act will no longer be available to individuals in the circumstances covered by the existing assistance by way of representation—ABWOR—arrangements to which the Minister referred, which form the basis of the duty solicitor scheme. The Act fails to provide assistance in many of the areas in which it is currently available, thus derogating from existing individual rights.

Moreover, the rights concerned are almost certainly protected by article 6(1) of the European convention on human rights, with which we were assured at the time of its enactment, the 1999 Act would conform. It is perhaps instructive to remind ourselves that it was the current Defence Secretary who gave us that assurance here, and no less august a personage than the Lord Chancellor who did so in the other place.

Mr. Bercow: That is all right, then.

Mr. Garnier: One would like to think that it was all right, but unfortunately the Government have now

[Mr. Garnier]

realised that the 1999 Act does not comply with the convention, so we need this two clause Bill to ensure that it does. I notice that on this occasion it is the junior Minister, who is here today, who has put his reputation on the line by saying that the Bill complies.

Mr. Forth: What reputation?

Mr. Garnier: Reputation and self-esteem need not be the same thing.

Now that these regrettable defects have been disclosed to us, it is right to correct them as quickly as possible. I take on board the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham about the retrospective nature of the Bill, but now that my hon. Friend has heard the Minister's explanation, I hope that he will be reassured. Had I thought for a moment that an error would have been made or an injustice done to the integrity of the legislation by introducing retrospectivity, I would have been the first to complain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst may have something to say on the matter, but it is probably right that the Bill will have received Royal Assent by 2 April. An error of this magnitude serves to amplify the Opposition's frequently expressed concerns about the quality of representation that the public will receive from the criminal defence service. Those are directed in particular at the proposals to establish a salaried criminal defence service.

During the passage of the Access to Justice Bill, the Lord Chancellor envisaged a salaried service playing a role only where there was clear evidence that the private sector was unable to provide in a particular location services of an acceptable quality and quantity. I want to be assured, as did other speakers on the subject in the other place, that before establishing salaried defence lawyers in a particular location, a proper cost-benefit analysis will be undertaken so as to compare the merits of such an initiative with the alternatives available through the private practising profession.

The Minister, more than anybody else in Government, must be aware that there is practically a state of war between the Law Society and the Government and his Department over the funding of the fee structure behind the legal aid system for solicitors practising in criminal law. As I understand it, the Law Society has advised its members to boycott any agreements with the Government in respect of criminal representation work.

I hope that the Minister will be able to tell us that, for once, he is taking a rather less aggressive and more sensible attitude towards the complaints of lawyers who find that the Government's activities are wholly unconducive to the provision of justice. I trust that he will be able to assure me that he has every intention of respecting the guarantee in section 15(4) of the 1999 Act that no one can be compelled to be represented by a salaried lawyer employed by the criminal defence service.

We had a great deal of hot air, if I may say so, from the Home Secretary earlier this afternoon, when he was thumping on about what the Government have done and intend to do about the criminal justice system. More to the point, the Bill demonstrates how easy it is for a high-handed, careless and thoughtless Government to get things wrong. This little Bill demonstrates a whole host of faults that we could find with the Government. I am delighted that they have at last seen the error of their ways and are bringing the legislation forward so that the original legislation can comply with the European convention on human rights. I trust that they will in future be rather more humble when it comes to trying to force their legislation on to the House of Commons.

7.2 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): It is uncontroversial to say that the old advice by way of representation scheme was useful. It was a cheap and relatively informal method of providing a limited degree of assistance in certain circumstances. It would be unfortunate if it turned out that similar assistance by way of advocacy was not available under the Access to Justice Act 1999, and for that reason, in the other place and here, we shall support the Bill.

It would be wrong if the category of those entitled under section 13 of the 1999 Act were not widened to include those subject to criminal proceedings. We welcome that change—individuals subject to criminal proceedings will be covered by this assistance, as well as those under investigation or subject to investigation.

The Government intend that in future at least some of this work will be done by their salaried defender service. Along with the Conservative party, we strongly opposed, as a matter of principle, the introduction of salaried defenders. There were many good reasons of principle for doing so, not least conflict of interest. That the state should be prosecutor, defender and judge in its own cause is alien to us and to anyone in the House. *[Interruption.]* It is anathema, as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) says.

Will the Minister confirm that if the Government introduce a salaried defender service, defendants will always be able to choose either a lawyer from private practice or a state defender? We had long debates during the passage of the Access to Justice Bill, as it then was, about such a choice. It was the contention of the then Minister—now Secretary of State for Defence—that choices made by individuals should be irrevocable. There was a lot of debate at the time about the unfairness of that attitude. If an individual who was under arrest at 4 o'clock in the morning made a choice, and then, having sobered up 12 hours later, wanted to choose another defender—perhaps a private practice defender—should he or she be bound by that first choice? I hope that the Minister will be able to give us some comfort tonight on that point.

Mr. Lock: Is the hon. Gentleman asking for a wider guarantee on choice of lawyer than that contained in section 15(4) of the Access to Justice Act 1999, which guarantees that no person shall be required to accept a salaried defender? If so, will he formulate precisely what he seeks?

Mr. Burnett: I am asking the Minister whether, if a defendant chooses at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning to be assisted by a salaried defender, that individual—in the space of one or two days or up to a week—will be able to change that choice, removing instructions from the salaried defender in due course and placing them with a private practitioner, or, for that matter, vice versa?

The unfortunate irrevocable nature of the initial choice caused strong debate in the House when the Access to Justice Bill was debated.

Another point that caused some discussion at that stage and to which an adequate answer was never really given concerned which Department of State would operate the state defender system. Will the Minister confirm that if a state defender system is set up it will never come under the aegis of the same Department as the Crown Prosecution Service?

I understand that there is a Scottish pilot scheme for the state defender system. I believe—it has been reported to me, in any event—that its operating costs are well in excess of budget. Will the Minister confirm that, and will he confirm the extent of the excess over budget? Will he also confirm that the alternative state defender system is likely to be more cost-effective and provide more value for money than the system already provided by private practice?

7.8 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I rise with some trepidation, but I wish to speak for two reasons. First, I think that matters of justice and the law are too important to be left to lawyers exclusively. Secondly, I spent an extremely instructive day last week at my local magistrates court in Frome talking to the practitioners who are engaged in such work about the situation that they see developing. I must say that one reason for my visit was my hope that we will still have a local magistrates court in the foreseeable future. I have grave doubts about the policies being pursued by the Lord Chancellor's Department on the smaller courts.

I was struck by salient points made by solicitors with whom I talked about the consequences for their profession of the Bill and the Access to Justice Act 1999. I do not dissent from the views expressed by either my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) or the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). Like them, I welcome this correction to the 1999 Act, even if it is extraordinary that the House should be asked to correct that legislation. A little humility from Ministers would be entirely appropriate, although we can, perhaps, expect nothing of the sort from the Lord Chancellor: we seem to have developed the new maxim that being Lord Chancellor means never having to say sorry.

There is an extraordinary lacuna in the Bill on the critical point of representation of people in legal proceedings. It is extraordinary that the Government should have certified that the 1999 Act conformed with the Human Rights Act 1998 and then found such an omission.

My first point echoes what my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon had to say about salaried defence lawyers. It would be entirely inappropriate for the state to sponsor investigation through the police, prosecution through the Crown Prosecution Service and defence through a salaried defence lawyer. It would be inappropriate for all those people to be principally responsible to a Minister. That would not transparently represent justice done, and we should be careful about proceeding towards overall nationalisation of the processes of justice.

My more important point is about how the Bill will work in practice from 2 April. The Parliamentary Secretary in the other place made the point on Second Reading there that the principal practitioners who will provide the duty solicitor service at our magistrates courts and police stations will remain private practitioners. He said that 3,000 or more firms are engaged in that process. All would be well if all of them remained involved, but, having spoken with Mr. Killah and Mr. Bannister at my local court last week, and having received written submissions from Mr. Howlett and Mr. Greenwood, I do not believe that they will. In some parts of the country, particularly outside the conurbations and cities, we face a grave situation from 2 April.

As the hon. and learned Member for Harborough said, the clear advice that solicitors are receiving from the Law Society is that they should not sign the new contracts being offered by the criminal defence service. That call is clearly being heeded by a great many—if not the majority—of the solicitors in private practice who are providing the services that the Bill addresses.

Unless something changes, on 2 April not a single solicitor in my constituency will be providing the service. There will be but one in Bath, where every other solicitor has signed a declaration saying that he or she will not sign the contracts. There will be no solicitors in Bristol to provide services under this franchise. The position is grave.

It would not be appropriate for me to go into the details of the contract while we are on Second Reading, but solicitors have made good points about the bureaucracy involved—I accept that it is less than it was originally, but it remains significant—about liability, and about unilateral changes that may be made by the criminal defence service but not by solicitors' practices. The level of remuneration has also been mentioned, although I do not believe that it is a prime consideration for many solicitors who are essentially vocational in their attachment to a rather unenviable area of legal work.

Not a single solicitor who has written or spoken to me has questioned the need for some regulation, for audit or for a contract. They simply say that what is on the table at present is not acceptable. Ministers have previously hidden their intentions behind the impression that they are dealing with fat-cat lawyers, those whom we naturally revile and who are making themselves rich at the expense of the defendant or the taxpayer through the legal aid system. That is transparently not the case, however, for those solicitors in small magistrates courts who, in situations in which not many of us would wish to be, act as duty solicitors who are carried by the other members of their partnerships who do much more lucrative work elsewhere in the legal system.

I have been given a clear understanding that unless matters change, people will flee criminal work, telling their partners that they were wrong to cross-subsidise criminal work with civil or other work.

Mr. Lock: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the current debate between the Legal Services Commission and the solicitors considering signing the criminal contract has nothing to do with fat-cat lawyers. It is about solicitors providing important public services, paid for by the taxpayer, to vulnerable clients for a modest return. It is about important services and the controls and contractual structure necessary to ensure a guarantee of quality for both the commission and the client as well as a proper, though not excessive, return for the solicitor. We must get

[Mr. Lock]

that balance right. I have spoken many times on this matter and have never raised the issue of fat-cat lawyers in connection with the contractual dispute. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be reassured by that.

Mr. Heath: I am grateful for that helpful intervention, but the Minister has simply underlined the fact that no matter how far advanced the negotiations are, they have not produced a satisfactory result. He merely highlights the fact that we may, in only a month and a half, have a serious problem with the administration of criminal justice in magistrates courts outside the conurbations. If so, Ministers will find themselves in a great deal of difficulty—perhaps at an extremely inopportune moment. They will face people who are properly addressing their concerns through the Human Rights Act 1998, such as prisoners who have not been properly represented. We have before us the makings of a complete breakdown in our system of local justice, a system that we prize and which it is absolutely essential to maintain.

The Bill restores advice by way of representation—so-called advocacy assistance—and that goes some way towards ensuring an unbroken maintenance of the traditional right of local representation. However, that can be mediated only by an effective local defence service, and there is a danger that that will not exist within the space of a few brief weeks. Ministers must address the problem urgently: it may not yet have hit the headlines, but it assuredly will do so across most of the country that is outside large cities and away from large practices. We may face an irrevocable breakdown in relations with the important professionals working within the local justice system.

7.20 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I have been a Member of the House long enough to know that, when a Minister sidles up to the Dispatch Box, assures us that a Bill is small and technical but important and then claims that he has the support of the Opposition, those are very good reasons to be extremely suspicious of what on earth is going on. As we listened to the rather inadequate explanations offered by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, of this allegedly small, technical but very important Bill, my suspicious were strengthened.

In my notes of the Minister's remarks, I identified several headings: provenance, retrospection, confusion and public expenditure. Coming to the debate as a layman, gratuitously sticking my nose into esoteric legal matters, I am happy to say that I was greatly assisted by the explanatory notes not only for this Bill but for the Access to Justice Bill, which I found most helpful when I tried to satisfy myself as to what on earth we are attempting to do.

I shall trot briefly through my headings, with some references to the explanatory notes, before analysing the Bill itself. I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I shall attempt to make all my remarks strictly relevant.

On provenance, the Minister was forced to admit, under cross-examination from my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), that the Bill turns out to be all too good an example of a measure that has arisen from an ill-considered piece of prior legislation—the Access to Justice Act 1999. As the Minister confessed, that measure needed a large number of amendments, which were made on the hoof—the Minister did not use that expression, but I paraphrase him in order to be helpful. The attitude taken by the Labour Government to the legislative process has become all too familiar: they start with an ill-considered Bill; it is hacked around, amended and altered in another place; it then returns to this place and, usually with wholly inadequate time, is amended or—as the Government would put it—further improved. Thus, we have a Bill that seeks to correct a lacuna—perhaps even lacunae—brought about by the Government's own handling of the prior legislation.

That would be bad enough but, as a direct result of all that, we are being asked to accept the worrying element of retrospection that has entered the process, which we are told is essential. Why has that element arisen? The key is helpfully given—as ever—in the Bill's explanatory notes, paragraph 4 of which helpfully states:

"It was always the intention that such limited representation would continue to be available in the same circumstances."

The Government have told us with rare and almost disarming honesty that they had intended something to happen under the prior legislation, but had not quite managed to deliver it. No doubt that was due to the rush of ill-considered amendments made to that measure.

The Government go on to tell us why we are considering the Bill:

"There is some doubt that the interaction of sections 13 and 14 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 allows for this limited form of representation."

Having confessed to their inadequacies, they explain:

"The Bill seeks to remedy those doubts by amending section 13."

The worrying part is the statement that

"As it is uncertain whether the Bill will receive Royal Assent before 2nd April 2001"—

that is indeed uncertain, as I shall discuss in a moment in relation to the possible timetable—

"the Bill is drafted to have retrospective effect to that date."

The Government are telling us that there has been a mistake; there is a lacuna that they want to correct. The implication is that the measure has been given the lordly stamp of approval in another place, so we do not have to look too closely at it. We now have future retrospection entering the legislative process. That may be unique—it may be a novelty—but for the Government to say that they are introducing provisions that will have retrospective effects just in case what they thought would happen does not happen seems to introduce a multiplicity of doubt and uncertainty to the process that cannot do us, or it, any good.

Mr. Bercow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the use of the words "there is some doubt" comes as near to an admission of ministerial fallibility as we are likely to encounter during this Parliament? Does he further agree that, if Ministers have reached that judgment on the strength of advice from Government lawyers, it would be helpful on this occasion to breach the convention that such advice is not published so that we can see it for ourselves? Alternatively, if Ministers have come to that view as the result of outside representations, may we be told from whom those representations have come?

Mr. Forth: "In your dreams" is all I can say to my hon. Friend. The day that that happens we shall all be so

astonished that proceedings may momentarily grind to a halt—although they will not do so on this occasion, I assure you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps, from now on, the Minister should be known as "Doubtful Lock", or something of that kind.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that we are witnessing a rare admission of near fallibility, but I regret that, in my interpretation of what is happening, that admission is altogether spoiled by the Minister's telling the House that he really does not expect us to take much interest in the measure as it is a relatively small matter; that he expects it to be nodded through quickly; and—as I shall discuss when we come on to the debate on the timing of the measure—that the Government expect it to be completed without too much fuss, in spite of the fact that we are correcting a measure that arose from exactly the same approach on a previous occasion.

The Minister compounds the felony by saying that, because the previous Act was made a mess by rushing it through with too many amendments, he is asking the House to rush through another measure. The correction of those errors is to be rushed through with as little scrutiny as possible. That is not a good harbinger of success.

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, especially as I was unable to take part earlier in the debate. He raises an extremely important point. Does he understand from the Minister's explanation that, if the Bill is enacted and if regulations are made under it, actions that are currently unlawful will be rendered lawful, or will it be only those actions that take place after 2 April, when the Bill has not yet become law, that become lawful?

Mr. Forth: My right hon. and learned Friend challenges me to explain what the Minister thought he was saying. That challenge may defeat even me. In a genuine attempt to help my right hon. and learned Friend, I can only draw his attention to the explanatory notes, which state:

"As it is uncertain whether the Bill will receive Royal Assent before 2nd April 2001 (when that section is commenced)"—

that is section 13—

"the Bill is drafted to have retrospective effect to that date."

I take that to mean that the retrospection would start on 2 April 2001; it would not have effect before that date. That is what I was referring to when I talked of the novel concept of future retrospection. I must confess that it defeats me. That is as much help as I can offer my right hon. and learned Friend, but I am sure that the Minister will clarify all when he winds up this little debate at a later hour. The point puzzles me as much as it does my right hon. and learned Friend.

Talking of dates—as we now are because the date is mentioned in the explanatory notes—I do not want to pre-empt the impassioned debate that we shall hold shortly on the programme motion, except to note that it is highly relevant at this stage. That is because we are in the rather unusual position that it is widely assumed that an election may be pending. The House must take account of such facts. We cannot operate in a bubble and pretend that nothing is happening outside this place. There is considerable speculation as to the possibility of an early Prorogation, Dissolution of the House and election. That is material in this case because, if we agree to the Bill's Second Reading tonight, its consideration in Committee would end on 8 March under the timetable that the Minister suggests in the programme motion.

If I am lucky enough to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the debate on the programme motion, I want to say something about that date, but let us take it as given at the moment. After that date, Report and Third Reading would have to take place and, if the Bill were to be amended—given the mess we are already in, amendments may be required in Committee, even to this Bill—it might be necessary for the matter to return to another place. Self-evidently, there might not be enough time, especially if an election were to take place on 5 April, one of the most widely canvassed dates, and with the postponement of the countryside rally announced early today, surely an even stronger runner.

I repeat my earlier challenge to the Minister: what does he think will happen if Dissolution of this Parliament occurs before the completion of even the accelerated timetable that he suggests? Even his retrospection will not save him then, because he will not get it without Royal Assent. Against a background of what may be much greater events, he is attempting to put us under unreasonable time pressure given the Bill's desired effect, as he has put it. Thus the challenge, which was echoed by what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) said earlier: if those circumstances effectively leave a group of people without legal representation, what does the Minister have to say to us and them?

Why has the Minister waited until now to introduce this allegedly very important Bill, with its unreasonable timetable, given the backdrop of a possible election? Unless he is extraordinarily fortunate, all those matters seem to conspire against him, and the lacuna that he seeks to remedy under the Bill will remain if Royal Assent is not given. I hope that he will be candid with us about those matters. He tried to take refuge behind an old shibboleth, saying that he would not speculate on whether the election will be held soon because that is a matter for the Prime Minister. We all know that, but the Minister owes it to the legislative process and to the people who may well go without representation unless the Bill is passed to explain exactly what he envisages will happen if the process that I describe occurs.

The matter appears to revolve around a confusion that has arisen between the terms "investigations" and "proceedings". I confess that the fact that I am not a lawyer will prove a considerable handicap, but my layman's reading of the Bill suggests that the difficulty has arisen because of the difference in wording between sections 12(1) and 13(1)(b) of the original Access to Justice Act 1999. Throughout section 12 reference is made to

"criminal investigations or criminal proceedings",

yet the word "proceedings" does not appear in section 13, which is unhelpful. If my reading is correct, that is where the matter originates, but what puzzles me is why that element of doubt has arisen, and I should appreciate the Minister's guidance in due course. Sections 12 and 13 seem to contain what I shall call wide savings provisions. Section 12(2)(g) refers to

"such other proceedings concerning an individual, before any such court or other body, as may be prescribed"—

[Mr. Forth]

the good old catch-all phrase with which we are increasingly familiar in such Acts. Section 13(2)(g) coincidentally refers to the commission

"doing anything else which it considers appropriate for funding advice and assistance."

Mr. Lock: Perhaps I can assist the right hon. Gentleman. If he turns to section 14 of the 1999 Act, he will see that subsection (1) provides for the grant of a representation in specific criminal proceedings. That is the reference to criminal proceedings. The right hon. Gentleman helpfully refers the House to the fact that section 13(2)(g) provides for the funding of advice and assistance. However, it is not clear from section 13(1) or, indeed, from section 13(2)(g), whether that advice and assistance includes advocacy in a case that is not subject to investigation because it has become a matter of proceedings before a court.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Minister for that helpful explanation, which takes us some way further in satisfying ourselves about the nature of the lacuna that he and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire described earlier.

Mr. Bercow: I hope that my right hon. Friend will not err on the side of unnecessary and excessive generosity in this matter because, although the Minister might well now have an extremely effective grasp of the Access to Justice Act 1999, it is a great pity that he and his hon. Friends, especially the current Secretary of State for Defence, did not have such a grasp at the time. Will my right hon. Friend clear up the confusion that still exists in my mind as to exactly when it occurred to the Government that the 1999 Act might not achieve what it was intended to achieve and when exactly therefore it was decided to introduce this supposedly modest measure?

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The Minister coyly failed to give us that information; it has not yet emerged, but it is crucial because it relates to the matter of timing, to which I referred a moment ago. If the matter had been identified earlier and the Government had been able properly to introduce this corrective Bill in another place and then here, the difficulties might still have arisen, but not in the same way. The Minister would not be in the position in which he now finds himself of expecting, with the arrogance that we have come to expect of the Government, that the Bill will be rushed or nodded through with scant regard under the timetable that the Government need to get themselves out of this hole. Had the matter been dealt with on a proper time scale at an earlier date, it would have been more certain and more measured, and proper scrutiny could have taken place, instead of which we now face the possibility of truncated consideration in Committee and the Bill's Third Reading and further stages at risk for the reasons that I have given. Perhaps, as a result of my hon. Friend's helpful intervention, the Minister will explain matters further. We might be more sympathetic to his request if he were prepared to tell us why the Bill has been introduced at this very late stage, putting him in such an embarrassing position.

I am grateful to the Minister for the further explanation that he has given as to the nature of the problem that we are seeking to remedy, but that only brings us to the intriguing reference in the explanatory notes to public expenditure, to which my hon. Friend referred earlier. Rather teasingly, paragraph 28 of the explanatory notes states:

"The Bill will not increase public expenditure."

That gives rise to another question: either the Bill is simply intended to validate the existing services or legal support given to people subject to criminal investigation or proceedings, or it is intended to give them something in addition.

I am not sure whether I can simply take as read the statement that the Bill will not increase public expenditure, because either the claims that were originally made when the 1999 Act was passed have not been fulfilled, or something additional will be provided if the Bill receives its Second Reading, in which case I should have thought that public expenditure would inevitably increase.

Mr. Lock: It may help to answer the right hon. Gentleman's question about public expenditure if I point out what would be likely to happen if the duty solicitor scheme were to be abandoned. In those circumstances, the defendants who have a right to representation would have their cases adjourned and would have to go to solicitors to seek a right to representation under section 14(1) of the 1999 Act in respect of individual cases. The cases would come back before the court on a later occasion and justice would be delayed. The overall cost to taxpayers would therefore probably be considerably higher.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful for the Minister's explanation. However, almost all the Members who have spoken in the debate have suggested that the answer depends, to put it crudely, on the relationship between the services provided by private and public sector sources. Our view of the Minister's analysis would depend rather more on the view that one takes of those relationships, which are not at all clear to me. I still have my doubts about the assertion in the explanatory notes:

"The Bill will not increase public expenditure".

However, I shall leave the matter at that. The Minister has provided his explanation and I shall leave it to others to judge whether it is the correct interpretation.

I have concluded my preamble and I now come to the Bill itself, in relation to which further explanation is required. I am keen—at least, initially—to read the text of the Bill literally to see whether it means what it says. Clause 1(1) states:

"Subsection (1) of section 13 of the Access to Justice Act 1999"—

the Act that we have been discussing—

"shall be treated as having been enacted with the substitution of the following for paragraph (b) and the words after it".

Does that literally mean what it says? Does that constitute the entirety of the remaining provisions in section 13, which appears to consist of more words than those simply in paragraph (b)? The wording of clause 1(1) is rather unusual. I seek clarification as to whether it refers to paragraph (b) only or to that paragraph and all the following words.

New section 13(1)(b) of the 1999 Act contains the words:

"in prescribed circumstances, for individuals who—

(i) are not within paragraph (a) but are involved in investigations which may lead to criminal proceedings".

I am again at a disadvantage in that I am not a lawyer, but I wonder whether that wording is sufficiently clear as to be reliable. The phrase "investigations which may lead" appears to be very vague and all-encompassing and, in some circumstances, that could lead to difficulties.

The same point applies to my reading of new paragraph (b)(2), which contains the words:

"are before a court or other body in such proceedings".

My legal friends and colleagues—and perhaps even the Minister—may well be able to reassure me that the term "or other body" is sufficiently clear and can be relied on not to open up what, on the face of it, could be a wide range of possibilities. As the whole point of the Bill is to provide the clarification and the reliability that patently did not appear in the 1999 Act, I wonder whether the words are sufficiently reliable for us to go forward with confidence and give the Bill a Second Reading.

Clause 1(2) provides the retrospective element in the Bill. It states:

"Regulations under subsection (1) of section 13 (as amended above) may include provision treating them as having come into force at the same time as that subsection."

That odd form of words gives us the future retrospection to which I referred earlier and which I have had difficulty getting my mind round.

Overall, I am worried not just by the lateness of the Bill's introduction or the speed that the Government are relying on to make it effective; that is bad enough. I have grave doubts as to whether its wording is sufficiently robust and reliable to do what it is intended to do. Given that the Bill is designed to correct earlier errors, one would have hoped and expected that it would be above and beyond suspicion. I do not believe that it is, and I am not yet satisfied that the retrospective element should be accepted as readily as the Minister suggests.

This allegedly small, technical and uncontroversial Bill is not all those things. Small it may look, but it has potentially wide ramifications. It carries within it many implications for the legislative process and for the Government's attitude to that process. The fact that the Bill has been introduced to correct the Government's earlier errors, which were caused by the speed at which they legislate and by the excessive number of amendments leads me to believe that the Bill requires much more scrutiny than the Government may have imagined. Its timetable may be more at risk than the Minister glibly suggested.

The House is right to give attention to such a Bill. I look forward very much to the Minister expanding on his introductory remarks as he seeks to reassure us on the matters that I have raised.

7.46 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I am grateful to have the opportunity to take part in the debate, and I repeat my apology for not having been present earlier. I wish to make just a couple of short points that are important to the way in which the country is governed—or, at least in part, significantly misgoverned.

The country is significantly misgoverned because legislation is rushed through. Legislation is often rushed even when we do not face the circumstances pertaining to this parliamentary Session, in which every Bill is being timetabled and in which much important criminal justice legislation is simply being put through in a time that is inadequate for its proper consideration. I know that perfectly well because, like my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins,) I am currently serving on the heavily truncated Committee stage of the Criminal Justice and Police Bill. That Bill will certainly not receive the scrutiny that it requires.

This Bill follows on from the Access to Justice Act 1999. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) has said in the past and as he probably said before I entered the Chamber, the 1999 Act was simply a legal Christmas tree—an expression that I had not heard before—on which it was possible to hang almost anything. On it are being hung the rights of the citizens of this country and their freedoms when they are brought before a court and charged with a criminal offence and their liberty is at risk of being removed by the court.

It is plain that this Bill was introduced because the need for the representation of the citizens in those circumstances was overlooked when the 1999 Act was passed. I do not blame the Minister for that. I was a junior Minister in the then Department of Health and Social Security and—happily, before I joined the Department—I know that mistakes were made in legislation and had to be corrected in what were colloquially known as the Social Security (Cock-up) (No. 1) and the Social Security (Cock-up) (No. 2) Bills. I would describe the present Bill as the Access to Justice (Cock-up) (No. 1) Bill.

It is right that mistakes should be corrected, but it is not right for corrections to made without our noting that errors occur when legislation is not properly scrutinised. That happens very often these days.

Mr. Garnier: Does my right hon. and learned Friend accept that this is what happens when Parliament, forced by a huge and thoughtless Government majority, allows Ministers to create legislation by secondary powers? He kindly referred to me and was very perceptive about what I said this evening—I did use the expression "Christmas tree". Such legislation is exactly what happens when Governments try to give themselves powers to make legislation off the field. Ministers run back to their Departments to draw up legislation, and they let through provisions that they might have decided against if they had thought about them and had they been debated on the Floor of the House.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: My hon. and learned Friend is absolutely right; that is exactly what happens. The country should sit up and take notice of the way in which it is being misgoverned. Another example of that misgovernment occurred this afternoon, and it is highly relevant to this aspect of criminal justice, which concerns the way in which people can be brought before the courts.

The criminal defence service is designed to reduce the standard of defence that is available to the citizen when he is charged with a crime. I see the Minister frowning at that suggestion, but if he is seriously saying that a salaried service will be the equivalent of the current service, he

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

needs to make his case. If the Government receive another term of office, as I hope they will not, and if what is being spun in the newspapers today becomes law—curiously, it did not find reflection in the Home Secretary's statement earlier—the citizen who has a right to receive representation under the criminal defence service will lose the right to be brought before a jury and will simply have a right to come before a legally qualified chairman and three lay magistrates, which is not the same.

It is wrong that the House is being asked to rush through legislation that fundamentally truncates both the rights of citizens who find themselves in the dock and the democratic rights of UK citizens to control our criminal justice system by their efforts as jurors, as they do in their hundreds of thousands every month.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): My right hon. and learned Friend is talking about rushing legislation through the House. Does he agree that on the first day back after a short recess, it may be relevant to recall that during that recess we had the revelation of the scandalous way in which the Lord Chancellor is using his time—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman is going far outside the scope of the Bill. The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), too, is concentrating rather more on the Act that is being amended than on the Bill itself.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: If I have concentrated too much on the Act rather than on the Bill that amends it, and if that is out of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I will attempt to step back into order.

I centre my remarks on the criminal defence service, which is the subject of the Bill. Its inadequacies have been shown up by the very need to introduce the Bill. The standard of representation that is available to someone who needs defence is an important matter of civil liberty. I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to have had the opportunity to take part in the debate and make that point. I hope that the Government will take to heart the point that rushing legislation through the House is not in our parliamentary tradition, and that if they receive another term of office, they will not do so again.

7.54 pm

Mr. Lock: This has been an interesting debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister requires the leave of the House to speak again.

Mr. Lock: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. With the leave of the House I will respond to the debate. As I am speaking for a second time, I shall be brief.

I am grateful to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) for his support for the Bill. He referred to the negotiations on the criminal contract and the criminal defence service which are taking place between the Legal Services Commission and the Law Society. Those negotiations are at an advanced stage. As a lawyer, the hon. and learned Gentleman knows that lawyers are skilled negotiators not only on behalf of their clients but on their own behalf, and one would expect them to exploit the position to their utmost advantage. I am confident that the contract that is available at present is fair. I am grateful to the firms of solicitors that have signed the contract to date, and we look forward to more firms signing in due course.

The hon. and learned Gentleman trotted out his usual attacks on the Access to Justice Act 1999. Of course, we do not know what his party proposes for criminal contracts, so we have no idea what the alternative is. In civil law, the alternative offered by the Opposition is to give £500 million back to the Treasury and entirely abolish civil legal aid, which would hardly create access to justice.

Mr. Garnier: If the Minister wishes to respond to the points that I made in the debate, I will be happy to listen to him. If he wishes to raise erroneous Aunt Sallies about another debate, he should confine his remarks to another place.

Mr. Lock: I appreciate that the hon. and learned Gentleman is embarrassed about his civil justice proposals, so I will not pursue the matter.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) raised a serious issue, unlike those hon. Members who spoke before him, when he referred to the independence of salaried lawyers. I am sure that he has read the remarks of the Canadian Bar Association which are set out in the Government's consultation paper on the establishment of the criminal defence service. The association said that it should be obvious that it is the fact of third-party payment, not the nature or form of that payment, that creates the potential conflict when the paymaster is the public purse. The hon. Gentleman rightly referred to concerns that a salaried lawyer employed by the state may lack independence compared with someone who receives money from the state but is in private practice.

The evidence from well-structured and well-funded salaried services around the world is extremely positive and shows that a mixed system provides not only value for money for the taxpayer but independent representation for the defendant. I refer the hon. Gentleman to the remarks of Judge Helen Halpert of the King county superior court, formerly of the Seattle municipal court. That experienced judge said:

> "Most judges, if they were offered the choice between an agency lawyer or a private lawyer, would choose the agency lawyer."

The independence of public staff defence lawyers, where they are well established and well financed, means that they are thoroughly committed to their clients.

I accept, of course, that there are examples of underfunded agency lawyers and staff lawyers in many Commonwealth countries who do not provide a good service. Comparing like with like, however, the evidence in favour of such a service is very strong. It is the fact of third-party payment, not whether that payment is made to someone who is employed or to someone who is self-employed, that makes the difference.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon made an important point about the choice of the defendant. I am sure that he saw our consultation paper on the issue, which raised a number of questions about the appropriate

cooling-off period. No decisions have been made on that. I hope that the hon. Gentleman took the opportunity to respond to the consultation and that we have therefore had the opportunity to hear his views, in addition to those voiced by others.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made—

Mr. Burnett: I made another point. I hope that the Minister can reassure the House that the Crown Prosecution Service and the state defender service will never come under the aegis of the same Department of state.

Mr. Lock: The hon. Gentleman did raise that point, on which I cannot reassure him other than by saying that the Government have no plans to do that. The proposals set out by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary earlier this afternoon plot a course for the future of the criminal justice system. They plainly envisage the separation of the departmental responsibilities of the CPS and defence services. I hope that that will remain the case. I believe that it is only right and proper that it should. However, one can never say never. A Government, possibly in the far distant future and of a different party, could form another view.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: In those circumstances, how can it be an objective of Government policy to ensure that an extra 100,000 prosecutions take place each year when that is matter not for the Home Secretary but for the Attorney-General?

Mr. Lock: If the right hon. and learned Gentleman looks at the document that was presented this afternoon, he will see that it is a result of the three Departments that are responsible for criminal justice working together. The document had to be presented to the House by one Department—in this case, the Home Office—but it covers the role played within the overall criminal justice system by departments that are responsible to the Home Office, and the role of my Department and that of the Attorney-General.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) was entertaining as always. Retrospection will be needed only if Royal Assent is granted after 2 April. The Bill's provisions on retrospection will not be required if Royal Assent is granted before 2 April. The right hon. Gentleman is perfectly right to say that no provisions will come into force if there is no Bill and that, therefore, there will be no provisions to which retrospection will apply. As the CDS comes into force on 2 April, it will have the financial consequences that I outlined. In those cases for which representation is required, a representation order will be needed under section 14. That is instead of utilising the duty solicitor provisions in section 13.

I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that it is in the interests of the operation of the criminal justice system that retrospection should not happen. He was right to say that the Bill arises out of a lacuna. This is not the first time that the matter has been brought before the House. I could not describe the Bill better than the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell), who eloquently spoke of taking forth legislation in similar circumstances as a junior Minister. It is in the interests of the criminal justice system to allow the matter to proceed smoothly.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst also asked about the meaning of clause 1(1). I assure him that it substitutes section 13(1)(b) with a new paragraph (b) and contains the words that will follow it. That is why the words

"and the assistance which the Commission may consider appropriate"

and so on are included.

Mr. David Heath: I rise only to remind the hon. Gentleman that he gave every impression that he was about to respond to my points when my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) intervened, and no more has been said on the matter.

Mr. Lock: The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome raised the issue of the independence of salaried defenders and the concerns raised by lawyers. I dealt with that when I responded to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon. He also asked whether lawyers would sign up to the contracts. Lawyers are experienced negotiators. They will negotiate in a tough manner, not only for their clients but for themselves. We are confident that the criminal contract is fair. We are grateful to the solicitors who have signed up to it and I am confident that the solicitors who are negotiating hard will recognise that the settlement on the table is fair. I hope that they will sign up to it; indeed, I expect them to.

Mr. Heath: I accept that a body of solicitors' firms across the country are negotiating in the terms that the Minister describes and will eventually sign up to a contract. However, having spoken face to face with a few solicitors who work in my area, I am convinced that they intend to leave criminal work completely as a result of the process—indeed, some have already done so. That is a loss to the criminal justice system.

Mr. Lock: I do not doubt the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's solicitor constituents. However, it is also true that solicitors in mixed practices often find that their private work is considerably more lucrative than public sector work has ever been—and than it would be appropriate for it to be. The proper comparator for lawyers who work for the state is the equivalent amount of money that they would get were they to engage in other work for the state at a comparable level of experience, stress and importance, and not the amount that they would achieve if their client were of sufficient means to be able to pay privately.

To that extent, I accept that in mixed practice firms, the solicitors who are successful in their private practice will generate higher fees than those who work in the public sector. If the hon. Gentleman's solicitor constituents are comparing the amount that they earn from the state with the amount that they would earn should they successfully obtain private work elsewhere at much higher rates, I understand that that would raise a concern. However, the contract that determines the amount that is available for the public sector financing of legal services is proper and fair.

The right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire suggested that the CDS was designed to reduce the quality of defence before a court. I entirely disagree. For the first time, the CDS will ensure that every

[Mr. Lock]

solicitor who is engaged in a contract has been through a quality assurance system. The state, which will be paying for the services, and the client, who will be receiving them, will be certain that they are being provided by a quality assured lawyer. That has never happened before. Merely qualifying and practising as a solicitor is not sufficient quality assurance to be able to offer services in every aspect of law. Those people who offer services in the criminal sector will have a criminal quality mark. That will reflect a significant improvement in quality, which I hope the right hon. and learned Gentleman welcomes.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: No matter what service is supplied, people have to go through some form of quality assurance procedure. That normally leads to as high a standard as is achieved when people have to compete with others who want to take the work from them. They have to demonstrate their competence month in, month out. It is left to the professional and the lay client to choose an advocate of suitable competence. Is there not a marked distinction between having no choice and simply providing a basic quality that is organised by the state, which is also paying what might well be a modest figure, and an open competitive system of the sort that we have enjoyed for so long?

Mr. Lock: I understand the points made. No, I do not accept that the market is king in this area. I believe that the quality assurance system is important.

The provisions are important. They will allow vulnerable individuals in court and in other hearings limited representation, thereby protecting their interests at a crucial stage, and will avoid delay. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill *[Lords]* (Programme)

8.11 pm

Mr. Lock: I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill *[Lords]*:

Standing Committee

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

2. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.

3. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 8th March.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at six o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at three o'clock on that day.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at four o'clock on that day.

6. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Lords messages

7. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any motion to vary or supplement this order for the purpose of allocating time to proceedings on consideration of any messages from the Lords, and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

The programme motion proposes that proceedings in Standing Committee be brought to a conclusion on 8 March. I consider that appropriate because it will allow up to four sittings during the week commencing 5 March. I am sure that even Conservative Members will agree that that should allow ample time to consider a Bill of this modest size and scope. Perhaps only one or two sittings will be required, but it is entirely for Opposition Members to use the time available to the best effect. Arrangements for the programming of later stages of the Bill will be decided by the House at a later time, in the light of experience in Committee.

I am sure that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) will want to make observations on this short Bill.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The hon. Gentleman just said that later stages will be regulated by the House at a later time. So far as I can see, paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the motion deal explicitly with Report and Third Reading.

Mr. Lock: Paragraph 4 does not provide for the day on which proceedings will be brought to a conclusion. Clearly, the date for Report will be fixed later. That is what I meant. Of course, the timing of Report is provided for by the paragraphs to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman referred, but arrangements for programming—

precisely when the Bill will come back to the House—will be decided in the light of experience in Committee. I commend the motion to the House.

8.12 pm

Mr. Garnier: The Minister's performance was useless. His arguments in favour of the motion suggested, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) pointed out, that he had not even read it.

The programme motion demonstrates the following: we have before us a small-minded, arrogant, paranoid Government who are infected by control freakery. Why cannot they let the Committee make up its own mind about how long it is appropriate for it to sit and consider the contents of the Bill? Large parts of the Access to Justice Act 1999 were not considered in Committee because matters were brought to a premature end. I really do despair of a Government who have reached the end of this Parliament by programming everything. It is high time that the Government grew up and let Parliament decide its own affairs.

8.14 pm

Mr. Burnett: We deprecate the use of programme motions. They are unnecessary and fly in the face of what should be parliamentary democracy. The Bill contains important matters which will be of interest to and have an impact on constituents of all Members of Parliament. Therefore, there should be an opportunity for the widest debate. The programme motion should be resisted, and we shall oppose it.

8.15 pm

Mr. Forth: We now go through this process properly with regard to each Bill before the House. We do so properly only in the sense that the Government have decreed that that will be the way in which legislation is dealt with in this House. The Minister's comments illustrate all too well, if somewhat embarrassingly, the fact that Ministers no longer bother to acquaint themselves with the content of motions in their name, and simply assume that such matters will be readily rubber-stamped by the House and dealt with peremptorily by the Government, with little regard to the circumstances or content of the Bill.

The Minister said that he assumes that matters can be properly dealt with. Let us remind ourselves that, at least under the terms of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3, we are talking about detailed scrutiny by a Committee of this House of a Bill that is to become the law of the land. The Minister has taken it on himself, as Ministers now routinely do, to say, "We, the Government, assume that you, the House of Commons, will require only a limited amount of time properly to scrutinise this piece of legislation." That is of course before the Government have had the benefit of hearing the debate on Second Reading. It was perfectly obvious that the Minister assumed that, because the Bill is relatively short and apparently has the support of Members of all parties in the other place, it could be dealt with rather rapidly and without too much trouble by the House of Commons. The Government routinely take that approach to such matters.

The Minister should at least attempt to take some account of the views expressed on Second Reading. In my modest contribution to the debate on Second Reading, I sought to raise a number of matters. Several others were raised by right hon. and learned Members who are of the legal profession and therefore able to raise much more profound and wide-ranging aspects with which we must deal.

I have some doubts about the Bill's wording, and the Minister kindly helped with some of them. However, there are sufficient elements to it—such as those on retrospection, its wording and its relationship to the Access to Justice Act 1999, which it seeks to amend—to suggest that, once the Committee of Selection has done its work, members of the Standing Committee, especially if they are legally qualified and expert, might require considerably more time for scrutiny than the Minister seems to have believed up to this point would be necessary.

The motion states, very generously, that the Committee

"shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet."

In the good old days, Madam Deputy Speaker, which will be within your recollection, Committees always sat only once on the first day—and for very good reasons. Most conventions of the House have very good reasons behind them. It was to allow Committee members to acquaint themselves with what was happening and to give them time to consider the Bill's contents, table amendments, and so on. Programme motions routinely state that the Committee will sit twice on its first day—the assumption being that it can do its work properly at an accelerated rate.

It is assumed, presumably, that in the morning of the first day, the Committee will nod through what the Programming Sub-Committee has deliberated on, and then go straight to work on the first afternoon. Such a timetable makes a series of important assumptions—not least that members of the Committee will have had time between Second Reading and the first sitting to think about the Bill's contents and, more importantly, to listen to outside representation and table considered amendments for the Committee to debate. If we are not very careful, none of that will happen.

If, in the light of the fact that the House has just given the Bill its Second Reading, we work on the assumption that the Committee of Selection meets this Wednesday, the two days that the Minister has in mind for the Standing Committee to sit are Tuesday 6 March and Thursday 8 March. There will be two sittings on each day, but the length of those sittings is as yet unspecified—another detail that we do not know at this stage. We are told by the Government that the Committee will sit twice in one day, but we do not and cannot know how long each sitting will last, so we cannot make an informed judgment on how relevant and appropriate is the timing proposed in the motion. We are always working in the dark at this stage in our deliberations. We simply have to accept what the Minister says: "I, the Minister, decree that, in my judgment, because this is my Bill and because I, the Minister, say that it is a small, technical and uncontroversial measure and so should not need much work, the Committee will only have to sit on a certain number of occasions and I, the Minister, do not even know—or if I do know, I am not telling the House—how long it will sit on each day."

The Minister tells us that Committee stage must finish by Thursday 8 March—the day after the Budget. I mention that because it is not entirely unconnected with

[Mr. Forth]

the fact that if, as it is now widely speculated, we are to have a general election on 5 April, the House would have to be dissolved on that date, or a day or two later. That raises important questions about the next part of the motion, headed "Consideration and Third Reading". It is relevant to the debate to consider that the possible imminence of an election and the timing that will be required following Budget day raise serious questions about this part.

As my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) pointed out in his intervention, to which the Minister was pathetically incapable of replying, the Government, not satisfied with decreeing the timing of the Standing Committee at this stage, are going on to prejudge the timing and duration of Report and Third Reading. The Government have the gall to say that they will allow until

"six o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced".

Let us suppose that that day is like today, with three ministerial statements in the House. What will happen to consideration and Third Reading on that day? Let us suppose that the business of the House is fixed, as ever, on the preceding Thursday and the day set for those stages is a Monday; let us suppose further that developments occur in respect of foot and mouth disease or Iraq and the Government feel obliged to make one or more statements on that day. Will Report stage on the Bill disappear altogether, or will it be diminished to less than an hour, or to half an hour, or to a matter of minutes? Is that what the Government are telling us in setting and predetermining the time limit for consideration and Third Reading at 6 o'clock on a certain day? In giving a waffling and ill-considered answer to my right hon. and learned Friend, the Minister stated that he did not know which day it is to be. Nevertheless, whatever day is decided upon, we are being told in all seriousness that at 6 o'clock on that day the matter will be concluded.

The motion also provides that if the day chosen is a Thursday—a day on which we routinely bunk off at 7 o'clock without doing our proper work—we shall finish consideration at 4 o'clock in the afternoon. On Thursdays, we have Question Time from 11.30 to 12.30, followed by business questions, which usually run until about 1.15. There might be one or two statements on the set day—we do not know, and neither do the Government at this stage. It is entirely possible that consideration and Third Reading, having been decreed to finish at four o'clock in the afternoon, will be squeezed into less than two hours or, in some circumstances, only one hour, or, in extreme circumstances, no time at all.

It is perfectly obvious that the Government will have to give us a cast-iron guarantee that no statements will be made on the day in question, regardless of the circumstances—regardless of whether we have been invaded by the French, have to declare war that day, or any other event. All in all, the motion is even more draconian than the ones to which we have become accustomed and is therefore wholly unacceptable.

That is bad enough, but paragraphs 6 and 7 make matters materially worse. The Government are saying that there is to be no scope for reconsideration in the light of known circumstances—matters that have arisen in Committee, amendments that have or have not been made in Committee, representations received, and so on. We heard on Second Reading that a considerable number of representations have already been made to Members of Parliament and that there is widespread concern in the legal profession and among those involved in court work about the implications of the Bill. We must assume that provision will have to be made for substantial outside representations to be made during the course of our consideration.

The motion would disapply the provisions of Sessional Orders A and B. Those orders were bad enough when they were introduced, but the Government now propose routinely not to bother any more with those new procedures, which were touted as being part of so-called modernisation, but which are already being swept aside, disregarded and disapplied by motions such as the one before us because the Government are in such a rush to complete their business and want less and less to give the House of Commons the scope to make its own decisions on how to conduct its business. Under the heading "Lords messages", Sessional Order A is disapplied and the time limits for dealing with those matters are to be predetermined—again, regardless of what might arise between this House and another place.

We can now see the sequence of events. The Government lay the programme motion before they have even heard the debate on Second Reading and so before they can gauge the level of interest in the House. They seek to predetermine when the Standing Committee will sit without even knowing the duration of each sitting, and they complicate matters further by allowing consideration and Third Reading to be jeopardised by the tightness of the provision made. I hope that my brief remarks have illustrated the nonsense of setting a time limit of 6 o'clock for the conclusion of proceedings on a certain day when we cannot possibly know what other business will be before the House on that day.

I have mentioned only statements, but leave to ask a private notice question may well be granted by the Speaker on the day set. Who knows? Any number of procedural possibilities could arise. On the previous day, the Speaker may well have granted an emergency debate. Such matters are unusual, but not unknown, and should certainly not be assumed to be an impossibility. Several procedural possibilities could arise so that, if one took the motion literally, the consideration and Third Reading could be squeezed out almost entirely.

Is that what the Government intend? It may well be that they have such arrogance and such contempt for the proceedings of the House that they do not care if we find ourselves diminished almost to nothing. As for the complex and delicate relationship between the House and another place, the Government seem to believe that we do not need to bother with it much; it can be brushed aside, everything can be rushed through, and that will be acceptable. All in all, the motion may well be the worst example of a series of so-called programme motions which, of course, should be called guillotines, as that is what they are.

Is the Minister prepared to give us a much fuller explanation? He barely bothered to explain why the matter should be dealt with in this way. I will not labour a point I made on Second Reading, except to mention in passing that the entire Bill is in jeopardy, as it could well be overtaken by much larger events. That would be the

Government's fault, and may be the result of incompetence or because they think that they can use the motion to blackmail Members by saying that people outside will not have proper legal representation unless the parliamentary process is accelerated to ensure that the Bill will receive Royal Assent according to a timetable which, ironically, will be dictated by the Prime Minister himself. That is the circular argument in which we are now engaged.

All in all, the motion is probably the most unsatisfactory programme or guillotine motion with which we have had to deal. Unless the Minister does an awful lot better to persuade me, I shall oppose this outrageous measure when I have the opportunity to do so.

8.30 pm

Mr. Hogg: This is a bad day for parliamentary democracy. There are two bad things about it: the motion, to which I shall speak at some length, and the statement of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, in which he made it plain that he resented coming to the House on Wednesday to debate foot and mouth disease, on the ground that he had better things to do.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. The right hon. and learned Gentleman knows that the scope of this debate is very limited indeed. I ask him to confine his remarks to that.

Mr. Hogg: Absolutely, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I said that two bad things had happened today, and I am now coming to the second—the programme motion. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). You may know, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you have had the misfortune to be in the Chair when I have addressed the House on previous programme or guillotine motions, that I have spoken against such motions, which I oppose on principle, six or seven times in the past two months.

I should have thought that the Parliamentary Secretary would have been chary of introducing this programme motion in the House, as the Bill to which it applies makes good a defect in a previous Bill. If the earlier measure had been properly discussed at the time, it might not have resulted in the current Bill. I should have thought that the Parliamentary Secretary would have been chary of asking the House to timetable a Bill, the object of which is to correct his own error. However, he has done so, and I am against that.

In his opening remarks, the Parliamentary Secretary said that four sittings in Committee were sufficient. Splendid, but whose business is it? It is not his business, but that of the Committee. I hope that the House finds it offensive that the Parliamentary Secretary—who has been in the House but a short time—comes here and says that four sittings are sufficient. That may be the advice of his officials, but the House and the Committee should determine how long they wish to spend on a Bill. That period will depend, at least partly, on amendments that are tabled by Members and representations that they receive from those outside the House. That will not be done properly, because the Parliamentary Secretary, from his short experience of political business, thinks that four sittings are enough. Indeed, he even suggested that two sittings may be enough, which raises the interesting possibility that he could use his substantial majority on the Committee to ensure that the sittings are abbreviated; perhaps some of the tiresome and difficult things that Members of Parliament want to say to him would not be articulated.

One important aspect of the Committee stage is the fact that it enables Back-Bench Members to table amendments articulating the concerns and anxieties of constituents and interested bodies who write to them. The process of curtailing debate curtails the representation of grievances.

Mr. Forth: Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree it is highly likely that the volume and complexity of representations on the Bill will be unusually large because of the nature of the legal profession and the implications for court proceedings that the Bill undoubtedly will have? Does he agree that peculiarly in this instance outside representations will be of particular importance?

Mr. Hogg: Yes, I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is highly probable that outside representations will be both numerous and extensive. They will reflect also the fact that the legal profession throughout the country has lost confidence in the Government. The Lord Chancellor and the Under-Secretary have forfeited the confidence of much of the profession. Therefore, it will be examining the Bill with an extremely critical eye. I should be surprised if substantial amendments were not tabled at the suggestion of the profession.

My right hon. Friend has identified the problems that are associated with Report stage. On an ordinary calculation, we shall be lucky to have more than an hour to an hour and a half; we might have substantially less. If the Bill had come forward for Report today, for example, it would not have been debated. That is unsatisfactory.

Report provides the one opportunity for Members as a whole to consider the detail of a Bill and to table detailed amendments, and that is important for at least two reasons. First, the Bill might be improved by the tabling of amendments. Secondly, Members can articulate in the Chamber, before other Members who choose to attend, anxieties that reflect the concerns of their constituents.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that this is only the second time that a programme motion has been applied to consideration in Committee, on Third Reading and on Report. The first such motion concerned the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill. The Standing Order that was passed by the House on 7 November 2000 provides in paragraph (1)(b) that

"an allocation of time to proceedings in committee on the bill"—

I move on to paragraph (7), shall—

"add to the proceedings to which a programme order applies."

Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that it is not far fetched to envisage a programme motion for Committee, Report and Third Reading, but one, given the way in which the Government are going—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman and anyone else who wishes to participate in the debate that we are confined to discussing the programme motion for the Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill.

Mr. Hogg: I shall deal with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). I

[Mr. Hogg]

was aware that this is the second programme motion to apply to consideration in Committee, on Third Reading and on Report, partly owing to the assiduousness of my hon. Friend. I deprecate the process, largely for the reasons advanced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst. We cannot tell now how long will be required for consideration in Committee, on Report or on Third Reading.

As I have said, Report provides the opportunity for the House as a whole to address the detail of the Bill. The House will approach the Bill with the benefit of representations that have been made from outside. The idea that the House can either amend or intelligently discuss a Bill on Report for an hour or an hour and a half is preposterous—or in any event, we cannot say now whether it would be preposterous.

A further point is that we are undermining the basis of democracy, as I have said in previous debates. The country believes that legislation is properly scrutinised. That, at least in part, is why people are prepared to put up with laws, even bad laws. However, what happens when the truth is that a Bill is not scrutinised properly, or at all? The bargain into which people enter as part of a political commonwealth is being stripped away. Bills cannot be debated properly in an hour and a half. If they are not debated properly, where is the legitimacy of what we do? We are profoundly undermining the respect that people will have for the House, and therefore for the authority of Parliament.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My remarks are general, but they do apply to the timetable motion, Madam Deputy Speaker. Is not the motion an affront to democracy? No one knows what might be discussed in Committee or what amendments might be tabled. Until such amendments are tabled and discussed in Committee, no one knows how much time should be allocated for Report and Third Reading.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Why on earth should we limit the debate to one and a half hours, which will effectively be the time allowed? Why should the debate on Report be brought to a conclusion at 6 o'clock? Why should we suppose that there is other pressing business that day? It might be convenient for the House to discuss the Bill until the ordinary time, without any inconvenience to anyone. We are assuming that one and a half hours is appropriate, and that is that.

Very soon we will be deprived of timetable motion debates, because the Government are uncomfortable with such debates and will do away with them, as happened with money resolutions, or, worse still, there will be a five-minute debate. We have been degrading the process.

When I first entered the House many years ago, timetable motions were generally moved by the Leader of the House. When they were not moved by the Leader of the House, they were moved by the Leader's deputy, or sometimes by the Minister at the head of the Department responsible for the Bill. Now, as a matter of course, the timetable motion is moved by the Parliamentary Secretary, who in this case manifestly had not read paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the motion.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Once again, I remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman of the limitations of the debate. Will he please confine his remarks to the programme motion relating to the Bill?

Mr. Hogg: With respect, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was directing my remarks to paragraphs 4, 5 and 6 of the motion when you called me to order.

The point that I was making was that the Parliamentary Secretary, who presented the motion to the House, manifestly had not read paragraphs 4, 5 and 6, or if he had, he had not understood them. That is a lamentable state of affairs. It suggests a contempt for Parliament and the parliamentary process which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst and I believe to be wholly wrong.

I hope that my right hon. Friend will join me in the Division Lobby in saying no to the motion, and that we will go on doing so to motion after motion of this kind as it is laid before the House.

Question put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 255, Noes 47.

Division No. 129] **[8.43 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Cousins, Jim
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline

Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jamieson, David
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
Macdonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Pearson, Ian
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Don Touhig.

NOES

Amess, David
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brand, Dr Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Collins, Tim
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Fabricant, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Garnier, Edward
Gray, James
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tyler, Paul

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown and
Mr. Owen Paterson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Criminal Defence Service (Advice and Assistance) Bill *[Lords]*:

Standing Committee

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

2. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it shall meet.

3. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 8th March.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at six o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at three o'clock on that day.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at seven o'clock on the day on which those proceedings are commenced or, if that day is a Thursday, at four o'clock on that day.

6. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Lords messages

7. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any motion to vary or supplement this order for the purpose of allocating time to proceedings on consideration of any messages from the Lords, and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2001, which was laid before this House on 1st February, be approved.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Community documents),

TRANSMISSIBLE SPONGIFORM ENCEPHALOPATHIES

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 5196/99, a draft regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the rules for the prevention and control of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, and a draft directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Directive 91/68/EEC; and supports the Government's objective of achieving Community-wide measures against transmissible spongiform encephalopathies, especially in the light of recent findings that BSE is more widespread in Europe than had previously been acknowledged.—*[Mr. Jamieson.]*

Question agreed to.

Line of Route

8.57 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Chairman of the Administration Committee): I beg to move,

That this House approves the First Report from the Administration Committee on the Trial Summer Re-opening of the Line of Route, HC 213, Session 2000–01.

I am conscious of the fact that this is becoming a habit. For the third time in less than two years, I am asking the House to approve proposals put forward by the Administration Committee on the reopening of the line of route during the summer Adjournment. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. Hon. Members should either settle down or leave the Chamber quickly and quietly.

Mrs. Roe: On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Visitor Manager, the Serjeant at Arms, the Director of Catering Services, the Director of Finance and Administration and their staff for all their efforts before, during and after last year's reopening. I also thank the Leader of the House for making time available for this debate when I am sure that there are many other pressing demands on the time in the Chamber. Finally, I thank my colleagues on the Committee and colleagues and officials in another place for their constructive advice and comments over the past two years.

At the outset, I want to address some of the erroneous articles that have recently appeared in the media. Anyone who has read our report would be able to confirm that nowhere do we say, or even imply, that visitors found the tours a bore or that the reopening was "financially disastrous". The articles seem to have been written mainly by taking selective extracts from one of the appendices and quoting them out of context.

The general tenor of the articles was that the trial reopening was a failure and did not achieve its targets, but it is misleading to talk of targets when, as summer 2000 was a trial, there were no precedents and it was not possible to forecast accurately what would happen. Surely that was why the House agreed to an experiment—to ascertain how popular the tours would be.

The oft-quoted figure of 55,980 visitors was but one estimate proposed in 1999, and it was based on a 41-day opening period. As the Committee says in the report, it was necessary to reduce that period to 35 days because the other place rose later than anticipated. Furthermore, the 1999 figure did not take into account the education unit's autumn visits programme. Both those factors lowered the total number of visitors.

It is claimed that visitors "shunned"—another word we neither said nor implied—Parliament, as "only" 40,577 people took part in the tours. Far more significant is the fact that the final cost of the reopening was less than anticipated. The figures are set out in paragraphs 6 to 9 of the report. The crux is that the Committee advised the House to expect a deficit of £232,000, whereas the final amount was in fact £209,611, so the cost to the House was £125,767, rather than the anticipated £138,000.

I want to comment on the reports stating that merchandising made a net loss of £15,000. That claim is, I regret to say, disingenuous as it ignores totally a later sentence saying:

"This reported 'loss' includes over £20,000 expenditure for staff costs which would have otherwise been borne by the House of Commons Refreshment Department and are not, therefore, an additional cost to the House."

I am sure that the House is as interested as the Committee was to note that those members of the public who took part in the tours last summer judged the tours and guides a considerable success, with 95 per cent. of visitors rating the tours as very good and more than 90 per cent. rating the guides as very good. The Visitor Manager has received 3,000 letters from members of the public urging the Houses of Parliament to continue the summer tours.

I am most grateful to the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) for suggesting that visitors be asked their views, as the results brought home to the Committee just how successful the experiment had been—indeed, it was so successful that I do not believe that we could justify not reopening the line of route this year.

As I know the House is keen that the parliamentary summer works programme should not be disrupted, I confirm that the major pre-planned programmes will not be impinged upon significantly by reopening the line of route this summer.

The results of the trial, together with the Committee's comments and conclusions, are given in our report. It might therefore be more helpful if I simply set out how the House authorities intend to remedy the few deficiencies that have been identified.

Perhaps the most crucial aspect is how the House authorities are to keep within last year's budget of £232,000 while still improving the marketing of the line of route tours. As was the case last year, the cost of the reopening would be borne by the House's reserve. The key to keeping this cost within last year's budget is to double last year's volume of visitors over an eight-week opening period—provisionally planned to be from Monday 6 August until Saturday 29 September.

I understand that the Visitor Manager is already at work on a business plan and that he is confident we can achieve the 85,000 visitors needed. But—and this is a big but—if we are to increase the number of visitors, we need to be in the market now. This is especially important as extra effort will be needed to attract visitors from overseas and from regions of the United Kingdom other than the south-east. As might be expected, the United States offers a great opportunity to attract overseas visitors and, as far as has been possible without having the agreement of the House yet, the Visitor Manager has been discussing the matter with the British Tourist Authority in north America, which considers that our optimism is well founded.

This year it is intended to introduce tours in languages other than English. Each day at 2.15 pm tours will be offered in French, German, Spanish and Italian, at no extra charge to visitors. The Committee will review the success, or otherwise, of these tours and may, in future years, consider the introduction of tours in other languages—for example, Japanese.

I turn now to the box office operation. This year it will not be necessary to book five days in advance. It is planned to sell about 400 tickets a day from a counter in Westminster Hall. Although we will be using Ticketmaster equipment, these direct sales to the public will not attract a booking fee. For pre-booked tickets which this year will be available from all Ticketmaster's 50 outlets in the United Kingdom, we will pay Ticketmaster a booking fee of 95p per ticket to cover the ticketing system's costs and postage. That fee is unchanged from last year. It will not be necessary to have a credit card to purchase tickets. If potential visitors are unable to get to a Ticketmaster outlet, they will be able to buy tickets by post from the box office here.

I make no apology for again stressing that what the Committee is recommending would in no way affect existing arrangements. A summer reopening of the line of route would be an additional facility and an extra way for visitors to see the Palace of Westminster.

At paragraph 26 of the report, the Committee, after considering the route to be taken by visitors, said that Portcullis House should not, at this time, be added to the tour. We recommended, however, that the building's public areas should be open, free of charge, during the annual London Open House weekend. The Committee is grateful that Mr. Speaker has endorsed that recommendation. I am pleased to advise the House that, in addition to existing access arrangements, members of the public will be able to visit Portcullis House on 22 and 23 September.

As the report notes, the other place has already agreed to a reopening in 2001. The House of Lords has given the proposal a green light, and it would be ironic if the House of Commons were to show it a red light. I hope that the House will approve the report, which is based on responses from visitors. The general public clearly welcomed the initiative, and there would be great disappointment among our constituents and visitors from overseas if the line of route were not to be reopened in August and September. The Visitor Manager has finalised agreements with the tour guides and with Ticketmaster. The advertising is ready, and a public relations statement has been prepared. The Ticketmaster computers are ready to be loaded. All that we need is the House's approval.

As the report says, the Committee is not asking for the trial reopening to be made permanent as there is room for improvement on last year's operation. For that reason, we are asking the House to extend the experiment for another year. Next year, it will fall to me or my successor once again to present the Committee's findings to the House for a decision. Last year we made a good start, and the responses of visitors showed that they welcomed the summer reopening. I commend the report to the House.

9.12 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): I am grateful for the effort and thought put in by the Select Committee on Administration to a report which, if we agree to it, will allow the line of route to open again in the summer. The Committee took on board comments and ideas raised during the previous debate on the matter, and the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) has discussed the visitor survey, an idea proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) which produced a wealth of helpful information. The Committee took on board the comments made in our previous debate and ensured that that survey took place.

The House should be grateful to everyone who worked hard to ensure that last summer's experiment was a success. The Committee has acknowledged that there

[Mr. Paddy Tipping]

were teething problems. Having identified such problems, the Committee has proposed solutions. The Committee recognised that the House could not be expected to approve a permanent reopening of the line of route while such problems existed and has rightly asked that the experiment be extended. I strongly believe that we should give the scheme another chance this summer.

I agree with what has been said about the need for better marketing. I am impressed by the thought already given and effort made in that respect. I was also impressed by the strong support shown by members of the public who undertook the tour and found it most valuable. I note that the Committee is not asking for an increase in funding—a rarity in this age of tight budgets.

This is a House matter and, rightly, is subject to a free vote. As has been pointed out, their lordships approved another trial during the forthcoming summer adjournment. Like the hon. Member for Broxbourne, I hope that colleagues in this place will approve the motion so that the Palace of Westminster will again be open to the public—to our constituents—this summer.

9.15 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I certainly support the proposal made in the first report of the Select Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) that the experiment should be continued this summer. I agree in principle that as many people as possible should have access—controlled, of course—to the House of Commons, to see how Parliament is constructed and how we work. It is important that we continue to engage the interest of members of the public in the history of this building, which is so important in our nation's life.

Regrettably, there is far too much cynicism about politics at present—especially about the work of the House. We can overcome that by encouraging members of the public to take an interest—to see and to hear more of what we do, if they are minded to do so; although I would not make that compulsory. The opportunity to do so during the summer months is to be valued. I congratulate my hon. Friend on the Committee's careful analysis of the experiment so far and on bringing the information to the House.

I want to pick out one or two points from the report. I note that paragraph 17, headed "Profile of Visitors", states:

> "One disappointing aspect of the tours was that they appeared to attract a very narrow visitor profile. United Kingdom residents accounted for 78 per cent of visitors—the majority of these coming from London and the South East."

As a Member representing a south-west constituency, I point out to my hon. Friend that, for a family, a trip to London—even for a weekend—is extremely expensive. That was clearly demonstrated by the lack of interest from people around the country in visiting that other attraction—of much less importance than this place—the dome. People thought twice about the cost of the rail fare. That is one of the realities of life that must be taken into account when we consider what our capital offers by way of visitor attractions.

I trust that my hon. Friend will take my remarks in the spirit in which they are meant when I say that I hope that we will not take the too politically correct route of trying to manipulate visitors to visit the House of Commons. Although 78 per cent. of visitors are from the United Kingdom, it is important for the people of this country to see the Parliament to which they send their representatives. I am pleased that the proportion of home visitors is so much greater.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend refers to the proportion of visitors from London and the south-east. She will not have failed to notice the significant interest demonstrated by our friends from the United States. Does she agree that, as regards improvements—even my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) accepted that there can be improvements—it is important to focus on merchandise that matches the interests of the visitors? For example, given that only £1,970 was raised from the sale of mini teddy bears, House of Lords version, does my hon. Friend agree that we would probably do better on profitability of merchandise if we could offer as an attraction to our American friends figurines of my right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Thatcher?

Mrs. Browning: I shall deal with merchandise in a few moments. My hon. Friend's suggestion had not occurred to me, but he will have noted that paragraph 17 refers to the fact that the visitor profile was made up of people

> "of white/European ethnic origin and defined as ABC1"

socio-economic category.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): What is wrong with that?

Mrs. Browning: I hasten to assure my right hon. Friend that there is nothing at all wrong with that, but as someone with a background in marketing, I would say that if people are to market merchandise, they first need to know the marketplace. That is easily identified by the socio-economic groupings. Given the point that my hon. Friend made a moment ago, the appropriateness of the merchandise for that particular category of visitor needs to be considered.

I was disappointed and astonished that the items—I am not sure whether they are china or porcelain—that carry the Pugin designs had not found favour. There are two possible reasons for that: either they are more highly priced, better quality items, or the importance of Pugin and examples of his work, especially the decorative work, are not pointed out properly by the visitor guides. It is astonishing that mugs bearing the portcullis emblem were the most popular souvenirs—not just any old portcullis mug, but the white ones with a gold portcullis emblem, whereas those with the green portcullis emblem did not find favour.

One has to test the market, and last year's line of route experiment provided a good opportunity to test the market and the way in which merchandise is sold to visitors, but I ask my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne to consider carefully why the Pugin merchandise has not found favour. It is clearly of good quality, but perhaps its historic importance is not well appreciated by visitors. If Pugin's importance to the House is not apparent after a tour of the House, I should be extremely concerned about the content of the tour. We all agree that people appear to be satisfied with the content of the tour, but perhaps she will consider that matter.

As for the House of Lords teddy bears, it could be that visitors were of an age-group profile that already had a teddy bear, so perhaps they are not the right sort of merchandise.

I hope that the House will take this in the spirit in which I say it, but I would not wish to have at home any china bearing the portcullis emblem, nor any other emblem of the House. I am fond of the House and respect it, but I should be afraid that if visitors came to my home and saw crockery bearing House of Commons insignia, it would be like being found at home with a British Rail cup and saucer in the cupboard—they would wonder how I had acquired it. Perhaps people in socio-economic group ABC1 might pause for a moment and wonder what the vicar's wife would think if they handed round teacups bearing House of Commons insignia. Much market research remains to be done on the merchandise, but I do not want to be negative because the experiment has clearly been a success and I am sure that the appropriateness of the merchandise and any new range that hon. Members might suggest tonight will be properly market-tested before money is invested in it.

There is a more serious matter, which my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne mentioned. I have no objection to Portcullis House, especially the rooms on the first floor, being made available to the public, but I am a little concerned that paragraph 26 states:

"the House should encourage greater 'casual' access to the building".

I have been a Member of Parliament for only nine years, but during those years there have been times when we may have been a little cavalier about the security of this building. Such concerns are no less now than when I was first elected. Although we all want to welcome visitors and allow them to see where we work, the word "casual" gives me cause for concern.

There was a time when most of the security focus was on terrorism from a particular source. There is a view—it is only a view—that that threat is somewhat diminished, but we face as much risk today of terrorism from unknown sources as we did in the past. Therefore, whether the House is in recess or not, I stress to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne that we should take seriously the issue of security. We should not take a casual approach to access at any time; it should be properly managed and controlled.

Mr. Forth: Like me, my hon. Friend has the privilege of having accommodation in Portcullis House, so the issue is perhaps closer to our hearts than to those of other Members. Does she not agree that it is one thing to allow or even encourage the public into the existing public area on the first floor of Portcullis House, but it is a different matter to allow them into what is now called the courtyard in the large atrium? That area provides direct unlimited access to 1 Parliament street and to other parts of the parliamentary estate. Should we not be very careful indeed about allowing further access, given the peculiar nature of Portcullis House and its relationship with other parts of the estate?

Mrs. Browning: My right hon. Friend is right, and that is why I am very concerned about the use of the word "casual". Access is an important issue not only when the House is sitting. We work during recesses and some of us are often here. We also have a duty to the staff and the people who work in the building during recesses; their security is as important as ours. I caution against taking too relaxed an attitude to the issue of access, because this building remains a major target for would-be terrorists.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne. I hope that the visits to the line of route this summer will be successful. I am sure that they will in no way detract from the excellent service provided by the staff of the House, particularly those in the education unit, who do an excellent job throughout the year in taking our constituents and school parties around the building. They explain the history of our Parliament and our country, and the work that we do. I am fully in favour of opening the building to as many people as possible so that they can have access to that information and experience.

I conclude by referring to a constituent of mine who came to the parliamentary estate from Devon. Not many people visit the House as frequently as we do, and a trip to London is often a treat for people who live a long way away. When my constituent arrived in Westminster Hall, she ran her hands along the walls and said to me, "It's just wonderful to be able to touch the history." When we whip through Westminster Hall and other parts of a building that we regard as the office, we sometimes take for granted the marvellous history that is represented by this place. I would like us to share that with as many people as possible and I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne will continue to enable that to take place during the summer recess.

9.28 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Tomorrow, I shall attend my first meeting of the Administration Committee as a newly appointed member, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on the report.

The price of £3.50 to visit the parliamentary estate and all that it has to offer must make it the best deal in town. The fact that the ticket price has been kept so low compared with what people have to pay elsewhere is to be commended. However, I am glad that the report recognises that the issues of marketing and distribution need to be addressed. My area of South Yorkshire is a fair distance from the House, and if people do not know what is on offer, they will not take the opportunity to visit it. Has the Committee considered advertising the fact that the parliamentary estate is open in the summer in the magazines of organisations such as English Heritage and the National Trust, which have many members? Other organisations with an interest in political history and heritage may also want to take that opportunity.

The report mentions the lack of toilet and refreshment facilities. A Conservative Member raised a point of order recently when all the toilets in Portcullis House broke down. My experience is that such problems are not confined to this place. When I attended a royal garden party some years ago I found that even in the gardens of Buckingham palace ladies were queuing round the block to use the toilet facilities. It is pretty much the same in every public venue. Bearing in mind the comments about security, in future, once arrangements in Portcullis House are more stable and the toilets work from one week to the next, perhaps we could think about using the refreshment facilities on the courtyard floor for visitors. At the end of their tour, they could leave the parliamentary estate through the tube station exit.

[Caroline Flint]

I wonder whether the Committee has thought about how we could market souvenirs better. When people come here, they may be weighed down with packages and feel that they do not want to buy anything, but they might buy something from the airport on their way home to remind them of their visit. Other specialist retail outlets might also have something to offer.

Mr. Forth: Does the hon. Lady realise that there is a danger in that approach? We must decide whether we want to turn the sale of souvenirs into a large-volume, high-profit operation, which has some attractions for me, I must admit. If I catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will say more about that. On the other hand, if we pursue that aim, we may sacrifice the exclusivity and prestige that we like to think the products have at the moment. On which side of the argument does the hon. Lady find herself?

Caroline Flint: I agree that we must be sensitive in dealing with the matter. Teddy bears and coasters are high-prestige products, but if we are to produce merchandise we must consider how we shall sell it because we do not want to end up with surplus stock. The matter can be handled with sensitivity and merchandise can be made tasteful so that we can ensure that people visiting the country have the opportunity to buy a memento of their visit to this place.

Mr. Bercow: That was a gloriously indeterminate answer, if I may say so. I congratulate the hon. Lady on her appointment to the Administration Committee, as a result of which I am sure she will display even greater gravitas in future than she has exhibited in the recent past. On the subject of good taste, does she agree that the sale, for example, of teddy bears is testimony to all that is cuddly and bland, while the sale of figurines of my heroine would prove that we were neither?

Caroline Flint: We must recognise that people have different desires in their choice of mementos. Figurines of many politicians, past and present, may be well received. I visited the American Senate and Congress, where one can buy a diverse display of such ornaments. There is something to be said for selling objects that appeal to children. I have certainly found that the teddy bears go down very well when I present them to local hospitals and charities for raffles. We must offer something for everyone. If we are to produce these objects, we may as well get a return on our money. We must consider different ways of ensuring that people find them accessible.

I generally welcome the fact that the palace is open to the public. I have no problem with the fact that a large number of the visitors are from the United Kingdom, but I hope that we can draw people from beyond London and the south-east. We must remove some of the mystique while allowing people to enjoy the history of the many centuries of democratic progress that the House reveals to all who visit it.

9.34 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am delighted to contribute to the debate. I must apologise to the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe), who chaired the Committee; I had hoped to give her notice of my detailed questions in advance, but, like many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I was preoccupied over the weekend with the foot-and-mouth epidemic, which was on the doorstep of my constituency. I have had time to consider the report only today.

I echo the sentiments of the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on Portcullis House. The electorate are entitled to see as much of what they have paid for as it is possible to show them. It is a magnificent and distinguished building and I hope that we are eventually able to use it for tours. It would be helpful to make it the end point of a line of route tour of the buildings, as suggested. Assuming that the toilets are in operation, that would provide the public with refreshment facilities at the end of their visit. I adopt a more positive view than that taken by Committee members and other hon. Members.

One aspect of the Committee's approach concerns me. The hon. Member for Broxbourne referred to the budget for last year's trial opening and the planned deficit of £232,000. The report does not put the deficit in those terms. Paragraph 8 of the background to the report mentions the worst-case scenario, which could lead to

"a possible net annual operating deficit of £232,000".

If every worst-case scenario were treated as a budget, the Chancellor would be in big trouble. I hope that the hon. Lady recognises that those were not the terms on which the House gave approval. She will recall that the Committee's first proposals were turned down because many of us were concerned about the approach to the basic figures that were set out. Even the modified scheme caused some anxieties.

I do not want to go into detail about the quality of the tour; I am sure that that can be improved. The report says that some guides did not know who Mr. Pugin was, which was a problem. I hope that their information will improve. However, we are used to a high standard of tours in the House because when our constituents visit, we, our staff or the Badge Messengers take them around, and the quality of the tour is very good. We might be unfairly criticising last summer's guides, who were simply not up to that standard. Other criticisms may also be unfair. There were concerns that to get around efficiently and be out in an hour took precedence over the quality of the material passed on to visitors.

However, I am more worried about the basic economics of the exercise. The hon. Lady will know from my contributions to both the previous debates that I have always been anxious about that. Although the report refers to the impact on the Parliamentary Works Directorate—she mentioned that tonight—we are not told what additional costs arose as a result of its overtime on Sundays. That cost is not in the financial breakdown. Incidentally, I find it intriguing that, although the Committee refers to the PWD throughout the report, there is no apparent reference to the summer opening programme as the SOP—perhaps that is a sop to the tender delicacy of our concerns.

The passage on the cost of reopening, which is critical to the report, is interesting. The total number of ticketed visitors was 40,577, at a nominal cost of £3.50 a ticket. By my calculation, that adds up to £142,019.50. We are told in the report that the income from ticket sales was £119,991, so there is a shortfall of £22,000-odd.

Some of the figure may be commission for agencies. If so, it is not stated in the report. Otherwise, if the shortfall is owing to the concession given to carers, to which the report does refer, 6,293 carers must have brought through visitors, which is probably an excessive estimate. It would be useful to know the precise reason for the discrepancy.

The report refers to the fact that the millennium exhibition was taking place at the same time. It is extremely important that we do not base all our forecasts on the very special circumstances of last year. It is important to understand that the millennium exhibition was clearly an extra attraction. All the merchandising sales of £188,551 stated in the report have been credited to SOP, yet a fair proportion of those sales must have been generated by the exhibition. I notice, incidentally, that although the estimate for the average spend given to the House during our previous debate was £4, it is actually £3.41, which is a considerable difference. I hope, therefore, that we shall consider that matter again.

On the question of tour operations, which are referred to in paragraphs 1 to 3 on page 4, the booking of tickets was contracted out to Ticketmaster and the provision of guides to Tour Guides Ltd. There is no mention in the financial breakdown of the exact commission or of any fees paid. That means that the figures to which I have just referred are a little misleading. I hope that we can have some more information on that. I would certainly like to know what sort of contractual fees and commission were paid to those two private companies.

The SOP employed five co-ordinators to assist at the sovereign's entrance. The financial breakdown shows that the cost of uniforms was £1,825. As far as I have been able to discover, that paid for sweaters or sweatshirts for five people, so those five sweatshirts must have cost £365 each. I guess they are gold-plated. Perhaps something else is included under the cost of uniforms. If so, it would be interesting to know exactly what.

According to paragraph 3 on page 10, two consultants were employed for a total of four days in order to brief the local media. They do not seem to have done a very good job. As the hon. Member for Don Valley said, we do not seem to have received all that much press coverage for what I would have thought was intrinsically an extremely interesting story. Therefore, I am not sure how well they did their job. Given that the manager and assistant manager were paid £54,000, surely they could have undertaken the task. I should have thought that the Visitor Manager would have been just as good a person to undertake such a responsibility. Again, it would be helpful to see a breakdown of the costs.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman has just made an important point about what appears to have been a deficiency of service. Have I misunderstood him or is his interpretation that the public relations service was not subject to market testing or competitive tender?

Mr. Tyler: I cannot advise the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps the hon. Member for Broxbourne will answer that question when she responds to the debate. The answer is not apparent from my reading of the report but, as I said, I have had an opportunity to read it only at speed as a result of other preoccupations.

I have several other questions relating to issues arising from the figures. The figure for admissions, for example, which is given under revenues, is clearly for ticket sales. Therefore, we do not know precisely what arises from that figure, under which heading guides are paid for and how any future trial will operate other than at a loss.

There is a figure for entertainment of £1,074. Entertainment, as we all know, always causes some difficulty. Given the wonderful value of refreshments in the House, it is not immediately clear where the entertainment was provided, to whom and by whom. I assume that it was a responsibility of the Visitor Manager.

An important point that may apply to both of those previous items is that any enterprise of this sort incurs set-up costs. Are they to spread only over the first season, across the whole year, or across future years? How many of those costs are recurrent? That, too, is not spelt out in the report, which makes it more difficult for us, in our traditional scrutiny role, to be sure exactly what is going on. For example, are the merchandising overheads of £59,587 and the development costs of £18,204 recurrent costs, or once-and-for-all set-up costs? It is not immediately clear.

Looking ahead to the trial's continuation, the most important point to note is that overall operating loss of the trial was £209,611, or a loss of almost £6,000 for every day that the line of route was open. The total of 40,577 visitors means that there was a subsidy of £5.17 for every single visitor. That is quite a considerable sum. Given that, at other times of the year, Members' tours—tours undertaken by Members of Parliament, or by our staff, or on our behalf—attract no subsidy, we see that we are dealing with a curious upside-down world. The loss quoted for the operation of tours is £176,263. I cannot see how those expenses—or costs, whichever way one wants to see them—can be so reduced in future years, or that the House will want to approve a loss of £6,000 for each week that the line of route is opened on that basis.

The overriding issue, which I have raised on previous occasions and I raise again tonight, is simply that, both last year and this, we open the line of route for a comparatively short time during the trial period. Surely that means that we should establish a short-term, limited and carefully controlled budget for that period. Instead, we appear to have set up a permanent institution, with a Visitor Manager and an assistant who are present 52 weeks a year. Instead of finding a way in which to cater for a comparatively short-term operation, with short-term costs, we appear to have engaged in long-term costs.

Having said all that, I believe that the Committee was right to experiment and I consider its request to experiment once again to be reasonable. However, I ask that the costs be scrutinised extremely carefully. Answers must be given to some of the specific points that I have raised this evening, if not now, on a future occasion or in correspondence. I am by no means convinced that the experience of the House, and of the Committee on our behalf, fully justifies a permanent experiment.

9.48 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): While following the spirit and thrust of the comments made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I wonder whether we should ask even more fundamental questions. Neither the report nor our previous debates has made it clear whether the House expects the line of route to be a subsidised cultural experience for visitors, or a regular contributor to ease the burden on the taxpayer of the costs of parliamentary activity. The answer could be one or the other, or something in between.

[Mr. Eric Forth]

Whether we should be shocked or pleased that each visitor is subsidised to the tune of £5 is an important and open question. If the idea was to draw in people from beyond the United Kingdom and, in effect, pay them to come through and marvel at the Palace of Westminster, that is one thing; if that was the aim, we have been moderately successful. However, if we expected the exercise to contribute to the real revenues of the Palace of Westminster and ease the burden on the taxpayer, it has been a miserable failure. Judging that properly will depend on where we start and what we set as our objective. That is not at all clear from the report, so it is difficult to judge whether the trial was a success.

Against that background, a much more fundamental set of questions should be asked about the accounting procedures that were used. When presenting figures on activities at both ends of the Palace of Westminster, we have never been clear about how we should account for those activities. In other words, should we charge a notional rent for space occupied? It is one thing to talk about a kiosk, sales outlet or even a line of route, but it would quite another if we factored in rental charges for the space occupied at central London rates. However, we assume that that is a free good. Few businesses have the privilege of a rent-free operation, especially in this location.

As for staffing, do we charge the full cost of staff to a particular operation, or do we absorb it into the general operation? For example, staff from the Refreshment Department would be here anyway, so we need not attribute an element of their cost to the activity that is being undertaken. Again, the presentation of such matters in the report does not make clear either the real costs or how we want to identify and attribute those costs to different operations in order to make a proper judgment about whether a certain element is profitable or extraordinarily expensive.

That is bad enough, but appendix 1 on page 28 of the report deals with the "pessimistic case" target, the adjusted target—to take account of reduced opening—and actual figures. If we are not careful, we will get into millennium dome territory: someone has made projections of what they think will happen but, lo and behold, it does not quite work out that way. In fact, when one looks at the figures, it is clear that it does not work out that way at all. There seems to be a shortfall in almost every regard.

One may seek to explain or excuse that shortfall by saying that last year was an experimental first year, that we were feeling our way and that we are not at all sure yet. At the very least, I hope that close attention will be paid to the figures and the targets. If there was a pessimistic case target, what on earth was the optimistic case target? If there was a shortfall of such a magnitude on the pessimistic case target, there is a serious question mark over the targeting process, on the one hand, and what went wrong with the actual figures, on the other.

Also on page 28 is an astonishing figure giving the average spend per visitor as £1.17, which includes VAT but excludes guidebooks. The average spend per transaction was £9.21. I should have thought that that indicated a distinct lack of success in persuading people who have visited the Palace of Westminster and paid the entrance fee, which they thought was all too reasonable—I will comment on that in a moment—to buy a souvenir of their visit, at least to any significant extent. We shall obviously have to consider that.

To reiterate the intervention that the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) kindly allowed me to make, we must reconsider carefully whether merchandise from this place is, as we would hope, of intrinsic value and rarity, can be purchased only here, and is therefore a genuine souvenir of a visit to the Palace or Westminster, or whether we should market it freely at airports, saying, "You might have gone to the Palace of Westminster. Grab a handful of souvenirs at the airport, whether or not you were at Westminster and take them home to whatever part of the world you come from." An important decision has to be made as to what we want to say about merchandise that is sold here.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend has set out for the House a key consideration. On this occasion, uncommonly for him, he has not specified his preference. Does he not agree that, even though we joust with each other as enthusiastic advocates of free market capitalism, having souvenirs of the House sold in the airports of the United Kingdom would be unspeakably vulgar?

Mr. Forth: As my hon. Friend challenges me to state my view, I should say that my preference would be for a degree of exclusivity and rarity to be attached to our merchandise. I haunt Capitol hill and Congress when I am in Washington, DC, as the hon. Member for Don Valley obviously does. I have bought the odd souvenir, but I would be rather shocked if on my exit from Dulles international airport or JFK I found a large stall with congressional souvenirs being pushed at me, no doubt at concessionary rates. That would somewhat alter my view of the undoubted magnificence of Congress and its history.

It is gratifying to be told that the results of surveys show that the overwhelming bulk of people thought that they had had a good deal when paying the charge to take a tour through the Palace of Westminster. That raises the obvious question whether a sufficient price is being charged. I was slightly disappointed by a recommendation that the price should be kept fixed. Following the entreaties of my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), a market approach would suggest that if a large proportion of people thought they had enjoyed a bargain with a charge of £3.50, we could perhaps be more adventurous and ascertain whether we could charge more and reduce the deficit.

We are asking taxpayers generally throughout the country to subsidise those people who are fortunate enough to visit the Palace of Westminster, and perhaps that is getting things the wrong way round. It might be more satisfactory to expect those who visit the Palace—they do so voluntarily, enjoy the occasion and pay the charge—to help out the benighted taxpayer, who otherwise will be paying an ever-increasing amount to subsidise what goes on in this place, either directly in a political sense in the Chamber or Committee Rooms, or in terms of tourism. That is my main criticism of the approach that has been taken.

My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) and her Committee might want to give the matter serious thought, alongside the extension of the experiment. I am

glad that there will be a further year of experiment and that we are not yet ready to rush into a permanent arrangement. I hope that the Committee will give serious thought to whether there should be a subsidised cultural experience provided by the taxpayer to the visitor, or vice versa.

9.58 pm

Mrs. Roe: This has been an interesting debate. I thank right hon. and hon. Members for their views and comments, and I shall respond briefly. I thank the Minister for his supportive remarks, and also my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). Members of the Committee are most grateful for their comments and support.

Much work went on behind the scenes by both Members and staff to try to ensure that the reopening was a success. The comments of the Minister and my hon. Friend will be welcomed by all those involved. I should be grateful if the Minister would pass on my thanks to the Leader of the House, who has been most helpful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton talked about how we could overcome cynicism about the House. I understand her points, and I hope that the reopening of the line of route will play a part in removing some of the misunderstanding about what is done by this place and the other place and the work that is undertaken by Members and others.

Mention has been made of the narrow visitor profile, given that trips to London are expensive. I understand that. However, I hope that marketing will draw to the attention of those who come to London—and many do—that there is an opportunity to see the Houses of Parliament. I have in mind especially those who come with young children. There is an opportunity to see what our democracy is about and to understand our traditions and the importance of this historic building.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) mentioned merchandising. I remind him that the merchandising remit is not part of my—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motion relating to the Line of Route may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question agreed to.

Question again proposed.

Mrs. Roe: Merchandising is the responsibility of the Catering Committee, and I am certain that the Director of Catering Services will take into account the points made by my hon. Friend and others about the type of products that should be available and what sells to which particular market, as well as promoting Pugin and the role that he played in the design of this magnificent building. That should be mentioned by guides in their talks to the groups that they take around.

On casual access to Portcullis House, my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton thought that that was too cavalier. I can assure her that the security will not be cavalier. The matter was dealt with meticulously during the reopening of the line of route. We take proper advice and all those involved have done an excellent job. It is suggested not that there should be unrestricted access, but that access should be widened as far as is practical. I remind my hon. Friend that the general public are allowed into parts of Portcullis House to watch the activities of Standing Committees and Select Committees. I am sure that the House would want to encourage that, but we must be mindful of the security element.

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend will recall that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) pointed out that access to the atrium in Portcullis House gives direct access to other parliamentary buildings, other than through the normal security procedures. Although the first floor of Portcullis House is quite a secure unit, the atrium is not a secure area suitable for unlimited access. I hope that my hon. Friend will take that into account.

Mrs. Roe: I have noted what my hon. Friend says. I believe that there is at present no direct access to the courtyard for members of the public, for the reasons stated by her. I assure her and the House that the matter is taken extremely seriously, with an eye to terrorism both in the past and in the future. Experience suggests that the matter was dealt with in a constructive and positive way during the reopening last summer.

I look forward to welcoming the hon. Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) as a new member of the Administration Committee tomorrow. I am sure that she will enjoy the work that we do, and that she will be an active member of the Committee. No doubt the Visitor Manager will take on board the hon. Lady's constructive comments about advertising with heritage organisations. I agree that it is important that as many members of the general public as possible are made aware of the opportunities to visit this special place. The report noted that there had been problems with the toilet facilities, and we hope to remedy the problems of access, which were the subject of complaints.

Souvenirs are not a matter for my Committee, but I will draw the comments that have been made to the attention of the Committee which has that responsibility. I have noted the other points made by the hon. Member for Don Valley about Portcullis House, and by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham about the teddy bears and other items that were on sale.

I now come to the remarks made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), especially on the budget and paragraph 8 of the report. I accept his concerns; the worst-case scenario is not presented as a budget. The House authorities will realise that the issue is important and we will have to keep below the specified amount. The hon. Gentleman asked about the extra costs involved in the need for the Parliamentary Works Directorate to work at weekends. I understand that an additional cost of £10,000 was incurred because work had to be done on Sundays rather than on days when the tours were occurring. Although one must never discount any figure within a budget, that cost was not astronomical.

I am grateful that the hon. Gentleman did not expect full answers today to his very detailed questions on financing. I shall of course ensure that he receives a reply as quickly as possible. I can tell him that the merchandising costs to which he referred are for the

[Mrs. Roe]

equipment and the shop in Westminster Hall. I understand that those are one-off costs. The entertainment that he mentioned related to two receptions—one to welcome the guides and one for the media. The Refreshment Department provided the refreshments, so I am pleased to say that the cost was recycled within the House.

I think that I have covered all the points made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) in my responses to other colleagues. However, if there is any other detail that he would like me to provide with regard to financing, I should be happy to do so. It is extremely important for this debate to be open, for all the figures to be available and for everybody to know exactly what is being done.

I have welcomed this opportunity to put before the House the success of the reopening of the line of route. I hope that it will endorse the Committee's recommendation without a Division. If hon. Members are unsure about whether we should have another trial, they should ask a fundamental question: do we listen to the sections of the media that have chosen to represent last year's reopening as a failure, or to our constituents, who have written in their thousands to say how much they have enjoyed the tours and to urge us to continue them? I am sure that this House will know to which group my Committee has been listening, so I hope that our recommendations will be endorsed.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House approves the First Report from the Administration Committee on the Trial Summer Re-opening of the Line of Route, HC 213, Session 2000–01.

LIAISON COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.

( ) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

( ) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Cemeteries and Crematoriums

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

10.8 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): We politicians might think that we are immortal, but we are certainly not. In my time as a serving Member of the House, a number of colleagues have died. It was an extraordinary experience to serve on a Committee considering rate-capping legislation whose passage took an extremely long time, as two hon. Members died during our proceedings. Before I became a Member of Parliament, a Minister died at the Dispatch Box. Last year, an hon. Member was killed in a fire. Hon. Members have committed suicide and an hon. Member was assassinated. We are not immortal. Hon. Members, like everyone else, can be certain only of the fact that they will die.

Members of Parliament attend the funerals of friends and relatives all the time. A constituent recently observed that I had become a professional mourner. Perhaps that is because many senior citizens live in the area that I represent, and they are prone to die, especially in winter. For many years, I was an altar server, and I have therefore attended numerous funerals.

Some people can be hard about such matters. Their view is: we die and that is the end of it; what awaits us is a bit scary, but does what happens to the body really matter? I believe that it does. Some people make their own funeral arrangements, but the majority do not. Those who are left behind to dispose of the bodies of their loved ones may suffer trauma and depend on others for good, fair and reasonable advice. Not everyone has relatives, and it is left to the state or the hospital in which they died to make the arrangements.

There is increasing pressure for cremation. We could argue the merits of cremation against those of burial, but an impression is given that there is a shortage of space and that we should consider cremation because we cannot all be buried. I do not want to exaggerate it, but there is a tendency to recommend cremation. I am worried about that. I hope that the people who present options to those who are grieving do so fairly.

I obtained a fascinating document called "Good Funerals", a background paper that was prepared on behalf of the ecumenical Churches group on funeral services at cemeteries and crematoriums. It covers good practice. I do not expect the Minister to be able to respond to all my points, but I should be delighted if he could deal with some, and perhaps write to me. What is the Government's position on the conduct of cremations? I do not want to name crematoriums, but in some, the process is a little hard-hearted. No sooner has one funeral party arrived than the next group of mourners is waiting to come in. The process appears to be conducted in conveyor-belt fashion. Someone presses the button, the organ plays—when there is no organist, a tape of music can be played—a hymn may be sung, the vicar will do his best to say something and suddenly one is outside looking at the flowers and that is the end.

Perhaps many people want that sort of funeral, but I am not convinced. People may be satisfied with it at the time because no one wants to go to funerals. I attended a friend's funeral, which appeared in the news. He was a teacher who, sadly, committed suicide. That funeral was traumatic for the huge number of mourners from Lewisham and Newham. Mourning is tough, but funerals should be conducted with the greatest possible dignity. That is why I am worried about the industrial side of the process.

What are the Government's views on the financial support that can be provided? The Government whom I supported introduced grants for such events; we could argue about whether they covered the costs. What is the Government's view on those who have no one to dispose of their body? How does the state deal with their wishes, especially if they are cremated? What happens to their ashes?

The Oddfellows survey of funeral costs in Britain tells us that last year, the average burial cost £2,040 and the average cremation cost £1,250. In the past two years, the cost of burials has gone up by 25 per cent. and the cost of cremations by 12 per cent. That is a lot of money. I know that it has to come from somewhere, and I wonder whether the Government have any views on that matter.

On the disposal of ashes, a person will often come to an arrangement with a cemetery to have ashes interred and to have a rose that they will pay to have maintained for 10 years. Then that person dies, and there is no one to carry on the payments. What happens to those ashes? Are they dug up? Are they used for a further garden? Do the Government have a view on how such circumstances should be dealt with?

Some hon. Members may smile, but when I prepare to meet my maker, I wish to be buried. Possibly the only thing for which I shall be remembered will be my smiling face in 1992—that may have been a horror for some people but for one or two it will perhaps have been my only contribution to national life. I think my Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988 and my Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 are also worthy of note. It is my own individual choice to be buried, as it is the individual choice of many other people, who have firm views on how a burial should be conducted and, in particular, how a grave should be adorned with a monument. The Minister has been a Member of Parliament as long as I have, and we have all had letters from constituents about the rules and regulations about the size of monuments, the wording on tombstones and whether one can have kerbs. There is also a debate as to how the regulations apply in a churchyard or local authority graveyard. If one is very upset, those are difficult issues with which to deal.

I am delighted that the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs is undertaking to produce a report on the state of our cemeteries. One of my colleagues said to me recently that they had inadvertently visited my father's grave in West Ham cemetery, and that it was in good order. I certainly pay tribute to the way in which that cemetery is kept. However, I wonder whether the Government intend to give further guidance on the rules and regulations on how people can mark the loss of their loved ones.

In my family, we have had a long argument about kerbstones. In a particular part of the cemetery, there is a plan to remove the kerbstones because it is hoped that the whole area will eventually be grassed over. That is crazy, because it is a very old part of the cemetery and there are some very large monuments either side of the area.

[Mr. David Amess]

How on earth is someone going to be able to clip the grass when it eventually grows? I take the view that if people are keeping a grave well, there should be some flexibility in these matters.

In the years that I have spent in the House, I have received a number of complaints from constituents. I am not knocking London Members or London boroughs, but those boroughs tend to have the biggest cemeteries and constituents have turned up in a London cemetery to find that the grave that they wished to visit has disappeared. We can all think of incidents over the years of cemeteries having been sold or not having been properly maintained, and I regret all that. What is the Government's view on that issue?

In a recent case in my constituency, a widow wanted her late husband to be buried in the military part of a cemetery. That was fine—they believed in burials—but she herself could not have been buried there, although she could have been cremated and had her ashes interred in the grave. She did not want that, so her husband was not buried in the military area. That seems crazy.

A constituent recently wrote to me about my local council's charge of £126 for permission to erect a headstone. I understand that other Essex authorities charge between £35 and £65. My constituent said that the authority only charges £95 for permission to erect a garage, and that two site visits are included in that fee. With the ever-increasing cost of a basic funeral, why is VAT on gravestones not zero-rated? I know that funds are limited, and that the situation has always been the same, but might the Government consider that? How much VAT revenue do they receive from that source?

People have asked me whether we might consider the Italian practice of interment in walls. I do not know whether that is a possibility.

Last year, I attended my first green funeral. One of our parish councillors died, and when I heard that she was to be buried in a cardboard box, I thought that it could not be true, but when a large gathering turned up at the funeral, we found that it was indeed so. The funeral was conducted with great dignity. The body was interred and will eventually form part of a woodland, which is something that some people like.

It is most unfortunate that, in my area, there is a rubbish tip right beside the very old Jewish cemetery. That is horrendous planning. One would have thought that someone, somewhere, would have said that that was not a good idea—but there we are, these things happen.

Recently, someone from Devon who does family research wrote to praise my local cemetery in Sutton road. He said how very helpful all the staff and local authority officers were and how they had welcomed him with a smile as he looked up the details of the people whom he was trying to trace.

Since this debate was announced, many people have contacted me about the lack of space and increasing land values. The Treasury is to publish the second consultative document on the security of pre-plan payments. The National Association of Funeral Directors is very interested in that. The funeral directors have pointed out a ramification of the working time directive about which I had no idea: burials may have to be early in the day to escape greater charges, especially between October and March.

There is disquiet among stonemasons about local authorities selling stones directly. One can see their point.

There are apparently European Union laws trying to ban the burial of embalmed bodies in green sites. The EU directive on embalming chemicals apparently means that since last May there has been a need to register, which costs between £20,000 and £40,000. I am advised that a monopoly could result, as many small companies cannot afford that. The Government rightly say that mercury emissions must be reduced, but the embalmers association tells me—I cannot believe it—that that might lead to mercury dental fillings being removed before cremation. New cremation equipment is more expensive. Difficulties will arise with regard to listed buildings with cremation equipment—about 50 per cent. of these listed buildings have cremation equipment.

I have been told by embalmers and staff at cemeteries and crematoriums that they would welcome more consultation by the Government prior to the issue of guidance notes and ensuing legislation. However, I am sure that the Government do their best to involve people, and there are always two sides to a story.

We all want to give our loved ones a good send-off, and everyone has a different idea of what that is. I am a Catholic; one is brought into the church the night before the funeral and then it is a straightforward matter. I understand that sometimes the liaison between the local vicars and funeral directors is not great, with vicars being told that they have only 20 minutes in which to carry out the service in crematoriums and are allowed only one or two hymns.

On the basis that we will all die and that there will, we hope, be someone to mourn us, I hope that the Government will do all they can to underpin what is already being done to support those who are left behind to mourn the passing of their loved ones.

10.26 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) has raised an important issue tonight. It is coming to the fore increasingly, as a result of a number of matters, some of which the hon. Gentleman addressed in the course of his interesting speech. The debate is particularly timely in the light of the decision of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs to carry out its own investigation. The amount of interest that the topic has generated, in terms of the correspondence described by the hon. Gentleman, is an indication of how important it is for the House and the Government to deal with it.

Government responsibility for cemeteries and crematoriums in England is shared. The Home Office is responsible for burial and cremation law, including the disturbance of buried human remains, while the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions has responsibility for most burial and cremation authorities, because most of them are also local authorities. Policy on land use, regeneration and environmental protection—issues which are relevant to how we plan and use cemeteries and crematoriums—is also within the Department's portfolio. It is a shared responsibility, which my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and I take very seriously. Indeed, we recently gave joint evidence to the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee.

The Home Office has long been responsible for cremation law and for the law on the exhumation or removal of human remains. Since 1995, we have also assumed responsibility for remaining burial legislation. This is an unwieldy, arcane and out-of-date body of law that is ripe for reform. That is why I particularly welcome this debate and the public discussion that is taking place on these issues.

Burial and cremation facilities are provided not by central Government but by local organisations in response to local demand. There are no special dispensations for cemeteries or crematoriums, and new facilities are subject to planning and other relevant laws in the usual way, mainly to compete with other demands on land utilisation. The hon. Gentleman drew attention to some of the difficulties that arise. The market is relevant here, as is pressure on land and the utilisation of land for a variety of purposes.

I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman's description of the unfortunate juxtaposition of a cemetery and a rubbish dump. It is unfortunate—local authorities and those responsible for planning need to treat these matters with sensitivity and care. In the main, that does happen.

Public policy in relation to cemeteries and crematoriums is that provision is a matter for local and commercial decisions in the light of demand. Regulation is designed primarily to uphold the public interest in the decent disposal of the dead, to ensure that proper records are kept and preserved, to avoid public nuisance and to protect buried remains from unnecessary disturbance. Municipal cemeteries are regulated to ensure uniform provision of the grant of burial rights and consistent arrangements for the maintenance of graves and memorials.

Crematoriums and cemeteries are subject to environmental protection regulations—the hon. Gentleman mentioned mercury in that regard—while crematoriums need additional regulation in order to deter any attempt to dispose permanently of evidence of crime. Undoubtedly, issues of choice and taste should be taken into account. People should have a choice and should have their tastes respected. Graves and memorials should be maintained in circumstances that uphold the dignity of the purpose for which they were designed and built.

Day-to-day management of burial grounds, which can be a cause of conflict, is very much a matter for the operator concerned, whether public or private. It is for the burial authority to determine how its grounds should be laid out, what maintenance regime to adopt and what range of services to provide. There will be differences, and some provision falls below an acceptable standard. The setting of fees, opening hours and days for burial or cremation services are also matters for local management. One cannot imagine circumstances in which such matters should be centrally controlled. What is certainly the responsibility of central Government is the creation of a framework within which local decisions can be made in the context of dignity, choice and the seemliness of arrangements.

The hon. Gentleman approached the subject of death in a refreshing and matter-of-fact manner—in fact, in almost an in-your-face way, if I may say so. Death is one of the last taboos in our society. We take a different approach to death than that of our Victorian predecessors, who would have had no difficulty with the notion of jewellery or confectionery being prepared and warmed for the purpose of commemorating a death. We do not do that in our culture today, although we should recognise that there are different methods in the diverse and plural society in which we live.

In my constituency, the Irish and Caribbean ways of dealing with death are much more in tune with what our Victorian ancestors would have recognised. They would have recognised the importance of a wake, and of lying-in and visits to the house. I recently attended the wake of a much loved local councillor. People visited the house and Ann John, the partner of the deceased, over a period of days. People were able to reflect on the life of the deceased, sharing happy times and sad times with Ann, who now leads my local authority. That was how she wanted it, and we all respected it. It was entirely fitting and appropriate. Others choose to do it differently.

We have to ensure that there is proper accountability and a degree of transparency. People should know where to take their concerns about services—whether provided by the council or the company. For municipal undertakings, a local government ombudsman offers a further avenue for complaints—and rightly so.

The Home Office has statutory powers to inspect cemeteries and crematoriums. In cases of serious allegations of irregularities, or when there are suggestions that a site should be closed, an inspection will be carried out and a report made. That will help us to decide what action we should take, although our powers offer only a limited choice. We do not have the powers which, it is sometimes believed exist in such cases.

I want to make a few comments about the environment. Cemeteries offer more than just a place of burial of or memorial for the dead. They can have architectural or historical significance; for example, the Kensal Rise cemetery in my constituency has catacombs of recognised importance.

We also realise that cemeteries and burial grounds can contribute to the sum of green open spaces in urban areas, providing a peaceful oasis for quiet recreation and contemplation. They may also provide valuable habitats for trees and other flora and an important haven for wildlife. The development of the green funerals described by the hon. Gentleman makes an environmental contribution and is also important in offering choice.

Those arrangements—a mixed economy and local decision taking—have, on the whole, worked well. However, contrary to the tenor of some of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, demand for cremation seems to have levelled off, at about 70 per cent. of all deaths. Many of the cemeteries opened in the past 100 years are coming to the end of their useful life. That creates its own pressures: pressure on land space for the living puts pressure on land space for the dead.

The past few years have seen a number of important developments. Certain problems have come to the fore. There is a shortage of land for burial in London and elsewhere. The condition of some cemeteries and churchyards has deteriorated owing to lack of maintenance. Some old cemeteries are of doubtful viability. There are challenges of principle and practice regarding the removal of human remains to enable the development of old burial grounds. Regulation is inconsistent and there are variable standards of practice and management.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

The case for change is made. It is important that there should be a wider public debate to address issues such as the lack of burial space, a review of burial law and the lack of direction for the burial industry. The decision of the Environment Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs to examine those matters was helpful. Last month, I gave evidence to the Sub-Committee. Whatever recommendations the Sub-Committee may make, our aims must be to ensure that the public have a realistic and affordable choice; that the services provided by burial and cremation authorities are professional, caring, timely and sensitive to the needs of the whole diverse range of communities in our country; and that local burial and cremation facilities offer a fitting environment for the bereaved and enhance the life of the community.

Those are just some of the challenges. We need to make sure that the public have confidence in the way that their cemeteries and crematoriums are managed—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at twenty-one minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 27 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 6 March.

MEDWAY COUNCIL BILL *[LORDS]*

Order for consideration, as amended, read.

To be considered on Tuesday 6 March.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

US National Missile Defence

2. **Mr. Malcolm Savidge** (Aberdeen, North): What recent discussions he has had with the US Administration on national missile defence. [149702]

11. **Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): What recent discussions his Department has had with the US Administration in relation to national missile defence; and what assessment he has made about the implications of any such involvement for the UK. [149712]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary is today attending the NATO North Atlantic council in Brussels, with the new United States Secretary of State, Colin Powell.

My right hon. Friend recently held discussions in Washington with Vice-President Cheney, National Security Adviser Rice and Secretary of State Powell on a range of issues, including national missile defence. Those discussions, and those that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had last week with President Bush, clearly demonstrated the constructive approach being taken by the Bush Administration. The US Administration reaffirmed their commitment to a national missile defence system, but stressed their willingness to take their time to consult allies, Russia and others. They confirmed that no decision had yet been taken on the development or deployment of a specific system. It is therefore too early to assess any implications for the United Kingdom.

Mr. Savidge: Does my hon. Friend recognise that the report by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs on weapons of mass destruction reflects concern across the political spectrum at the dangers of national missile defence, not least to the arms control process, and support for the Government, urging caution on the issue? Will he reassure us that there is no foundation for media reports stating that the Government have cut a deal to assist, encourage or advocate NMD, as that could undermine our policies and principles, our national interest and global security?

Mr. Vaz: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but the fact is that we made our position clear in the discussions between the President of the United States and the Prime Minister, and I can do no better than to quote from the joint communiqué:

> "We recognise the existence of a common threat stemming from the growing proliferation of weapons of mass destruction . . . we are already working together in this area and agree on the need for further substantive bilateral consultations as well as consultations with other allies".

The United States of America is our closest ally and our strongest friend. It is important that we should discuss those matters with the US Administration. It is also important that they should consult ourselves and others, as they have agreed to do. We shall proceed on that basis because that is in the best interests of transatlantic security.

Mr. Simpson: My hon. Friend will know that, on 3 July last year, the Secretary of State for Defence told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that there was no significant threat to the United Kingdom from an attack by a rogue state. Why would we wish to change that position by making ourselves the most obvious target if we were to become the front-line partner of the American star wars initiative? Why has the United Kingdom invested more than £100 million so far in the star wars technology—a project that not only would breach the ABM treaty, but would have no international support across the developed world?

Mr. Vaz: Throughout my hon. Friend's career in politics he has had a long-standing commitment to the views that he has just expressed. The Government's position is absolutely clear. There is no difference between what the Secretary of State for Defence said last year and what the Prime Minister and President Bush said at Camp David last week, which is that there is a common threat. If our closest ally feels vulnerable, it is right that we should listen carefully to its concerns. There is no specific proposal on the table, as my hon. Friend knows. There is ample scope for consultation, and we have made it clear that we will look carefully at those very serious and sensitive matters. It is extremely important that we work with our allies to ensure that those matters are resolved. There is no significant threat to us, but there is a common threat that affects the security of a number of countries.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): On the subject of national missile defence and the phantom

European army, will the Minister inquire of the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs why they appear to say one thing to the President of the United States and another thing to leaders of European Union countries? Is he aware that the French have a rather good ambassador in Washington who is having tremendous fun every evening dining out in political circles and reading out the conflicting messages that 10 Downing street is sending to Europe and to Washington?

Mr. Vaz: I am not responsible for what the ambassador does in his leisure time; I am responsible for telling the House that there is confusion because of the activities of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith). He travels like a weasel to Washington, giving out old draft documents and insulting the American Administration. The situation is clear and was set out by the President and by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the Camp David meeting last week. I remind the hon. Gentleman of what was agreed in the joint communiqué. It said:

"The United States welcomes the European Union's European Security and Defence Policy intended to make Europe a stronger, more capable partner in deterring and managing crises affecting the security of the Transatlantic community".

As the hon. Gentleman knows, and as we have said on numerous occasions, NATO remains the cornerstone of our defence policy. No matter what confusion the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green wishes to sow wherever he goes, that remains the position.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The Vale of York is between Fylingdales and Menwith Hill, although neither is in my constituency. Before the Government consider any application from the United States on the national missile defence policy, will the Minister tell us what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Defence on what the cost of upgrading those two listening stations would be?

Mr. Vaz: I have had no discussions with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on that matter.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, I represent the constituency of Scarborough and Whitby, which is very close to Fylingdales. The people of my constituency will welcome very much the consultation that was implied by the communiqué that was issued at the weekend. However, will there be any consultation with local people in the North Yorkshire moors area, should there be any further developments? Will there be any consideration of the fact that the base at Fylingdales is in a national park? Will that have any bearing on any potential developments at the site?

Mr. Vaz: I have listened to my hon. Friend and I can do no better than to pass on his comments to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I welcome the generous compliment that the Minister has just bestowed on the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, my hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green. He will be delighted to know that he has got up the Minister's nose to such an extent.

Why does the Minister not abandon his waffle, dither and procrastination and just admit to the House that the reason why he will not tell us clearly whether he and the Government are, in principle, in favour of national missile defence as a protection against the antics of rogue states is that the Ministry of Defence and his Department are irreconcilably split? Is it not the case that the Secretary of State for Defence can see the merits of such a system but that CND man—the Foreign Secretary, who consistently championed one-sided disarmament throughout the 1980s—remains feeble, passive and hopeless on this subject?

Mr. Vaz: I do not understand why the hon. Gentleman is working himself up into such a lather. The position is very clear. We recognise that there is a threat, as the President of the United States said to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister last week. As the ally of the United States, we will be consulted, as others will be. That is the way forward. No specific proposal is on the table but when such a proposal is available for discussion, it will be discussed in the proper way. There is no difference between any members of the Government on that point; there is one specific policy that deals with the need to work with our allies, to be consulted by them and to move forward on this issue.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): Is it not clear that the Opposition must be bitterly disappointed at the outcome of the meeting in Washington because it was so obviously a success? On missile defence, my hon. Friend must know that the United States Administration is dropping the word "national." Although the conclusions of last August's Foreign Affairs Committee have been adopted, is it not clear that the Bush Administration's concept of such defence has moved on from a land-based strategy to a sea-based or space-based strategy? If that is technologically feasible, how long will it take before such a system becomes operational?

Mr. Vaz: There is no timing on that because no specific proposal is before the House. As for my right hon. Friend's first point, he is absolutely right; there were tears in central office last weekend when it was seen how successful the meeting had been between the Prime Minister and President Bush. The joint communiqué dealt with a number of crucial issues, including the President's support for the European security defence initiative and the support of our Government for consultations on NMD.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): The Minister's smug complacency takes the biscuit. The only weasels are those who sit on Labour Benches. Last week, the Prime Minister undoubtedly left the President of the United States with the impression that he would support the missile defence programme. However, on this side of the Atlantic, as reported in the Danish press, the Foreign Secretary reached an agreement with the Foreign Minister of Denmark last month that neither country would give the United States any indication that it was prepared to provide sites for the radar installations that are necessary for the missile shield to function. Is it not about time that the Government showed some leadership on the matter

rather than saying one thing in Europe and another thing in Washington? Is it not the truth that the only things to put in the box marked "handle with care" are the Government's promises?

Mr. Vaz: It is very sad when Opposition spokespersons prepare their supplementary questions before they hear the answers to earlier questions. The hon. Lady will know that she is completely wrong. Her question goes to the heart of the way in which the Opposition want to deal with the policy; they provide misinformation to everyone, causing massive confusion. The fact is that no decision has been made. An agreement was reached at Camp David last week that there should be consultation between the United States and the United Kingdom, and further consultation with allies and with Russia. That remains the position.

Iraq

3. **Mr. Bill Michie** (Sheffield, Heeley): What UN Security Council meetings are planned in the next three months to discuss policy towards Iraq. [149703]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): To date, the Security Council has scheduled meetings on Iraq issues on 8 March, 31 March and an unspecified date in April. In addition, the Iraq sanctions committee meets on a regular basis to discuss all aspects of Iraq policy.

Mr. Michie: The situation is serious and future loss of life on both sides—by accident or design—is a stark reality. Since I accepted what was at the time the King's shilling and wore uniform, I have been convinced that politicians who vote for war and armed conflict should be the first on the front line, thus possibly avoiding future conflicts throughout the world. Will my hon. Friend talk to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to find an alternative to break the deadlock before more lives are lost, because two wrongs do not make a right?

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend would agree that continuing a wrong does not make a right, and that is what we confront in the Iraqi regime. I am pleased to spell out the differentiation. Nothing that we or the United Nations do is intended to hurt the Iraqi people; that is not the purpose. The purpose is most definitely to prevent the Iraqi regime from developing weapons of mass destruction, from attacking its neighbours—as it did 10 years ago—or from using chemical weapons against its own people, as it also did in the not-so-distant past. Let us keep the balance right and implement policy as effectively as possible. We must not abandon our resolve to prevent the Iraqi regime from acting in the way that I have described.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I welcome the Minister to what I believe is his first Foreign Office Question Time? If any information were required on the need to review policy towards Iraq, was it not to be found in the rather cold and frigid reception for Colin Powell as he toured Arab capitals over the past two or three days? With three out of five of the permanent members of the Security Council no longer supporting the sanctions regime and no Arab Government, apart from Kuwait, being prepared to offer public support for the regime, is it not now time to do what the Minister was hinting at over the weekend, which is to institute a full-scale review of policy towards Iraq, out of which should come a sanctions regime that is related to military and dual-use equipment, but excludes non-military sanctions?

Mr. Wilson: The purpose of the sanctions regime and that of United Nations Security Council resolutions is to achieve exactly what the right hon. and learned Gentleman has described: to target the military capacity of Saddam Hussein. Of course, there are items that fall into the dual-use category.

It is no part of my intention, or anyone else's, that humanitarian goods should be caught up in the sanctions regime. As I have said, if there are concrete examples of that happening, they should be drawn to the attention of the Government and the UN sanctions committee. Merely to assert that there are such examples plays into the propaganda efforts of Saddam Hussein, in whose interests it is to claim that, by definition, if we prevent him from building weapons of mass destruction, we are visiting humanitarian suffering upon his people.

That is not true. Saddam Hussein is inflicting that suffering, as I am sure the right hon. and learned Gentleman well knows. There is $11 billion lying in bank accounts that Saddam Hussein could be using for the humanitarian good of his own people. He chooses not to do so because he prefers the propaganda value of that $11 billion to the practical effect of the money.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington): My hon. Friend the Minister has said that anyone who points to the dire humanitarian consequences of the sanctions regime against Iraq is a dupe. He will be aware that two successive UN co-ordinators in the regime have both said clearly and publicly throughout the world that there are massive humanitarian consequences of the sanctions regime, and that, as relevant UN officials, they cannot support it. Does he believe that they too are dupes?

Mr. Wilson: I said absolutely no such thing. I respect the many people who are genuinely concerned about the sanctions regime and the way in which sanctions are implemented. I am not speaking negatively about those who hold that view which, doubtless, is shared by my hon. Friend. It is positive to say that we must distinguish between two approaches. One is directed against weapons of mass destruction, and one is purported to be directed against the humanitarian interests of the Iraqi people. In so far as there is purported to be confusion, it serves only Saddam Hussein. That is why he seeks to imply that one approach is the inevitable consequence of the other.

If the approach can be better, of course it should be better. Everyone agrees about that and is trying to take the agenda forward. The logical conclusion is not to abandon sanctions, to allow the means of developing weapons of mass destruction—including the development of the chemical weapons programme—and to allow another attack on Kuwait or anywhere else. It is in our interests to distinguish the two objectives, and we shall do that more effectively in future than in the past. The objective remains clear. The primary objective—which is in the

interests of the world, and of the region—is to stop Saddam Hussein developing the potential that we are discussing.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): If we ask our brave pilots in the RAF to undertake challenging and dangerous missions, are they not entitled to expect the widest support in the United Kingdom and throughout the world community for the task that they are carrying out, which is of the highest humanitarian order? If there is concern about whether people understand why the task is being undertaken, is it not beholden on the Government to ensure that there is a much clearer picture in people's minds in the United Kingdom and more widely of the real threats that are posed to the southern Shia people and the marsh Arabs, given the brutality and awfulness that was suffered by the people of Kuwait? Will the Government make a great effort to support our pilots in the task that they have been given?

Mr. Wilson: The raids of a fortnight ago were launched precisely in pursuit of that objective and were not an extension of policy towards Iraq. We were merely saying that if we ask aircrews to cover the southern no-fly zone, we must make sure that they have the best protection possible. I find it difficult to believe that we cannot achieve full consensus on that point, even if on no other. If we ask our aircrews to do a job, we must protect them. It is as simple as that.

Like me, the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) went to Kuwait at the weekend, and there are plenty of reminders there that we are not talking about some hypothetical threat. It is not an invention of paranoid minds that Saddam Hussein might do certain things in the region; he did them 10 years ago. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman would join me in wishing to mention the people whom we met in Kuwait—mothers, daughters and children of 660 prisoners of war who have never been accounted for. The Iraqi regime has made no attempt to tell those prisoners' loved ones whether they are alive or dead or to describe their treatment. Those people are not propaganda, but real, flesh-and-blood human beings. If we had some movement from the Iraqi regime on such questions, some of the other claims made on its behalf might be a little more credible.

Mr. Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): What discussions does my hon. Friend plan to hold with the Indian authorities and at the United Nations about the alleged activities of the Delhi-based company NEC Ltd, which is alleged to be supplying missile material and biological weapons material to the Iraqi regime? Is that not exactly the type of activity that must be ended if there are to be any developments in policy towards Iraq?

Mr. Wilson: Any alleged breach of sanctions should be investigated, including that one. Breaches of sanctions are occurring; we cannot have sanctions without breaches. However, that does not invalidate the case for sanctions, which will play the key role in stopping Saddam Hussein developing weapons of mass destruction. I undertake to write to my hon. Friend on the specific case to which he referred.

Discussions are taking place, and that is one reason for Colin Powell's presence in the region during the past few days. He has talked with representatives of neighbouring countries to try to persuade them that sanctions must be enforced. Sanctions were not invented by the Government or by the United States; they are carried out under United Nations Security Council resolution 1284. The way out for the Iraqi regime is to allow the inspectors in to see what is going on. If that happens, sanctions can be suspended and, ultimately, lifted. That is a simple, straightforward way ahead, but it requires Saddam Hussein not to develop weapons of mass destruction or chemical weapons, and not to attack his neighbours. The House was united on all those objectives 10 years ago, and it should be united now.

British-American Relations (Europe)

4. **Mr. Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): When he will meet the US Secretary of State to discuss bilateral relations between the United Kingdom and the United States with regard to Europe. [149704]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Secretary of State Colin Powell between 5 and 7 February during a round of visits to Washington. He discussed the whole range of British-American relations.

Mr. Fabricant: The Minister will be aware that President Chirac has said that the raison d'être of the European rapid reaction force is to contain the United States. *[Laughter.]* The Minister may laugh, but that is what President Chirac said; I shall say it in French, if the Minister likes. [HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] It would, perhaps, be out of order to do so.

The Minister read, with some smugness, the communiqué issued from Washington last weekend. Is he aware that, since then, the French and Italian military attachés have said—not in their spare time, as he said, but in time paid for by their Governments—that the information given to President Bush was incorrect? If the Minister read the Nice treaty, he would find that it contains reference to an independent command structure.

Mr. Vaz *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Fabricant: It is all very well for the hon. Gentleman to shake his head; I suspect that he has not read the Nice treaty. If he has, he will know that it identifies an independent chain of command for the European rapid reaction force, independent from NATO. That is the whole raison d'etre of the force. Does the Minister not realise that we live in a small world, and that he cannot do what the Liberals do—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the Minister should now answer the question.

Mr. Vaz: Indeed, it is a small world. I have read the treaty of Nice. When the hon. Gentleman reads the treaty—a copy of which I will send him, as it was signed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary only yesterday in Nice—he will find that defence is not mentioned in the treaty itself. The clauses and propositions concerning defence are in the annexes.

May I clear up a further point? There are 372 million people in the European Union. The hon. Gentleman quotes a couple of defence attachés from countries that he names. I much prefer the views of the Heads of Government at Nice, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of this country. Our position on European security and defence policy has been made absolutely clear.

May I tell the hon. Gentleman whom he should thank for ensuring that defence was part of the European Union? He should thank his right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude), who signed the Maastricht treaty. That was the first time that a common defence framework was mentioned in a European treaty, and we must thank the right hon. Member for Horsham for that.

I was very pleased, and the entire House should be pleased, with the communiqué that came out of Camp David last week. It is important that we treat these issues seriously. Throughout the process, our American allies were told what was happening. Before Nice, they were sent copies of the treaty and the annexes. After the treaty was approved at Nice, a communiqué from NATO was drafted by the Americans and the United Kingdom Government, among others.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does my hon. Friend welcome the accord at Camp David, which repudiated the isolationist policies of parties such as the Conservative Opposition and particularly of people such as the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood), who says that our EU partners are influenced by anti-Americanism? Is it not the case that a country such as Britain must be friends with both America and the European Union in the interests of jobs, as well as world security?

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Opposition are so bitterly disappointed because of the success of the Camp David meeting and of the Nice treaty that they have nothing to proclaim as a result of those two events. My hon. Friend is right that we have a close and strong ally in the United States of America—as demonstrated by the meeting between President Bush and our Prime Minister—and that we are a leading player in Europe, shaping the European agenda. That is the best of both worlds.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): Last Thursday, the Foreign Secretary said on "Question Time" that the EU rapid reaction force would be "firmly anchored within NATO." One of the papers that was signed at Nice—not by a couple of military attachés, but by the Heads of Government and Heads of State to whom the Minister refers—stated that

"the entire chain of command must remain under the political control and strategic direction of the EU throughout the operation".

Will the Minister tell us how that is consistent with the force being "anchored within NATO"?

Mr. Vaz: That is absolutely consistent with the force being anchored within NATO. I am sorry that the right hon. Gentleman does not understand the Petersberg tasks. If he looks back, he will recall that, in 1992, two members of the Government of whom he was a member, Sir Malcolm Rifkind and the noble Lord Hurd, signed up to the Petersberg tasks. The process began under the previous Conservative Government.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the Petersberg tasks deal with certain humanitarian and crisis management issues. He also knows that NATO is the cornerstone of our transatlantic security policy. Of course, we will have to draw on the planning, resources, capabilities and assets of NATO. That remains the case. As Lord Robertson said on the "Today" programme this morning, there will be only a very small number of cases involving minor issues that European nations will have the capability to deal with themselves. That is what the right hon. Gentleman is referring to when he quotes that sentence.

Mr. Maude: It is not at all clear whether the Minister is denying that the rapid reaction force is anchored within NATO. He appears to be saying that it was never meant to be and that the Foreign Secretary was talking about something else. He certainly has not begun to explain how the Foreign Secretary's comments last Thursday are consistent with what he signed up to at Nice.

However, that is not all. We are told by President Bush that the Prime Minister assured him at the weekend that European defence

"would in no way undermine NATO",

that there "would be joint command" and that

"planning would take place within NATO."

The Prime Minister used the words "within NATO", but the papers to which he signed up state:

"The European Council has decided to establish . . . The Military Committee of the European Union; The Military Staff of the European Union."

Is not it clear that the Prime Minister's assurances to President Bush were simply not true?

Mr. Vaz: I suggest that the right hon. Gentleman starts to read the annexes in English rather than German. If he does so, he will see that they are fully consistent with what the Prime Minister said to President Bush on 23 February. They are also entirely consistent with what the Foreign Secretary said last week. Lord Robertson, who happens to be the Secretary General of NATO, said:

"It is very difficult to see circumstances other than the very smallest ones, which will be done perhaps by individual countries grouping together, where they would not require or want or find desirable to have NATO assets and capabilities."

He is dealing with those small circumstances that are defined in the Petersberg tasks, and not with the major situations that have been described. NATO remains the cornerstone of our transatlantic defence policy.

Of course, we have to draw on the assets, planning and capabilities of NATO. That is why the Prime Minister made those remarks to President Bush and why the president is so reassured. What upsets the right hon. Gentleman is that there was agreement at Nice and that the President of the United States supports the European defence policy.

Mr. Maude: The Minister has utterly failed to explain how the phrases "anchored within NATO" and "joint command" are compatible with what the Government signed up to. On television last week, the Foreign

Secretary claimed that he had written most of the papers himself. That is an improbable contention, but let us take his word for it. I have read out some of the words that he claims to have written, but they are inconsistent with what the Government are now saying.

Why will not the Government accept that they have signed up to a project that is deliberately designed to be autonomous from NATO and which, as our American partners have said, runs the serious risk of undermining it? The only way of wringing even a qualified approval from the United States is by misrepresenting what has been agreed. Is not the right course now to accept that that is the wrong way to achieve the desirable aim of enhancing European defence co-operation and capability, and that the right way is to return to the European Security and Defence Initiative model agreed by my right hon. Friends in 1996, which was genuinely anchored within NATO?

Mr. Vaz: I am sorry, but I shall have to invite the right hon. Gentleman to come and see me in my office, where I can properly explain these issues to him. He has been relying so totally on what has been said by the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) and in the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail*, that he does not understand the issues. I am sad about that, but let me explain it to him for a third time. NATO remains the cornerstone of the Government's defence policy and that of Europe. Of course, the European rapid reaction force is anchored within NATO and will act only once NATO finds that it does not want to be fully engaged. That is the point.

Mr. Maude: This does not say that.

Mr. Vaz: It does say that. The right hon. Gentleman takes one sentence out of a whole set of annexes. I will use my highlighter pen and send him a copy of the document that will set the position out. That is how it is to work. It has the support of President Chirac, the President of the United States and the Prime Minister of this country. I know that it does not have the support of the right hon. Gentleman, because he simply cannot understand it.

British Trade International

5. **Ms Sally Keeble** (Northampton, North): What assistance and advice on promoting overseas trade is being offered to the English regions by British Trade International. [149705]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): British Trade International, through its trade support arm Trade Partners UK, delivers its advice and assistance in the English regions through international trade teams in the business links, led by nine international trade directors. Assistance covers every facet of international trade, with particular emphasis on small and medium enterprises.

Ms Keeble: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that business link in Northamptonshire, which is a full programme of trade fairs, found in a recent survey that there had been a 6 per cent. increase in the value of export sales by local firms in the last half of last year and that, in addition, 65 to 70 per cent. of those exports were to the European Union? Does he agree that the important job of building on that success is ill served by the Conservative party's anti-European rhetoric?

Mr. Wilson: I do not know very many serious exporters who would support the Conservative party's policy. Indeed, they can be certain that the key to the success of British exporters lies largely in Europe and that any turning of our back on Europe would be disastrous for them. Our record success in attracting inward investment is due to our place in the EU and the Government's position on the single currency.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the hon. Gentleman ensure that British Trade International bears in mind, when giving advice to British regions and elsewhere, the experience of Sainsbury and Wena Hotels Ltd. in trading and investing in Egypt, and warns potential British investors in Egypt of the possible pitfalls of investing in that country?

Mr. Wilson: The normal advice is available to any company investing in any country. Personally, I would not give such advice on Egypt, with which we have very good relations. The Wena Hotels case to which the hon. Gentleman refers is the subject of on-going legal action. As he knows, because I wrote to him, I raised the matter with the Prime Minister of Egypt when I met him recently. Equally, the Sainsbury story is complex and I do not think that it has yet reached its conclusion. I would certainly not reach the general conclusion about Egypt that the hon. Gentleman has drawn.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): Did my hon. Friend notice the recent call by the chairman of Ford Europe for the Tory party to rethink its policy on the euro? Does not my hon. Friend think that the Tory party is putting its own prejudices before the interests of British jobs, British workers—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not responsible for those matters. [HON. MEMBERS: "Nobody is."] Order.

Ilisu Dam

6. **Mr. Simon Thomas** (Ceredigion): What recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding the export credit guarantee for the Ilisu dam in Turkey. [149706]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): My right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry have had several discussions about the Ilisu dam project in Turkey. My officials remain in close touch with their counterparts at the Export Credits Guarantee Department and the Department of Trade and Industry, in order to monitor progress on the four areas of concern set out by right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 21 December 1999.

Mr. Thomas: I thank the Minister for that reply. May I draw his attention to the conclusion of the International Development Committee's sixth report, which states:

"The Ilisu Dam was from the outset conceived and planned in contravention of international standards, and it still does not comply"?

In the light of the current financial chaos in Turkey, does he agree that the United Kingdom taxpayer should not touch that project with a bargepole? Will he use the last remnants of his Department's ethical foreign policy to ensure that the Government do not support the project?

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Gentleman is right to raise those concerns; they have of course been raised a number of times before. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made it clear that he will not give his agreement unless there is progress on meeting the points that he has made. As the hon. Gentleman knows, they are very important points to do with resettlement, the environment, water disposal and other such issues. Unless they are dealt with, there is no question of the project being agreed. We are very concerned about the human dimension of the matter, and the hon. Gentleman can be reassured that no decision will be taken unless those criteria have been met.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As the only member of the International Development Committee to visit the site of the Ilisu dam, may I suggest to my hon. Friend that the plan as it stands meets none of the criteria—on environmental, developmental or human rights grounds? It is time that we said to the Turks: "Nothing doing; we will have nothing to do with the plan", because 75,000 people cannot be kicked out of their homes without being consulted on the plan well before it is executed.

Mr. Vaz: No Member of the House has done more to highlight these issues than my hon. Friend, and I pay tribute to the work that she has done on this matter. She speaks eloquently about these issues. She is either about to meet the Turkish Ambassador or she has met him recently, and I am sure that she has put her views more forcefully than even I could. What she has to say is highly relevant, and I assure her that her views are carefully listened to in the Foreign Office. As I said to the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), no decision will be taken until the criteria laid down by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry are met.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the Minister realise that more than 70,000 people will be displaced by the Ilisu dam project, losing their land and their livelihoods? How many of those people does he estimate will be washed up on our shores and those of other European countries seeking asylum? Does he agree with me and some of his colleagues that it would be preferable to make life better for the citizens of countries such as Turkey by preventing projects such as the Ilisu dam, rather than trying to cope with a continuing stream of people wanting to get a better life elsewhere?

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Lady makes a valid point. She knows about these matters as she is a distinguished member of the International Development Committee. I reassure her, as I did my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and the hon. Member for Ceredigion, that these are real issues affecting real people and that, given the humanitarian consequences, no decisions will be taken until the criteria set out by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry have been met. If they are not met, no agreement will be given by him.

Turkey

7. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the United Kingdom's bilateral relations with Turkey. [R] [149707]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): Turkey is a strong ally of the United Kingdom. It is a NATO member, and a potential European Union partner. Many companies in this country export to Turkey.

Mr. Chapman: Do not the devaluation of the lira and other events underline the need for Britain and other western nations to maintain a close dialogue with Turkey? If Turkey were to switch from secular, democratic and European paths and instead were to follow fundamentalist policies, would not Europe and the whole of the region be the losers?

Mr. Vaz: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend for his work as Chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on Turkey. He has developed a close relationship with a number of groups in Turkey. I assure him that we are concerned, as he and others are, about the state of the currency in Turkey, and we are monitoring the situation carefully. As he knows, last year at Helsinki, Turkey was given the status of a candidate country for admission to the European Union. It is considering its accession partnership, which was agreed on a political basis on 4 December last year. We shall ensure that that process continues, and shall give Turkey any assistance that we can. However, the fact remains that Turkey must meet the Copenhagen criteria on human rights issues. We are monitoring that carefully, and we shall continue to work with Turkey as an ally.

Sir David Madel (South-West Bedfordshire): The question refers to Britain's relations with Turkey. Does the Minister agree that our relations with Turkey will not improve until Turkey withdraws from northern Cyprus?

Mr. Vaz: Relations between Britain and Turkey are very good, and that will continue. The problem to which the hon. Gentleman referred is on-going. He will know that the Government's position is to support the talks taking place under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. We urge all parties to be involved in those discussions. The hon. Gentleman will know that these matters cannot be solved overnight. These are sensitive decisions, and there must be careful discussion between all the parties. That will continue until we get a just and lasting solution to the problem.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): As relations with Turkey are so good, can the Minister tell us what pressure has been put on the Turkish Administration to persuade them to cease military activity against Kurdish people in Turkey and over the border in Iraq? What representations have British representatives in Ankara

made about prison conditions in Turkey, the large number of people who have been on hunger strike in prison and the continuing violation of the human rights of Kurdish people throughout that country?

Mr. Vaz: I have spoken personally to the Turkish ambassador following an appeal by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) about the situation in Turkish prisons, which has caused concern. It is important that the Turkish Government address that concern, and the ambassador gave me assurance that he will raise the matter with Ankara so that there are improvements.

Mr. Corbyn: What about the bombing?

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend asks about the bombing. We have also made representations on a number of other issues and will continue to do so.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Will the Government do what no British Government have ever done and express regret about the first great genocide of the 20th century—the massacre of the Armenians? No apology has ever been given, but the matter is topical as the French Government have done precisely that. They have suffered the consequences, I know, but they have done the right thing. If we do not express regret, the evil words of Hitler, "Who now remembers the Armenians?" will be borne out as true. Are the Government prepared to express such regret and to express regret at the fact that no Turkish Government have ever given the slightest apology for the first great genocide of the 20th century?

Mr. Vaz: The hon. Gentleman was in the House for the previous Foreign Office questions. I set out the policy then and it has not changed.

Indonesia

8. **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): What representations he has made to the Indonesian Government on forced conversions to Islam. [149708]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. John Battle): Our embassy in Indonesia has made representations to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta on a number of occasions over the situation in the Moluccas. Recent evidence of forced conversions adds a worrying new dimension to the conflicts there and we shall continue to monitor events closely and make representations.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I understand the Minister's concerns as two letters from constituents, who, like many people throughout the kingdom, are concerned about what is happening in Indonesia, arrived on my desk today. Is he aware that forced conversions include forced circumcision and female genital mutilation, often with blunt instruments and without anaesthetic, and has he drawn the matter to the attention of the Indonesian Government? I understand that such practices are against the laws of Indonesia, so surely the perpetrators should be brought to justice.

Mr. Battle: Yes. I know that the hon. Gentleman takes a keen and persistent interest in the conflicts in the Moluccas and has made regular representations as a result of his excellent Church contacts there. We also receive information from Christian Solidarity and the Barnabas Fund, which have continued to alert the world to those atrocities.

The situation in the Moluccas has calmed down. The reasons for the conflict there are long standing, although communities had lived at peace for hundreds of years until 1999. We have raised those matters with the Indonesian authorities and, most recently, between 20 and 22 February, our ambassador participated in a European Union mission.

We were encouraged by the fact that the situation in north Maluku and in Ambon had calmed down over Christmas and over the Idul Fitri holidays and we can draw encouragement from the action taken by Ambon's governor, who has initiated three inter-faith missions to Kesui and Tioor islands, offering to evacuate Christians who are in fear of forced conversion. That is not an answer, however, so we shall continue to press the Indonesians, as I myself have done.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): The House will be grateful to the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) for raising this terrible matter. Has not the time come to point out to Governments who engage in such activities that, as they expect their people to have complete civil and religious liberty when they come to the United Kingdom, so we expect those Governments to practise that on their own citizens?

Mr. Battle: The hon. Gentleman should read the laws of the new Indonesia, which has moved to democracy only in the past 18 months. The laws are in position, but sometimes we fail to understand the largeness and complexity of Indonesia, which has 218 million people, some 700 ethnic minorities and about 500 different languages scattered across 3,000 islands.

I think that the Indonesians are trying their best to get to grips with the situation. Obviously, it is up to their authorities to implement law and order; we shall exhort them to do so and assist them as best we can, but in the meantime we can contribute, and have contributed in small ways, to conflict resolution by negotiating to bring Christians and Muslims together at local level.

Cyprus

10. **Mr. Andrew Love** (Edmonton): What progress has been made in the accession negotiations of Cyprus to the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [149711]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): Cyprus is making good progress in its accession negotiations with the European Union. It has provisionally closed 17 of the 31 chapters in the negotiations—more than any other candidate. I trust that Cyprus's current good performance on adoption and

implementation of EU legislation will continue. I look forward to discussing this and other matters during my visit to Cyprus in 10 days' time.

Mr. Love: I thank my hon. Friend, and congratulate him on his forthcoming visit, which is indeed the only way in which he can find out about the problem of Cyprus.

In the light of the recent statement by the EU enlargement commissioner reaffirming that there will be no separate negotiations for the Turkish-Cypriot community and that it is an absolute fiction that it will ever be able to join with Turkey, will my hon. Friend take the opportunity provided by his visit to urge Turkish- Cypriot community leaders to enter into negotiations, so that both communities can be satisfied with the outcome when Cyprus joins the European community?

Mr. Vaz: My hon. Friend is right: we shall secure a just and lasting settlement of this agonisingly difficult problem only if all sides come together in the talks. That is why we support what has been done by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, and give wholehearted backing to Sir David Hannay as he tries to deal with the difficulties.

Our message to the Cypriot community in this country is that the Government will continue to take their responsibilities seriously, and will support the on-going process. As for EU membership, we look forward to Cyprus joining as quickly as possible. I know from the work that my hon. Friend and others on both sides of the House have done over the past few years that the community here would welcome an early accession for Cyprus. We hope that this will act as a spur to the solving of what is, as I have said, an agonisingly difficult problem.

Middle East

12. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): If he will make a statement on the prospects for peace in the middle east, following the Israeli prime ministerial election. [149713]

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): The cycle of violence is undermining the confidence of both sides in the peace process. I am encouraged by Prime Minister-designate Sharon's statement that he plans to continue with the peace process, and to ease the conditions for Palestinians.

Sir Sydney Chapman: Will the Minister confirm that his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave his support to financial help for the Palestinian Authority at yesterday's EU General Affairs Council? Given the historic ties that exist between the United Kingdom and both Arab countries and Israel, may we have the Government's continuing assurance that they will be even-handed in their initiatives to try to bring peace to the middle east—especially given that only a fortnight ago, in a democratic election, an overwhelming 62 per cent. gave power to Prime Minister-elect Sharon?

Mr. Wilson: I think that even-handedness—along with transparency—is the key to building and maintaining credibility. I am delighted that yesterday the EU approved the provision of £38 million for the Palestinian Authority: money that had been held in reserve is now being made available. Obviously, the economic health of the authority is very much part of the key, and I am pleased to note Prime Minister-designate Sharon's recognition of that since his election.

Mr. Jim Murphy (Eastwood): My hon. Friend will share our sadness at the apparent unravelling of the peace process over recent weeks, and the sadness felt by Labour Members, at least, at the defeat of Ehud Barak. As he is doubtless aware, there are some conciliatory signs, not least the fact that the Labour party in Israel has joined the national unity Government.

May I urge my hon. Friend to ensure, in his discussions with the partners in the middle east, that they put pressure on Chairman Arafat to be tough on some of the extremists, particularly those in Hamas? Will he also urge the Prime Minister-elect to honour and respect the wishes of the vast majority of Israeli and Palestinian people, so that we can have a lasting peace based on "land for peace"?

Mr. Wilson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend that the vast majority of the Palestine and Israeli people want peace. That is usually the case in such conflicts. At present, every effort of everyone who has a contribution to make should be to ensure that the dialogue on peace is maintained and takes up where it left off, and that every door is kept open to dialogue.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): May I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his new appointment?

Given our historic links, is the hon. Gentleman aware of the disappointment that is widely felt in the middle east about Britain's lack of influence in the peace process? Does he realise that that is borne out by the embarrassing unwillingness of political leaders in the area to see the Prime Minister's personal envoy, Lord Levy?

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. There our accord ends. I find it sad that such a serious matter should be reduced to such a trivial level on the basis of some ridiculous inaccuracy, on a personalised basis. If that is all the Tory party has to offer a serious question such as the middle east peace process, heaven help the Tory party, never mind the rest of us.

Rail Passenger Services

3.31 pm

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to require railway passenger service providers to compensate passengers for late journeys and to ensure that passengers reach their ultimate rail destination.

I start with a quote from a piece in *The Daily Telegraph* of 21 February 2001, supplied to me by Jeremy Goodwin, who happens to be a student at Aberystwyth university, headed "Rail Revenge":

Pretoria's 91-year-old railway terminus has been extensively damaged after a mob of about 10,000 home-going commuters, angered by delays to train services caused by a series of signal failures, set it on fire."

My Bill is prompted by the same angry sentiments, but seeks a less inflammatory solution.

German and French trains are so reliable that one can set one's clock by them. That is not so in the United Kingdom. British rail travellers are so used to being late that we are sometimes relieved and occasionally even amazed when we get there on time. Twice I have been so delayed—once by Great Western Railways and once by Virgin Trains—that I have missed the responsibilities that I had to conduct in the House of Commons.

More recently, one of my Montgomeryshire constituents was horrendously delayed, by four hours, owing to the failures of the Northern Spirit service. Northern Spirit's whole approach on that occasion showed that it had little or no appreciation of its responsibility to minimise the inconvenience of those delays.

In fact, before the Hatfield accident, things were not as bad as they may seem to have been. The Strategic Rail Authority's figures suggest that, between April and October 2000, for example, long-distance cross-country services were on time, or within 10 minutes of being on time, 81 per cent. of the time. The problem is that, when trains are late, the compensation systems let us down, so that, on top of the annoyance of the delay, one enters into a bartering situation, where the compensation seems to be in proportion to how loud one can shout.

UK rail travel compensation is, in the eyes of many of its users, something of a lottery. Also, it seems that, on occasion, operators do not deliver their passengers to their destination. That happened to one of my members of staff the other night. She was left at a station late at night, alone. That is not safe and it is not fair. It certainly should not be for the passenger to have to plead with rail staff for some way to finish the journey home.

There is a basic principle at stake. As with any other transaction, if the service is defective or cancelled, the customer should reasonably be able to expect the supplier of that service to make good the deficiency. That is how it should be in relation to the railways. That is what my Bill seeks to do.

My Bill would objectify the compensation process and guarantee the delivery of customers to their destination. It would accomplish those goals very simply by ensuring that, for every minute that a customer was delayed, 1 per cent. of the ticket price was refunded. As the system would kick in only after a 20-minute delay, the minimum compensation would be 20 per cent. of the ticket price. Initially, I had suggested that the process should commence after a delay of only 10 minutes. However, after representations from interested parties, I accept that such a system would be too strict and that the operators could be inundated with small claims. Additionally, as the rail passengers committee for Wales has pointed out, overly small claims could clog up the system and entail unreasonable administrative expense. I therefore think that 20 minutes is a reasonable starting point.

My Bill would also oblige operators to deliver their passengers to their destination, and not to leave them stranded in stations as a result of cancellations or missed connections. In other words, operators would absolutely and positively have to get their customers to their destination, if not on time, at least eventually. None of those proposals is rocket science. They would simply bring the rail system roughly into line with the way in which we operate in most other spheres in which customer and supplier enter a contract—which is what happens when one buys a ticket.

Eurostar has proved that such a system really can work. Eurostar's compensation system operates so that, if one is delayed for between 61 and 180 minutes, a voucher is issued for a free single journey. If one is delayed for more than 181 minutes, a 100 per cent. money refund is made for the delayed part of the journey. However, compensation is paid only when the delay was within Eurostar's control. I believe that that condition is reasonable, and it is not very different from what I am proposing. That condition also demonstrates that such a compensation system can run in tandem with a professional and profitable rail business.

I am therefore asking Ministers to accept the principle of such a system and to enter into a dialogue on it with passengers and rail operators, with the goal of creating an objective compensation system and a guarantee of arrival at the destination.

I accept that various issues will have to be thought through, such as who will pay when two rail operators both contribute to a delay. Additionally, what will happen when Railtrack is responsible for a delay? Will passengers claim compensation from the operator, who will subsequently work out appropriate compensation with Railtrack? Conversely, when would it be unfair to make operators pay for lateness? Would it be unfair to expect compensation if there had been a natural disaster? I should say that, by natural disaster, I do not mean leaves on the line, but earthquakes, flooding, or even the remote possibility of an asteroid taking out a large proportion of the British rail system.

There are probably other matters that I have not thought of that will have to be tidied up. However, the principle behind my proposals is simple enough: compensation proportionate to the delay and a guarantee of arrival—if not by railway then by other means—are the organisational responsibility of the operator.

I hope that the Government will commence that dialogue to examine what we can do to create such a system. I also assure the House that my proposals are not intended to punish the rail operators or as a way of hitting them over the head just because we are unhappy with the service. My proposals are intended simply to make sure that we have a system which ensures that, when consumers have bought the service of being delivered somewhere on time, they are compensated when their valuable time is lost.

I believe that if Ministers commit to those two principles, passengers everywhere will be very grateful. I also believe that such a system would take the lottery out of the current compensation system, which is so frustrating for those who have to negotiate with rail operators who have not delivered the purchased service. Best of all, such a system would also end the worry of being abandoned in the middle of nowhere because a train has been terminated far from home.

I am not looking for victories over the rail services, but for a sensible, common-sense system that everyone can understand and a process that every railway user can initiate. Such a system would also avoid the potential for frayed tempers when, very reasonably, passengers request a refund because Britain's rail service network has not achieved the standards that we would all expect it to achieve.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Lembit Öpik, Mr. David Chidgey, Mr. Bob Russell, Mr. Adrian Sanders, Mr. Brian Cotter, Dr. Jenny Tonge, Mr. David Heath, Mr. David Rendel and Mr. Richard Livsey.

RAIL PASSENGER SERVICES

Mr. Lembit Öpik accordingly presented a Bill to require railway passenger service providers to compensate passengers for late journeys and to ensure that passengers reach their ultimate rail destination: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 16 March, and to be printed [Bill 52].

Points of Order

3.41 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware of the serious situation in the countryside as a result of foot and mouth disease. Almost every constituency is affected. Have you received any application from the Government to vary the business of the House for today? The debate that we are about to begin is singularly inappropriate for people who have been affected by the disease, as it is about a matter that has concerned them very deeply. I am sure that they would feel that the House would be displaying greater responsibility if we were to leave the subject, at least for today.

Mr. Speaker: The point that the right hon. Gentleman raises is not a matter for the Chair. However, I am sure that his concerns will be duly noted.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a slightly different point of order, Mr. Speaker. During questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food yesterday, when Madam Deputy Speaker was in the Chair, I asked for an undertaking that the right hon. Gentleman would keep the House informed while the foot and mouth disease outbreak continued. He replied, quite specifically, "No, I will not." Are you prepared to deprecate that statement, Mr. Speaker, and to ask the Minister to think again? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that that is not a matter for me. It is for the Minister to make his replies. I have no control over the way in which the Minister replies in the House.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a different point of order, Mr. Speaker. Foot and mouth disease has been confirmed on the Isle of Anglesey, and there are suspected cases in my constituency and in that of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik). Thousands of visitors from Ireland on their way to Cardiff for Saturday's rugby union international are expected to travel through Anglesey and by routes to the south of my constituency. Have the Government given you any indication that they will give a further statement to the House to give leadership and guidance to agencies, Government Departments and quangos as to how problems arising from the foot and mouth outbreak should be dealt with? My constituency office is being inundated by questions from members of the public seeking guidance.

Mr. Speaker: Once again, I must say that this is not a matter for me. However, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns will be noted.

Hunting Bill (Programme)

3.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I beg to move,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Hunting Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 20th December 2000 (as amended on 17th January 2001 and 8th February 2001):

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in one day on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day.

2. On that day—

(1) proceedings on Consideration shall (unless previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock, and

(2) proceedings on Third Reading shall (unless previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Twelve o'clock.

3. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

4. In the application to proceedings on Consideration of Sessional Order E made by the House on 7th November 2000, paragraph (2)(d) shall have effect as if it required the Speaker to put—

(1) a single question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of the hunting of rabbits and on any amendments in the name of a Minister of the Crown which are consequential on that amendment;

(2) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of deer-stalking and flushing;

(3) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which expands the defence in respect of the hunting of rodents;

(4) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of the hunting of mink; and

(5) a single question on any other amendments moved or motions made by a Minister of the Crown.

5. Paragraph (4) of Sessional Order E made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration.

Lords Amendments and Messages

6. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(1) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, or

(2) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords;

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

I can be brief, as the motion before us is simple enough and I am keen to get on with the substantive debates on this Bill. Essentially, the motion provides that Report stage should run until 10 pm tonight and be followed immediately by Third Reading. That is by no means an odd or unusual way to proceed. I reject the suggestion, implicit in the amendments tabled by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), that insufficient time is being allowed to consider the Bill.

The Bill is not long. It does not fill even seven pages. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) said in Committee that it was

"after all, a very short Bill".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 8 February 2001; c. 442.]

Not only that but, unusually, the whole House has had two opportunities to debate the issues—on Second Reading and in Committee of the whole House.

The Bill was extensively debated in Standing Committee. Indeed, the Committee sat on 15 occasions and the Government even extended its proceedings at the request of the official Opposition. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) led for the Opposition in Committee, and he took a very constructive view of the length of time allowed for debate. In the initial debate in the Programming Sub-Committee, the hon. Gentleman accepted the Government motion without seeking to amend it. In return, the Government did not think unreasonable his request for an extra day in Committee, and we agreed to it. I understand that no other request was made for a substantial amount of extra time in Committee.

We had some good debates in Committee. Although some speeches were a little on the long side I thought that, on balance, the debate was very constructive and enormously well informed as a result of the Burns report. I regret, however, that despite the extension of time that we provided, we were not able to deal with all the amendments that had been tabled.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way and also for making provision in the voting procedure tonight for us to deal with amendments in response to points that I made about deer stalking and about rabbits and rats. However, the programme motion does not allow for the new Government amendments to be the subject of debate in any protected way. We might reach 10 o'clock and have to vote on the amendments without having the opportunity of assessing whether they meet the case that was put in Committee, as the Minister has tried to do.

Mr. O'Brien: I certainly hope that the House will be able to manage its affairs. I have no wish to impose unreasonable deadlines or time scales on the House. In my view, our proposals are entirely reasonable. The programme motion allows the House some leeway in terms of the time that it allows to discuss the various issues.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I should like to finish answering the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) first.

I think that the programme motion is reasonable. I do not want to have specific times allocated for debate on amendments. It is the Government's view that we have identified some of the key issues that were raised in Committee and in respect of which I felt that it was important for the House as a whole to take a view. May I make it very clear that that does not mean that the Government are asking the House to vote on all the amendments? It is the Government's view that our amendments cover the key issues arising out of the

debates in Committee that need to be debated by the House as a whole. Therefore, although they are Government amendments, they have been tabled to facilitate debate. The Government's position is not to support or oppose any of these amendments. I have a view on them, and will no doubt be able to express my views on some. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed may find that my position is not too far from his on some points.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I will give way first to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), as I promised.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman suggests that we are to have a fairly free debate and that the Government do not have a distinct view. That being so, is it not yet more important that the House should have an opportunity to vote? Does not the hon. Gentleman realise that if we were to vote on but three or four groups of amendments, which is not unreasonable, the time taken for that would come out of the substantive time available? That will make it even less likely that we get to the important groups of amendments towards the end of the selection list.

Mr. O'Brien: I want to ensure that we have sufficient time to have reasonable debates on these issues, and I think that the programme motion allows precisely that. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues, who take a particular view on these matters, had managed the time in Committee a little better, we might have been able to ensure that we got through issues in a more expeditious but sensible way.

Let me offer some observations: during the Committee's deliberations, the Chairman had to call representatives of the official Opposition to order on no fewer than 52 occasions because they were straying beyond the terms of an amendment under discussion. I do not accuse them of filibustering, because the Chairman would have brought them to order very quickly if they had been. I accuse them simply of being not quite on the point on many occasions. Indeed, on one occasion, the Chairman was moved to state:

> "I have made it abundantly clear on several occasions that dilation in debates is becoming excessive and repetitious."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 1 February 2001; c. 286.]

Right hon. and hon. Members can draw their own conclusions from that. I hope that we will not have excessive and repetitious dilation this afternoon—then we can reach the issues that the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues wish to ensure we debate.

Finally, let me deal with the ridiculous suggestion from the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham that only those of us who represent English or Welsh constituencies should be allowed to participate in Divisions on the Bill—*[Interruption.]* That seems to be his view. I understand the attractiveness of that suggestion for a member of a political party that was so decisively rejected by the voters of Scotland at the general election, but I remind the House of the points that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary made when dealing with this issue on Second Reading.

The powers of the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly derive from this Parliament. Those Parliaments are palpably subordinate to this one and their powers can be rescinded at any stage by this Parliament—although I am not advocating any such course. This is a sovereign Parliament and it is the right of every Member of it to participate in its proceedings, subject to earlier legislation. The arguments of the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham would have carried slightly more conviction if the Conservative party had ever objected in the past to the fact that hon. Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies regularly went into the Lobby with them despite the existence of the Stormont Parliament.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire) *rose—*

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I will give way to the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman, but then I shall conclude my remarks.

Mr. Garnier: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. In the Standing Committee, he conducted the Government's business with considerable calmness and in a reasonable spirit. I hope that he will not depart from that conduct on Report. I think that he made a false point when he was dealing with the 52 admonishments from the Chair. If he analyses the speeches that were being made on those occasions, he will find that there was no flagrant abuse of the time of the Committee. If he then translates my point about the Committee to the 11 groups of amendments tabled today, he will find that it is not unreasonable to complain that the amount of time allotted is insufficient. A huge number of amendments and groups of amendments—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman's intervention has gone beyond an intervention.

Mr. Garnier: May I complete the point?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the hon. and learned Gentleman can complete the point at some other time.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to you, Mr. Speaker. Excessive dilation on a particular issue has just been demonstrated, so I do not need to deal with that matter further.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): A moment ago, the hon. Gentleman prayed in aid the argument that every Member should have a right to contribute. Does he not realise that, by saying that, he hoists himself with his own petard? Earlier in his speech, he argued that substantial consideration of the issues in Committee necessitated—or at least justified—circumscription of debate on Report. Does he not realise that many right hon. and hon. Members did not have the opportunity to serve on the Committee? Nor were they able to contribute on their constituents' behalf on important and detailed issues on Second Reading. They want to make their voices heard this afternoon.

Mr. O'Brien: Again, that was a rather lengthy intervention. As I understand it, that Standing Committee

[Mr. O'Brien]

was one of the largest ever appointed to consider a Bill. That extension was made at the request of the Opposition. We did so in order to ensure that there was a fair amount of debate—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is replying to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), but the hon. Gentleman is not giving the Minister a hearing.

Mr. O'Brien: The Committee had a fair amount of time to debate the issues. The programme motion provides us with ample time to consider the Bill, given the large amount of debate held already—

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) *rose—*

Sir Peter Emery *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: If hon. Members on both sides of the House adopt a constructive attitude, I see no reason why we should not be able to deal with all the tabled amendments in the time provided.

Sir Peter Emery: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Brien: When I gave way to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), I indicated that I should not be giving way again.

Sir Peter Emery: I have tried to get in—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. O'Brien: I said that I would give way to the hon. and learned Member for Harborough, who speaks from the Conservative Front Bench. I then gave way a second time, and I will not give way again. We need to debate the Bill. Some hon. Members may well want to make lengthy interventions and have lengthy debates that do not deal with the issues. People in the countryside expect the Opposition to deal with the issues, and I am ready to do so, so let us now get on and debate them.

3.55 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I object to the programme motion on two counts. First, any dispassionate or independent-minded observer who looked in on the proceedings of the House this afternoon would regard the Government's decision to set aside the entire day to debate a ban on hunting with hounds as demonstrating a sense of priorities that verges on the surreal. British farmers are now facing what anyone with a reasonable turn of mind—whatever his or her view on the Bill—would recognise as by far the gravest crisis that has faced British agriculture and this country's rural economy for at least half a century. To spend hours debating a ban on hunting today displays what I can only regard as a warped sense of priorities.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Did not my hon. Friend notice that despite the reminder of the point of order, the Minister did not take the opportunity to associate himself with the views that most of us have about the seriousness of this occasion? Is not it surprising that a Bill that assaults the sentiments of most people in the countryside has been introduced on a day when the countryside is reeling from yet another blow? Is not it time for the Government to learn a little respect for the countryside?

Mr. Speaker: Order. We are debating the programme motion, and those matters cannot be discussed during this debate. The right hon. Gentleman has made his point. I understand the difficulties that people in the countryside have at the moment, but the debate on the programme motion is not the time to discuss them.

Mr. Lidington: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In answer to my right hon. Friend's questions, I simply say that I agree with every word that he has said, but we are faced, sadly, with the fact that the Government have decided to insist on debating this Bill today.

My second reason for opposing the motion will unite every member of the official Opposition, whatever view he or she takes on the Bill's merits or demerits. As on every occasion when hunting has been debated, my right hon. and hon. Friends will have a free vote not only on the various amendments that we shall consider on Report, but on Third Reading later tonight. Although the overwhelming majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends share my opposition to the Bill, there is a distinguished minority in my party who have, for honourable reasons over a long time, supported such a ban, and they will, as always, enjoy a completely free vote in any Division. However, the Opposition will, as a matter of principle, oppose the motion, as we have opposed other programme motions since the habit of the routine guillotine was introduced at the beginning of this Session. We have made our opposition to the principle of such programme motions clear on numerous occasions, including in the meetings of the Programming Sub-Committee, to which the Minister referred. However, as we know, no record is kept of the proceedings of those meetings so Members are not accountable in the way that they are if they speak in the Chamber.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Has my hon. Friend noted that the Government consistently say that they are upholders of liberty and protectors of minorities? If they truly believe what they say, should they not, on this and any other issue of conscience, allow a full debate until any hour and not use a guillotine? A guillotine is an affront to democracy and to liberty.

Mr. Lidington: I agree with my hon. Friend. The very idea of a programme motion is particularly unwelcome and inapposite in the case of a Bill that divides Members in all political parties and on which there will be a free vote. I cannot say on behalf of the Conservative party that we collectively support or disagree with particular amendments or particular details in the Bill. Every individual Member of the House must, in conscience, reach a decision about each of the groups of amendments before us and about Third Reading. They must then speak and vote accordingly. It is therefore a particularly inappropriate Bill for a programme motion.

As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said, the motion has been drafted in such a way as to protect the right of the House to take separate

decisions on each of the main categories of Government amendments. However, as he also said, the motion does not protect the right of the House to debate those Government amendments. Certainly, no protection whatever is given to Back Benchers to ensure that their amendments are discussed in any length at all.

Mr. Leigh: Does my hon. Friend agree that the programme motion is doubly surreal, and not just for the reasons that he gave earlier? I thought that such motions were usually tabled when a Government wanted to get their Bills enacted in the face of fierce, official opposition. However, it is apparent from the Bill's timing—it was the first to be introduced and it will be the last to go to the other place—that the Government do not want it to become law. Why are we having this doubly surreal programme motion? Can my hon. Friend explain what is going on?

Mr. Lidington: I wish that I could explain to my hon. Friend the Government's machinations in handling the Bill. As he implied, it is clear that, even if the Bill is considered in an exceptionally speedy fashion in the House of Lords, it cannot complete all its stages in both Houses before the expected general election in April or May. One is therefore tempted to assume that the Government are engaged in a charade in an attempt to impress some of their own Back Benchers and some of the animal rights groups to which the Labour party has looked both for support and for money in the recent past.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Would not the best interests of the countryside and all those who support countryside issues be served if we were to truncate the debate and have a Division within the next few minutes? We could then proceed to discuss amendments. The Gallery is full, the country is watching and people want to hear the debate on the amendments so that Parliament can decide. Why do we not get on with that right away?

Mr. Lidington: The best service the hon. Gentleman could perform for the countryside would be to support the Opposition in the Lobby in trying to reject this programme motion. That would enable the House to proceed at the pace it considers appropriate to discuss all the groups of amendments that are before us.

Mr. Campbell-Savours: I would willingly do that, but there is a problem: if we do not proceed on the basis of the programme motion, Conservative Members will filibuster throughout the night and wreck the Bill, when what the public want is for us and the other place to reach a decision. Why does not the hon. Gentleman just concede my case?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman is frustrated by the fact that the Bill illustrates the problem that far too little time is being allotted to scrutinise and debate legislation. Programme motions are an impressive procedural device that Governments use to try to constrain Parliament's ability to scrutinise legislation. They allow them to ram through as many Bills as they choose.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The Government have a massive majority, a mandate and another year to go, but, instead of staying in government for that extra year, they are going to cut and run and go to the country early. Is it not the simple truth that that is why they are subjecting Parliament to a draconian and dictatorial series of programme motions?

Mr. Lidington: I not only agree with my hon. Friend, but think that even Labour Members would do themselves some good by taking his comments seriously. He has been consistent in his criticism of the way in which successive Governments of both parties have treated the House of Commons and has championed the rights of Back Benchers during his years in this place.

Mr. Gummer: Will my hon. Friend return to the fact that the measure is not party political and has been trumpeted by the Government as something on which we have a free vote? A programme motion imposes on Back-Bench Members of Parliament a restriction that I cannot recall being imposed while I have been a Member of Parliament. We should be entirely free to debate the Bill for as long as necessary. The Minister seems to have missed the curious fact that he is stopping Back Benchers from speaking on a Bill on which he admits that there is a free vote on both sides of the House.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. Friend is correct. The Minister let it slip that he was unwilling to face up to the limitations that the motion imposes on the rights of Back Benchers. In praising the part of the motion that allows for separate votes on the main Government amendments, he said that Standing Committee debates had allowed the Government to identify the key issues. I agree that the Government amendments cover some of the key issues that arose from those discussions, but, as there is a free vote on the Bill, it is plainly wrong for debate to be constrained by their views on what constitutes the chief issues that are worthy of discussion and Division. On such a Bill, Back Benchers have as much right to have a say as Front Benchers and, if necessary, to insist on Divisions on issues about which they feel strongly.

My right hon. Friend will no doubt recall from our Standing Committee debates that the Bill is in great need of thorough, detailed and meticulous scrutiny. Many ambiguities and uncertainties still need to be explored.

Sir Peter Emery: Will my hon. Friend take up the argument of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department who said that, having analysed consideration in Committee, he had gone to great trouble to identify the issues that he felt should be brought to the House on Report? There are 68 amendments in 11 groups, and the hon. Gentleman is not ensuring that the issues that he considers should be debated will be debated. We shall have only five and a half hours of debate. If he thinks that we shall get through the 11 groups of amendments that have been selected in that time, given that many Members who were not in Committee are vitally affected in their constituencies by the Bill, he is in "Alice in Wonderland". There is no need for such a programme motion.

Mr. Lidington: I agree completely with my right hon. Friend. He brings to bear his experience as a senior Member of this place and as a former Chairman of the Procedure Committee. We are right to listen with attention to his criticisms on issues of procedure.

[Mr. Lidington]

I was referring to the way in which the Committee flushed out, if I may so put it, some of the inherent ambiguities and uncertainties in the Bill. Some of them arose because individual Members had a constituency or other interest in certain details in the Bill. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) has been a consistent supporter of the need to control mink. She put the Government under great pressure on that issue. No doubt one Government amendment is in large measure a response to what the hon. Lady said in Committee.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, like myself, raised issues connected with deer stalking. It was astonishing that on the final day in Committee—the additional day that the Government offered the Opposition, as it became clear that the time provided in their original programme motion was inadequate—the Government admitted that the Bill would prohibit the stalking and flushing out of deer, even though that was not the Government's intention. I found it extraordinary that after the Bill had been drafted in the Home Office, scrutinised in the Home Office, presented on Second Reading and taken through Committee, it was discovered in Committee that the Bill meant something different from what Ministers asserted they wished it to mean.

Mr. Hogg: Will my hon. Friend remind the House that the Bill as drafted would prevent rabbiting in its traditional form? Hence the need for amendment No. 49 and the amendments that stand in my name.

Mr. Lidington: We need later this afternoon to discuss matters relating to rabbits and rodent control. However, there are other ambiguities, which were demonstrated as a result of scrutiny in Committee. I contend that they demonstrate beyond doubt that there is a need for further rigorous scrutiny on Report and during further stages of the Bill's passage.

In February, the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), said:

"The hon. Member for Aylesbury"—

that is myself—

"asked if we intend to outlaw them"—

that is, Welsh gun packs. The hon. Lady said that

"the straight answer is no: gun packs can fall within the exceptions."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 6 February 2001; c. 386.]

Those of us who heard the Minister re-read the Bill and remained unconvinced that the Government's intent and policy were delivered by the words in the Bill in Committee.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman may have forgotten it, but I sent him a letter yesterday saying that Deadline 2000 initially wanted deer stalking to be included in the Bill. I should make it clear that the parliamentary draftsmen complied with the policy set out by Deadline 2000, which is now content that deer stalking should be taken out of the Bill. I do not want the hon. Gentleman in any way to traduce the parliamentary draftsmen, as I am sure he would not wish to.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In your long and distinguished service to the House of Commons, can you remember a Government ever having subcontracted another organisation—called, in this case, Deadbeat 2000—to write Government legislation? Can you recall such a thing, and is that a proper way to carry on?

Mr. Speaker: I have forgotten lots of things over my time in Parliament.

Mr. Lidington: I wish to make no imputation against the conduct of the parliamentary draftsmen or civil servants, who, in my experience, obey the instructions of Ministers. One of the most unsatisfactory points about our proceedings has been that we have made repeated criticisms of the detail of the schedule only for Ministers to resort to saying that the Bill had been drafted not by them, but by Deadline 2000. They could not, therefore, explain or justify its ambiguities or the apparent gap between the Government's political intent and the wording produced by their subcontractors, Deadline 2000.

Mr. Hogg: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is impossible to reconcile the statements made by the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department to the effect that he subcontracted the policy with what is written on the back of the Bill, which tells us that it was presented by the Home Secretary, the Prime Minister and other rogues?

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Hogg: Yes, yes, I apologise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I was about to say that we are going beyond the programme motion before us.

Mr. Lidington: My previous point was perhaps the most serious concern felt on both sides of the Standing Committee about the inadequacy of the Government's response to the many detailed questions asked during our proceedings. It demonstrates the need for further debate without the imposition of the artificial time limit that we are being forced to consider.

The motion is a Government attempt to constrain debate and limit discussion to the priorities that the Government consider appropriate. The motion amounts to a disgraceful attempt to gag Back-Bench Members and prevent the House from exercising its duty to scrutinise the Bill, question the Ministers responsible for it and hold the Government to account for the new criminal penalties and duties that they seek to impose on our fellow citizens. It is a thoroughly bad motion, and I advise my hon. Friends to resist it.

4.19 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): It is a tragic irony that we are debating this matter this afternoon. This morning, I had a telephone conversation with a farmer at St. Issey in the centre of my constituency, which is likely to be subject to restrictions as a result of a nearby foot and mouth outbreak. The farmer asked me what the House of Commons would be doing today to help him. I had to say that, for the first part of the afternoon, we would be discussing the timing of the debate that would take place later. He asked what the subject of the later debate was, and I had to admit to him that it was the Hunting Bill.

Whatever one's personal views, no one can pretend that the House of Commons is doing its duty by the countryside, the rural community and all the people—

Mr. Soames *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I will not give way; I want to be as brief as possible. The farmer was incredulous that we would be spending time either on the programme motion or on the Bill this afternoon. He said, "Surely my representatives in Parliament are more concerned about the things that concern the real people of the countryside." I know of no one in any rural area, except on the extremes, who thinks that the Bill is the most important issue to bring before the House.

I shall not repeat the comments of the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) about the programme motion, except to emphasise a point that he made in the latter part of his speech. The Bill is unusual because hon. Members of all parties take differing attitudes to it. At least three options have been before Parliament. Even if those on the three Front Benches could agree a programme motion, that would have been entirely inappropriate, because it is not a matter for those on the Front Benches or for the usual channels. It is a matter for the House as a whole, and it is therefore extremely important that we examine the programme motion carefully.

I am sure that the Minister meant well when he said that he did not want to restrict or compartmentalise the parts of the Bill, but major issues will come before the House, some of them introduced by the Government only at this stage, and they will not be properly debated before being voted on. It is not good enough to say that the issues have been agreed between the two sides of the House. Nothing about the Bill is agreed between the two sides of the House, because there are not two sides. There are many sides, and if there had to be a programme motion at all, it should have been generous in time and should have allowed adequate space for each issue to be addressed properly.

That was the proper reason for introducing programme motions in the first place. The right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) has always been in favour of a sensible division of debates, to ensure that all hon. Members can express their views to the House and divide on them. The programme motion does not allow for that. The issues raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) in Committee and again this afternoon will come before the House for the first time—

Mr. Mike O'Brien *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I shall not give way. I want to be as quick as possible. I find it extraordinary that on an issue that has presumably been considered at extreme length in Whitehall, the Home Office has failed until now to acknowledge that there were major inadequacies in the Bill. One would have thought that even the Home Office realised that there was a possible anomaly concerning rodents, rabbits and deer stalking in the Bill as first drafted.

It is helpful, I suppose, that there will be time for Divisions, but every minute spent on a Division is time out of the subsequent debate. That will be especially true at 10 o'clock. We should have provided time for Divisions without reducing the time for debate. I pressed the Leader of the House at business questions a fortnight ago to provide us with adequate time for Third Reading. Again, it will be the first opportunity for many hon. Members to discuss the issues that have arisen during the Bill's passage through Committee. If, however, there are several votes on Government amendments at 10 o'clock, that will necessarily curtail the time available for Third Reading. The programme motion should have provided for a two-hour debate on Third Reading, over and above the time allowed for Divisions.

It is crazy of the Government to prepare a programme motion before they even know the number of amendments, how significant they are, and which ones will be selected by the Speaker. The programme motion is wholly inadequate. It belies the Government's claim to take seriously the concerns of the countryside. Whatever one's views of the Bill—there are differing views in all parts of the House—the motion is a disgrace.

4.24 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I should like to endorse everything that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said in his brief but powerful speech. Historians have a habit of referring to Parliaments by various names—the long Parliament, the short Parliament and the addled Parliament. This will go down in history as the abused Parliament, because it has been systematically abused by the Executive in a manner for which there is no adequate precedent.

I have frequently had cause to take issue with Governments formed by my party, but never have we seen such overbearing arrogance as that witnessed during the past four years, and never has such arrogance been better exemplified than this afternoon. At a time when the countryside is bleeding, the Government bring before us a Bill for which there is no need. They are doing so for the reasons that I described in my intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), and it is utterly disgraceful that they are behaving in this manner.

Mr. Hogg: Actually, it is the self-abused Parliament, because the Government majority is ramming through these gagging measures.

Sir Patrick Cormack: We could say also that Labour Members are allowing it to be the supine Parliament, but the fact of the matter is—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) may be laughing, but this is an extremely serious matter for anyone who cares about Parliament, as it is being systematically denigrated by this Government. Its powers are being eroded and set at nought, and the Government are using their steamroller majority to ignore the views of hon. Members of all parties.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall was completely accurate: this is not a Bill on which there are party positions. Even on my own Front Bench, it is not surprising that there are certain differences of opinion within the Home Office team—views that are honestly and conscientiously held. I happen to agree foursquare with the line taken by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury, who spoke so admirably, but there are others on this side of the House—one has come in recently—who take a different view.

It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on the motion, MR. SPEAKER *put the Question, pursuant to Order [7 November 2000].*

The House divided: Ayes 288, Noes 175.

Division No. 130] **[4.27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAllion, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Snape, Peter
Southworth, Ms Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm

Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Dowd and
Mr. Don Touhig.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Ballard, Jackie
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Keith Simpson and
Mr. James Gray.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the Hunting Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 20th December 2000 (as amended on 17th January 2001 and 8th February 2001):

Consideration and Third Reading

1. Proceedings on Consideration and Third Reading shall be completed in one day on which the Bill is put down as first Government Order of the Day.

2. On that day—

(1) proceedings on Consideration shall (unless previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock, and

(2) proceedings on Third Reading shall (unless previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Twelve o'clock.

3. Sessional Order B (Programming Committees) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

4. In the application to proceedings on Consideration of Sessional Order E made by the House on 7th November 2000, paragraph (2)(d) shall have effect as if it required the Speaker to put—

(1) a single question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of the hunting of rabbits and on any amendments in the name of a Minister of the Crown which are consequential on that amendment;

(2) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of deer-stalking and flushing;

(3) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which expands the defence in respect of the hunting of rodents;

(4) the question on any amendment in the name of a Minister of the Crown which creates a defence in respect of the hunting of mink; and

(5) a single question on any other amendments moved or motions made by a Minister of the Crown.

5. Paragraph (4) of Sessional Order E made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on Consideration.

Lords Amendments and Messages

6. Paragraphs (6) and (7) of Sessional Order A (varying and supplementing programme motions) made by the House on 7th November 2000 shall not apply to proceedings on any programme motion to supplement this order or to vary it in relation to—

(1) proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments, or

(2) proceedings on any further messages from the Lords;

and the question on any such motion shall be put forthwith.

Orders of the Day

Hunting Bill

As amended in the Committee and in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

DISPOSAL OF FALLEN STOCK

'.—(1) Not later than 6 months after the date on which this Act is passed the Secretary of State shall by order make a scheme for the collection and disposal of infirm, diseased and dead agricultural animals (in this section referred to as "fallen stock") which would have been collected by hunts but for the enactment or coming into force of the Schedule to this Act.

(2) A scheme shall regulate—

(a) the method of the collection and disposal of fallen stock,

(b) procedures for the notification to the Secretary of State of the whereabouts of fallen stock and the requirements for its prompt collection and disposal,

(c) any charges which may be imposed for the collection and disposal of fallen stock, provided always that such charges shall meet the cost of the scheme and no more.

(3) In order to fulfil his obligations under subsection (2) the Secretary of State may appoint agents to act on his behalf on a regional or national basis.

(4) A scheme under this section shall apply in all of England and Wales.

(5) Before making a scheme under this section, the Secretary of State shall consult such persons as appear to him to be likely to have an interest in such a scheme and such organisations as appear to him to represent such persons.

(6) The Secretary of State shall publish widely in appropriate journals the details of any scheme under this section.

(7) An order under this section shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Garnier.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.41 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to consider the following amendments: No. 36, in the schedule, page 6, line 37, at end inset—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall by order make a scheme for the making of payments to persons in respect of losses incurred by them as a result of—

(a) ceasing, by reason of the enactment or coming into force of this Act—

(i) to carry on their businesses so far as they consist of activities prohibited by this Act, or

(ii) to continue in paid employment so far as that employment was dependent on activities prohibited by this Act;

(b) damage by wild mammals which were previously controlled by activities prohibited by this Act.

(2) A scheme may, in particular—

(a) specify the descriptions of losses and businesses in respect of which payments are, or are not, to be made and the basis of valuation for determining losses,

(b) specify the amounts of the payments to be made or the basis on which such amounts are to be calculated,

(c) provide for the procedure to be followed (including any time within which claims must be made and the provision of information) in respect of claims under the scheme and for the determination of such claims,

(d) include provision for arbitration of any dispute as to a person's entitlement to payments under the scheme or the amounts of any such payments.

(3) Before making a scheme under this paragraph, the Secretary of State shall consult such organisations as appear to him to represent persons likely to be entitled to payments under such a scheme.

(4) An order under this paragraph shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.

No. 40, in page 7, line 14, at end insert—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall by order make a scheme for the making of payments to persons—

(a) whose business or employment is materially affected (whether by a reduction in profits or the incurring of losses) by reason of the enactment or coming into force of this Act, or

(b) who are deprived of any services previously provided by hunts and as a result incur and are materially affected by costs, expenses or losses which would not have been incurred but for the enactment or coming into force of the Schedule to this Act.

(2) A scheme shall, in particular specify—

(a) the manner in which losses, costs, expenses or reduction in profits may be calculated, and

(b) the evidence which may be reasonably required to show the losses, costs, expenses or reduction in profits calculated in accordance with this paragraph.

(3) A scheme shall also, in particular—

(a) specify the basis of valuation for determining losses,

(b) specify the amounts of the payments to be made or the basis on which such amounts are to be calculated,

(c) provide for the procedure to be followed (including the time within which claims must be made and the provision of information) in respect of claims under the scheme and for the determination of such claims.

(4) Before making a scheme under this paragraph, the Secretary of State shall consult such persons as appear to him to be likely to be entitled to payments under such a scheme and such organisations as appear to him to represent such persons.

(5) Sub-paragraph (6) applies to any dispute as to a person's entitlement to payments under a scheme or the amounts of any such payments which—

(a) has not been resolved within nine months of the day on which the original decision as to entitlement or amounts was notified in writing to the person concerned by the Secretary of State, and

(b) has not been referred by agreement to arbitration.

(6) The dispute shall be referred by the Secretary of State to such appellate body as he deems appropriate by order.

(7) An order under this paragraph shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

(8) In this paragraph—

"losses" includes losses of income and losses of capital;

"materially affected" means a reduction in profit or the incurring of losses, costs or expenses which may be measured by ordinary principles of commercial accountancy.'.

Mr. Garnier: So begins consideration of the Bill following our deliberations in Committee upstairs. I am grateful to the junior Ministers from the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department for their presence here to assist us. It is perhaps worth pointing out at the outset, however, that today is a black day for British agriculture—a black day in a black fortnight. There appears to be no sign of the problems caused by the foot and mouth outbreak lifting in the next few days or weeks, so it might have been more appropriate, even though the Bill was introduced by the Home Office, for an Agriculture Minister to respond to the debate, particularly on the new clause.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will my hon. and learned Friend remind the House that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food made it plain that he did not think it proper for him to attend on this place?

Mr. Garnier: Irrespective of what that Minister said yesterday, and rather than rely on the efforts of the two junior Ministers, it might have been more appropriate for one of his deputies to be with us, at least to assist in our debates.

Amendment No. 36 stands in the names of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), and I leave it to one of them to speak to it. Amendment No. 40, which stands in my name and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) and for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson), deals with compensation.

I shall briefly discuss the new clause, which would require the Secretary of State to put in place an alternative scheme for the collection and disposal of farmers' fallen stock in the absence of the hunts that currently carry out that service. As you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will know, a further agricultural benefit to farmers, in addition to that of pest control, is provided by hunting with dogs.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Hounds!

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend complains about my use of the word "dogs". He will understand, however, that I use that generic term to make our debates more understandable to Labour Members. I hope that he also understands that I include hounds within it. As the Chairman said in Committee, no doubt he will have an opportunity to dilate on that particular semantic discussion.

4.45 pm

The collection from farms of fallen stock—that is, unsaleable dead farm animals—or the humane killing and collection of injured or sick animals, known as casualty stock, is an extremely important service. Those of us who represent farming constituencies—and, indeed, others who do not, but who have some knowledge of the rural economy—will appreciate that, nature being what it is, farm animals die. They die in abattoirs, obviously, because they are moved through abattoirs to get into the human food chain, but, sadly, they also die on farms. Were it not for the activities of many hunts in England and Wales—the jurisdiction that the Bill will cover—and in Scotland and, I dare say, Northern Ireland, the farming economy would be under even more strain.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): The importance of hunts in collecting fallen stock is perhaps emphasised by

[Mr. James Gray]

the example of the Avon Vale hunt in my constituency. It is a mile away from Bromham, where a case of foot and mouth disease was confirmed yesterday. I understand that Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food officials have been in touch with the hunt with the intention of introducing better arrangements, so that it can still pick up dead stock and have dead stock delivered to the kennels. Were it not for the hunt, what on earth could the farmers do? By its action, the Ministry has demonstrated the importance of the service to agriculture throughout the countryside.

Mr. Garnier: The point is well made. Indeed, a number of Agriculture Ministers have acknowledged, both in the House and outside, the role played by hunts in the collection of fallen stock. Despite his views on hunting, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has acknowledged candidly the value of that role.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) mentioned the outbreak of foot and mouth, and said that the hunt provided a valuable service in collecting fallen stock. The new clause refers to

"diseased and dead agricultural animals".

Have we learned nothing? Is the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) saying that it is right for hounds to be given diseased animals to eat?

Mr. Garnier: It is a pity that the hon. Gentleman intervened in the way he did, at the time when he did. If he had visited a hunt kennels, he would understand that not all casualty stock is eaten by hounds. If an animal was diseased, and if the meat of that dead animal is likely to infect the hounds, no sensible keeper of hounds will feed it to them. The collection of diseased and dead animals from farmland, however, is vital to the proper maintenance of the rural economy. If the hon. Gentleman does not know that, he should have found it out by now.

Mr. Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Garnier: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once. If he waits, he will be able to make his own speech in due course, and I dare say that we shall all listen with rapt attention.

The Cobham report, commissioned in 1997 and entitled "Countryside sports: their economic, social and conservation significance", reported that 179 hunts handled 352,000 carcases in 1995—an average of more than 2,000 carcases per hunt. The report estimated that, when the work of the harrier and beagle packs was taken into account, the total number of carcases handled annually by all packs, including foxhounds, deerhounds and harriers, was more than 400,000.

Other reliable survey information demonstrated the economic value of the work done by hunts in clearing fallen stock; and, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) pointed out, Agriculture Ministers have been the first to admit that their work is valuable. When he was an Agriculture Minister, the Minister of State, Department of Social Security, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), said in a written answer:

"a small survey undertaken by the State Veterinary Service earlier this year"—

the year was 1998—

"indicates that . . . 55 per cent. of calves, 35 per cent. of adult bovines, 25 per cent. of sheep and goats, and 10 per cent. of pigs and lambs, which have fallen, may be disposed of through hunt kennels."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1998; Vol. 314, c. 606W.]

Those bare figures, given by a member of the Government, who is now in a different Department, amply demonstrate the value of hunts to the agricultural economy.

Mr. Hogg: Is not it true that, if that collection facility is removed, the cost will fall on agriculture, particularly cattle producers, who face an appalling crisis at present?

Mr. Garnier: My right hon. and learned Friend is entirely right. In my constituency and, to a lesser extent but a still significant one, in his, livestock farmers are the main source of farming activity. Their average incomes are about £7,000 or £8,000. One cannot run a family on that sort of money. The cost of fallen stock is met by farmers in some cases, but if that additional burden had generally to be paid for by farmers, because the service provided by hunts was removed by the Bill, no doubt unwittingly by its proposers, it would add yet further to the economic burdens suffered by our farming constituents.

It is not a party political point. There are Labour Members who represent farming areas and they surely must have spoken to their farmers and heard about their economic difficulties. To have placed upon them yet one further burden as a consequence of the removal of the collection of fallen stock would, as a matter of common sense, be a terrible blow.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does my hon. and learned Friend agree that, although it may be illegal, in practice, what will happen is that farmers will simply dig a hole to dispose of those animals? That will be very bad for the environment, but it will be an inevitable consequence of the Bill, even though that practice may be illegal.

Mr. Garnier: I sincerely hope that, if the Bill goes through without new clause 1, farmers will not do that—I am sure that no responsible farmer will do so. There would be an environmental risk, particularly if farmers dug pits near rivers or other water courses. The likelihood is that, should that happen, the water courses would be contaminated, to the danger of the entire rural environment in that area.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is not the value of the service provided by hunts illustrated by the fact that the National Trust is, apparently, still using the service, even though it has banned hunting of deer on its land?

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is accurate in what he says. It underlines the general point that I make: the service provided by hunts in removing fallen stock is

recognised not only by the Labour Government, but by organisations that recently banned hunting throughout their land.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Can my hon. and learned Friend give some estimate as to the total cost? According to the Cobham report, about 415,000 carcases are involved. I am told that the cost of removing a cow and a horse can be up to £20 each and a pig £10 per 50 kg. If we are talking about 415,000 carcases, the average cost to agriculture could be anything up to £80 million a year. We are talking about very large sums.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is right. His ability to do the arithmetic is no doubt better than mine.

The point does not need repetition. The valuable service that is provided by hunts in dealing with fallen stock has been recognised for years. It is recognised across party—*[Interruption.]* It is recognised even by the Prime Minister, I understand from my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh). Quite where he said that, I do not know and quite whether he knew what he was saying, I do not know either.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Joyce Quin, the Minister for—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should know the terminology by now.

Miss McIntosh: I apologise. The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), has asserted in the House—it is on the record—that the hunts make a positive and valuable contribution to the removal of fallen stock on farms.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend is of course quite right.

Before moving on to amendment No. 40, I should like to remind the House of some facts—of which I am sure that those who have taken an interest in the Bill will be aware. Two local studies have been conducted—one in west Somerset and one in Wiltshire—of the value of the fallen stock service provided by the hunts. The West Somerset district council report, produced in 1998–99, showed that operating fallen stock services in the study area collected a total of more than 12,000 carcases annually, and that farmers estimated that the service saved them each an average of £212.50 annually. Alternative disposal methods were estimated to be about five times as expensive as use of the hunt service.

The Wiltshire county farms report, published in 1995, indicated that 89 per cent. of farms disposed of cows, sheep and horses through hunt kennels and that 77 per cent. of farms had used the hunt to dispose of livestock in the previous 12 months. The report also found:

"the hunt currently provides an important carcass disposal service to Council tenants, particularly those which are dairy farmers".

I return to the point made just a few moments ago by my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire. We are discussing evidence of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food making use of the fallen stock service provided by the Avon hunt at a time when, sadly, there are a great many more beasts to be cleared from farms.

Although the service was traditionally provided without charge, some hunts now require a contribution to help meet the costs of their fallen stock service. However, the types of sums that the hunts are charging are way below an economic cost. If one were to employ a knackerman or another professional agency to clear fallen stock, the sums required would—as the West Somerset district council report indicated—be far higher. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, in this week of all weeks, when we are discussing foot and mouth, those oncosts would be unbearable.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Perhaps I misheard or misunderstood the hon. and learned Gentleman. Is he telling the House that MAFF officials took animals infected with foot and mouth and passed them over to the hunts, so that the hounds could devour those diseased animals? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Garnier: I am not sure that I accept the use of the alternative—I think that the hon. Gentleman both misunderstood and misheard what I and my hon. Friend the Member for North Wiltshire said. MAFF has suggested that the hunt should be used to clear fallen stock not because that stock has been infected by foot and mouth, but because those animals were already casualties from another cause. Some stock may, for example, have broken a leg in a fence or be suffering from some other non-contagious condition that, as Lord Burns might have said, turned out to be fatal or compromised their welfare.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the hon. and learned Gentleman agree that the matter we are discussing is not one that should divide those who are for a hunting ban and those who are against one? Surely it is a matter of good public policy that, particularly now, there should be a safe, efficient and effective way of dealing with casualty stock. The almost half a million carcases that are going to the hunts each year will have to go somewhere in future. That is what this discussion is all about.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman is precisely right. Some people would say—although I as the Member for Harborough would disagree—that the south-west of England, part of which he represents, is the headquarters of the livestock farming industry. Nevertheless, it does not matter whether when one represents Somerset, Montgomeryshire, Northumberland, Sussex, Staffordshire, Buckinghamshire or Leicestershire, the point is the same: those animals will have to be cleared off the land in one way or another.

I hope that Ministers will be able to appreciate the point that we are making. Conservative Members believe that the scheme that we are proposing in new clause 1 is essential. I accept that the new clause may not be perfect in every detail, but I trust that the Home Office lawyers who have been so careful in drafting the schedule and the Bill will, if necessary, be able to adjust its wording to make it suitable.

However, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is right: despite the differences between his party and mine about hunting, the new clause proposes an essential scheme for the maintenance and preservation of the rural economy.

Mr. Soames: I have no quarrel with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), but there is

[Mr. Soames]

disagreement between his party and the Conservative party. If hunting is banned, there will be no one to fulfil the obligation regarding fallen stock. Hunts will not retain kennel staff merely to clear away fallen stock in the countryside. If the hunts go, the fallen stock system will go too.

5 pm

Mr. Garnier: It is possible that my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) may have misunderstood slightly the point made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome. I do not know the hon. Gentleman's views on hunting, but I assume that he, like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex and I, abhors the Bill. If the House has its way and the Bill becomes law, the job of Opposition Members is to mitigate its worst effects on the wider rural economy, and specifically in respect of fallen stock. Farmers will be placed in desperate economic straits and put to huge expense if hunts are banned and the fallen stock service is lost. New clause 1 would provide some mitigation for the worst effects.

Other hon. Members may have other and better points to make in respect of new clause 1, but I intend now to speak briefly to amendment No. 40, which is designed to create compensatory schemes for people suffering a loss due to the cessation of businesses and jobs as a result of a hunting ban, or for people whose jobs or businesses are materially affected by a hunting ban. The proposed schemes would also provide for compensation for loss due to damage done by wild mammals that were previously controlled by hunting, and for loss due to deprivation of any services previously provided by hunts.

The debate is very timely, in the context of the present foot and mouth disease outbreak. On behalf of my constituents and those represented by other hon. Members with rural constituencies, I again express regret that no Minister from MAFF is present to give the House that Department's view of the matter. We know what the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said yesterday about economic loss, and I doubt that many Conservative Members were very impressed. However, the right hon. Gentleman's remarks gave me to understand that we are not likely to hear him address the House on the subject again.

As I said, amendment No. 40 would compensate people whose business or job is materially affected by a ban on hunting, and people who are materially affected by costs, expenses or losses because of the loss of services provided by hunts. The Burns report contains a great deal of information about the economic effect that a ban on hunting would have. I shall not bandy figures with those who disagree with me on the question of hunting, which is the main principle at issue, but I shall draw the House's attention to some of the information that ought to inform the debate. I trust that it will persuade those listening that the amendment is worthy of consideration and support.

Hunting with hounds makes a fourfold contribution to the rural economy. Hunts and hunting organisations employ full-time and part-time staff. The people who participate in hunting with hounds employ stable staff, or provide further employment by keeping their hunting horses at livery. Hunts, hunting organisations and their members and followers incur direct expenditure on goods and services in order to participate in hunting. Finally, expenditure by participants in hunting with hounds stimulates the rural economy by creating a demand for other goods and services. The indirect expenditure arising from hunting generates income and jobs for others. It can enable small businesses to have enough overall income to trade profitably. All of that will go, or will certainly be badly affected, in the event that hunting is banned.

Other speakers will be able to provide the House with information relating to their areas of the country. I should like to illustrate the points that are relevant to this debate by referring to my county of Leicestershire. The gross contribution to the economy of Leicestershire from its seven packs and their members' hunting expenditure is nearly £9.2 million per annum. In the great scheme of things, and compared with the social security budget, I appreciate that £9.2 million is not a great deal of money, but to the farriers and those who work in the livery stables and the clothing shops in Leicestershire, that £9.2 million is hugely important—it helps their families to survive. We estimate that about 750 full-time and part-time jobs in Leicestershire rely directly on hunting.

Let me bring this down to an even smaller compass. In the village where I live, other than those who commute to Leicester—of whom there are not many—all the jobs depend, in one way or the other, upon the hunt. That is not to say that all those who live or work in the village are employed directly by the hunt. However, they have something to do with horses; they have something to do with the clothing industry that makes riding clothes, boots and saddles.

Just a little way down the hill from where I live is a small rural industrial estate where there is a metal worker, a mechanic and a riding equipment and clothing shop. All three of those small businesses are dependent on the hunt for the majority of their income. Abolishing the hunt will destroy livelihoods which those people have spent their lives working to create. We will throw out of work any number of perfectly innocent victims of the Bill.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): My hon. and learned Friend makes a very valid point for rural areas. It is, of course, also true for an urban area such as Walsall, which is the centre of the leather industry. It is an important contributor to saddlery, making the finest saddles, I would argue, in the world. That means that saddlery and leather companies are dependent on this business, which supports the wider economic interest of an urban centre such as Walsall.

Mr. Garnier: My hon. Friend makes a particularly telling point which demonstrates the inter-relationship between the rural and urban economy. We cannot simply say that this is an urban or a rural issue. The matter affects all our constituents. My hon. Friend's constituents in the leather trade in his part of the west midlands no doubt sell their products across the country and, I dare say, abroad to Ireland, America and France where, if the Bill becomes law, many of the more well-heeled members of our society will take their horses—or at least themselves—to hunt. My less well-off constituents will lose their jobs. The less well-off leather workers in my hon. Friend's

constituency may lose their jobs. Hunting will go on, but not in this country, and it will be to the economic disadvantage of his constituents and mine.

Mr. Hogg: Will my hon. and learned Friend remind the House that there is a precedent? The House considered compensation in our deliberations on the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, when the Government were driven to offer a compensation scheme. As they conceded the point in the context of fur farming, there can be no possible opposition to a concession in this area.

Mr. Garnier: That is a rational argument. Unfortunately, it may not touch the intellects of those who vehemently oppose hunting. That is something with which my right hon. and learned Friend and I will have to deal. We must do our best to persuade the House and the country as a whole of the cogency and good sense of the points that we make.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way on that very point?

Mr. Garnier; I think that the hon. Gentleman will be making his own speech in a few moments.

Many right hon. and hon. Members will wish to speak from their own experience and that of their constituents about fallen stock and the compensation that will become necessary as a consequence of the Bill's draconian effects.

I have taken up quite enough of the House's time; the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) is itching to get to his feet. I urge the House to consider carefully the points that I made—albeit briefly. Before hon. Members come to a decision on the measure, I urge them to do their best to mitigate its worst effects. Without our new clause and amendment and without the amendment that will be proposed by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire, the Bill will be far worse than it need be. Its supporters will have to answer for that in due course.

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Like many of the amendments tabled on Report, amendment No. 36 is intended to mitigate the worst of the injustices that the Bill would inflict on those individuals who lose their right to hunt. In introducing the amendment, I hope to illustrate that—as the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) rightly pointed out—our proposals have nothing to do with whether one agrees with a ban on hunting with dogs. They are entirely about fairness and about compensating individuals, as we should do if we ask people in any walk of life profoundly to change their life style on account of legislation.

The proposals on fallen stock reflect that view. Anyone who has ever had to deal with that issue would agree that the logic of the arguments that have been made simply serves to underline the importance of our holding an objective view on the consequences of a ban on hunting with dogs.

The purpose of the amendment is to provide the Secretary of State with the latitude to introduce a sensible compensation scheme, following consultation, for the losses in employment and the effects on damage and pest control in some parts of Britain that will arise from the restrictions introduced by the Bill. The amendment gives the Secretary of State plenty of scope to work out the details. The issue is important and must be handled through consultation with the organisations and individuals most affected by the Bill.

The amendment specifically requires the Secretary of State to consider schemes to compensate individuals who lose business as a result of the Bill and who suffer greater depredations by foxes and other predatory animals because the traditional means of control is no longer available. Such schemes should

"specify the descriptions of losses and businesses"—

and—

"the amounts of the payments."

They should

"provide for the procedure to be followed"

and introduce a system of arbitration in the event of disputes. The system of compensation would be introduced by statutory instrument, thus giving the House a further opportunity to consider the matter.

Our challenge is to establish a compensation system that genuinely brings fairness into the ban on hunting with dogs. It cannot be just to take away a person's livelihood without making good the loss through compensation. Similarly, it cannot be morally just to take away a person's ability to control a pest without making good the loss that results from the damage caused by that pest.

Burns was clear on that point. Paragraph 10.60 of the report states:

"In the event of a ban on hunting, consideration would need to be given to possible action in respect of the fallen stock service provided by many hunts and to whether there would be a case for compensation if hounds had to be destroyed and hunts had no further use for their kennels."

There are other examples of Burns's acknowledging that as a salient and important point, but perhaps most important of all, the Burns report states:

"It would be a matter for the Government to consider, in the event of a ban and in the light of clearer guidance about its likely effects, whether any compensation should be paid in this particular case."

To interpret that, Burns is basically saying that it is a Government responsibility to make a judgment about the case for compensation.

5.15 pm

I understand that Deadline 2000 does not believe that there is a case for such compensation. I could go through its arguments, but there would not be much point in my doing so because, clearly, I disagree with them, and there other hon. Members who will no doubt seek to explain why they do not believe that the farming community deserves compensation as a result of a ban on hunting with dogs. However, there is no doubt in my mind that the individuals who hunt with dogs in the uplands of mid-Wales—which, as hon. Members know, is the area that I know best in this regard—would definitely expect an increase in predation on their stock if they could not pursue and dispatch foxes with dogs. Without rehearsing the details of the argument yet again, the reason for that is simple.

As Burns acknowledged, people in the uplands of mid-Wales genuinely believe that hunting with dogs is the most effective means to control foxes, and Burns had some sympathy with that view. So the ban will remove a pest-control procedure which has been long established in

[Mr. Lembit Öpik]

the area and which is largely regarded as effective by the experts in pest control—the farmers and the huntsmen. If that were the case for any other abolition or prohibition of a pest-control method, I should like to think that the House would, as a matter of course, consider the case for compensation.

My concern is that because we sometimes stray into areas not directly related to the objective consequences of our actions, those who simply do not like hunting and want to ban it think that there is no case to compensate those who hunt for the loss that they will incur as a result of the prohibition. Obviously, hon. Members are entitled to make up their own minds, but I simply disagree with that view. We have to subjugate our feelings to our values—one of which must surely be that of fairness.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I ask my hon. Friend to bear in mind two points, the first of which is the Bill's significance to those whose paid employment depends on the continuation of hunting. If hunting ends, they will simply lose their jobs, because it will not be legal to employ them to do what they are trained to do.

Secondly, given that this proposal extends beyond the principle of hunting and could therefore be supported by hon. Members who would like to abolish hunting but who nevertheless understand the fairness case, I hope that my hon. Friend will press amendment No. 36 to a separate Division.

Mr. Öpik: Indeed. I would have made that request later, but I shall do so now. I hope that we shall have a separate vote on amendment No. 36—if you see fit, Mr. Deputy Speaker—because compensation involves a free-standing, specific and crystal-clear binary decision. In other words, although we can discuss fallen stock—also a fairly clear issue—it must be a matter for the House to state publicly in its vote whether we believe that, as I claim, a moral wrong will be committed if we take away such rights without compensating those who will lose their jobs and their ability to control pests in the way that they have done previously. That is a powerful reason to have a separate vote on amendment No. 36.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The hon. Gentleman has repeatedly said that there is some sort of moral wrong in criminalising an activity and not paying compensation to those who would break the law as a result of continuing that activity. We regularly criminalise certain activities. The House has criminalised all sorts of things, from burglary to whatever. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, in all cases when we change the law, we ought to compensate those who carry on an activity that was not previously criminal? I do not seek to equate hunting with burglary; I am saying something quite different. *[Interruption.]* I am trying to be brief, so I do not want to deal with that matter further. The House regularly makes criminal certain things that were previously legal—whether handguns or whatever—and in those circumstances, we do not always pay compensation.

Mr. Öpik: The Minister has talked himself into a hole. He used burglary as his first example. Of course, we would not compensate individuals if their right to burgle houses were taken away. However, what kind of a comparison was that? Burglary was never legal; it certainly has not been in my lifetime. It is not sensible to compare burglary with foxhunting, which is manifestly legal and, more to the point, regarded as a legitimate activity by a large proportion of people.

The Minister needs to think hard about the logic of his argument. I have not a shadow of a doubt that the individuals in my constituency who go hunting foxes with dogs genuinely do not think that they are committing a moral wrong. In fact, I would go further: they do not understand why that civil liberty is being taken away. For that reason, the case for compensation in this example is very much more like the case for compensation when fur farms were closed down and when handguns were taken away. Those examples relate much more closely to the character of this debate than does any comparison with burglary.

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is right to say that I used the wrong example. Burglary has always been illegal. However, badger baiting has not always been illegal. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we should have compensated badger baiters? Dog fighting has been banned. Is he suggesting that we should have compensated those who participated in that? Handguns were banned. Is he suggesting that everyone involved with them should have been compensated? What is he suggesting as a general moral principle? He is ducking the issue by picking up on the particular point I made when I compared foxhunting to burglary. I accept that that was probably a bad example, but will he now deal with the much sounder points that I have just made?

Mr. Öpik: I accept the Minister's point about the comparison with burglary, so let us move on from that. He has given three much more interesting examples that serve merely to highlight the case for compensation.

The Minister asked about badger baiting. Badger baiting was never a form of pest control, and I do not think that anyone ever pretended that it was. It was a form of entertainment through the torture of animals. The Minister has sat through the lengthy debates in the House and in Committee, so he knows that at least a proportion of the people who control foxes with dogs do not regard it as anything less than a legitimate form of pest control. Even if he wants to claim that some people go foxhunting purely for sport, I hope that he will at least accept that a proportion of them believe that the Government's proposals will outlaw a legitimate form of pest control.

The Minister cannot question the fact that some people will lose their jobs, and that that is not their fault. Those people will not understand why, in relation to compensation, the hon. Gentleman seeks to compare the abolition of badger baiting with a ban on the hunting of foxes with dogs as a means of pest control.

Mr. Norman Baker (Lewes): Does my hon. Friend accept that many of us who want hunting to be banned and who see compensation as a separate issue are not yet convinced by the Minister's response? Frankly, I feel slightly uncomfortable about his intervention.

When fur farming was banned, members of the public who were involved in a legitimate activity—an activity that many of us thought was reprehensible for animal

welfare reasons—were compensated when their right to engage in it was taken away and, as I understand it, they have gone abroad and used the money to set up farms in Denmark. I fail to understand the difference between fur farming, which was reprehensible and legal, and foxhunting, which I also regard as reprehensible and legal. What is the difference?

Mr. Öpik: My hon. Friend takes a very different view from me on the question of a ban on foxhunting, but he highlights a fundamental point. We should not be divided on the issue of justice.

The Minister's second example was dog fighting. Again, that was never a form of pest control. It was a barbaric form of entertainment based on the torture of animals and it had no legitimate justification in terms of the wider interest. Furthermore, although I do not want to put words in the mouth of Lord Burns, I am fairly confident that had he been commissioned to study bear baiting and dog fighting, his report would have provided an unarguable case in favour of a ban without compensation. Of course we would not pay compensation in those circumstances and those examples are inappropriate.

The Minister's third example is, however, appropriate. The banning of handguns removed the ability to participate in a legal activity that the Government regarded as dangerous. I did not agree with them, but the ban warranted compensation. The Minister was wrong to say that none was paid, because an enormous amount was provided. To the hon. Gentleman's credit, he is nodding in agreement, but he cited the banning of handguns as an example of where we should not pay compensation. His acknowledgement makes the opposite case.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman refers to handguns, and the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) referred to fur farmers, as did I. The banning of self-loading rifles in the Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 is another example because compensation was paid to those people who lost their large-magazine self-loading rifles.

Mr. Öpik: I am sure that we could give many other examples, and there is a common theme to those that have been cited. When we have banned an activity—either on moral grounds or because it is in the public interest to do so—as long as we have genuinely believed that the individuals who will lose their livelihoods or incur costs have not acted in an overtly reprehensible manner that affected the quality of our society, we have paid compensation.

Perhaps Labour Members do not want to pay compensation because they believe that people who hunt with dogs are so barbaric and reprehensible that they do not deserve to have that right. I remind the House of the precedents: handguns, fur farming and self-loading rifles. We all have different opinions about the morality of using such items or being involved in such activities, but I like to think that we are united in agreeing that we need to treat people fairly. People who hunt with dogs will not understand the logic of compensating for the closure of fur farms and not compensating for the closure of an entire industry. Thousands of jobs are at stake and, in some areas, the ban may have a serious effect on predator activity.

Mr. David Heath: I hope that my hon. Friend will not pursue to great length the activity of hunting but will concentrate instead on the people whose jobs depend on it. Many kennel maids and hunt staff are among the lowest-paid people in the industry. Clearly they should be compensated if hunting is banned. It is reprehensible that the Bill does not recognise that group of people and their rights.

Mr. Öpik: I was coming to that issue—although as my hon. Friend has raised it, I shall not dwell on it for too long. People who are directly involved in the industry—perhaps looking after kennels or dogs—may not have strong views about hunting with dogs. Hon. Members on both sides of the House might be able to strike up a friendship with them and come to respect them. They might understand that they have a great love of animals and the countryside. Were Labour Members and others who oppose compensation to meet them, they would discover that they are ordinary folk who are having their livelihoods removed without receiving compensation. It is simply not just to do that to individuals. That may not be high parliamentary language, but the problem is simple: we are about to punish people for a decision which we are making and in which they have played no part. Normally we compensate people when we do that.

5.30 pm

I am concerned that some Members who support the ban are unwilling to accept the simple and powerful objective that lies behind amendments Nos. 36 and 40. It is almost as if they think that it is a sign of weakness to compensate individuals who are losing their livelihood and that it is dangerous to associate the case for compensation with a ban on hunting with dogs. Some comments suggest that the distinction has been blurred. Taking away the right to hunt with dogs is one thing, but not compensating individuals who have been involved in that activity in good spirit and good faith, and as morally as they can, is another.

I believe that amendment No 36 raises a materially different issue from that which arises from new clause 1. I would be grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you would allow a separate vote on amendment No 36, so that we might make a clear statement on where the House stands on the case for compensation for those who lose out in the ways that I have described.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Changes in public policy have never resulted automatically in compensation being paid. If that were the position, when we changed the law on anything under the sun, people would be knocking on the door of the relevant Minister pleading for compensation. Let us say that there was a change in the law on drink-driving, the limit was reduced and some publicans lost trade—publicans would tell Ministers that they wanted compensation.

Three examples have been cited, and I have a fourth and better one.

Mr. Garnier: Did the licensed trade go to the Home Office when the breathalyser was first introduced to ask for compensation? I do not think it did.

Mr. Prentice: I am advised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) that it did.

[Mr. Prentice]

However, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) gave us three examples, and I have a fourth, which is more relevant.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), as the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, presided over the BSE catastrophe. The entire head deboning industry was wiped out. The heads of animals were cut off, and they were of no use to us in Britain because we do not eat cheek pouches. However, in France they are a great delicacy. The pouches were turned into a pâté in France, and that kept an industry running in Britain.

The head deboning industry went down the pan and the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham swept to one side pleas for compensation. I would give greater credence to pleas from those on the Opposition Front Bench for compensation if they could point to a record of providing it when they were in government, of compensation being given as a result of changes in public policy.

Mr. Hogg: In substance, the hon. Gentleman is right. Head deboners were not compensated, and I have always been troubled by that decision, which probably was wrong. However, I was also responsible for firearms legislation at the end of the 1980s. The hon. Gentleman will remember that owners of large-magazine, self-loading rifles were compensated. I was glad to play a part in that process.

Mr. Prentice: BSE is slightly more relevant to the debate than self-loading firearms. That brings me to my point, having been prompted by the remarks of the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier). I believe—I am sure that the view is not shared by any Opposition Members—that diseased animals should not be fed to hounds. That is wrong. Have we learned nothing from the catastrophes and the chaos of the past decade? It is wrong to feed diseased animals—not animals that have broken a forelock or have tripped, become concussed and then died—to hounds. Diseased animals should be incinerated.

I am surprised that the hon. and learned Member for Harborough made no reference to the Burns report as new clause 1 is all about the disposal of fallen stock. At paragraph 3.59, on page 62, Burns refers to the EU waste incineration directive, which introduces new requirements for hygiene and incinerators. Because of the requirements of the new directive, Burns says:

> "It is not clear . . . whether all the hunts would be able to continue the fallen stock service even if hunting was not banned."

We have not heard the whole story from the hon. and learned Gentleman, just a partial rendition.

Mr. Garnier: Before the hon. Gentleman accuses me further of misleading the House, would he care to read the entire paragraph that he has cited? It adds, in terms, that the hunts have incinerators that they might find it expensive to upgrade. Diseased fallen stock are not fed to the hounds; it is those that have died as a result of breaking a bone or other injury. I said that when the hon. Gentleman intervened on my opening remarks; it may be that he has forgotten that, but if he wishes to make a point on the basis of the Burns report, he should do that report justice by reading the whole of the paragraph to which he refers.

Mr. Prentice: I was going to continue my point about diseased animals by referring to the Phillips report—not, thankfully, all 16 volumes of it, but just volume 1. Hunt kennels and knackers' yards earn a multiplicity of references throughout all 16 volumes; if the hon. and learned Member for Harborough has the report to hand, he might consider page 86, paragraph 438. As far as hunt kennels were concerned, there were no adequate checks between 1991 and 1996 on whether hounds were fed specified risk material. They could well have been, and I suspect that they were. The regulations in place at the time—the 1982 regulations—required knacker meat to be treated as unfit for human consumption and to be stained, but there were no provisions in respect of specified risk material.

Who knows what dreadful, contaminated stuff was fed to the poor hounds in the kennels? It is wrong for diseased animals to be fed to other animals, and the new clause serves no useful purpose.

Mr. Soames: Let me try to reassure the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), who seeks always to find a way to denigrate hunting or show that its practitioners act improperly. No hunt, no huntsman and no hunt staff would ever feed to their hounds anything that it would be improper for them to eat. I know that the hon. Gentleman's pea-like brain will find the proposition impossible to understand, but those people love their hounds and would never do any such thing.

In his ignorance, the hon. Gentleman does not understand that hunt kennels are approved premises for rendering animal by-products, including carcases, under the Animal By-Products Order 1999. Diseased stock would be disposed of by hunts absolutely properly.

I support the proposals in new clause 1 on the disposal of fallen stock. The views of the hon. Member for Pendle on hunting and the countryside are way off-beam, compared with what really goes on. However, the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) made a reasonable, sensible and careful case, as he always does. In the past two years, for example, the market in bull calves collapsed and it was impossible to sell them. Had it not been for the hunt service putting those animals down humanely and disposing of them, the countryside would have been a shambles.

I remember when my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and I served together at MAFF. We were concerned about the tidiness of the countryside and the possibility of farmers burying stock, and the remains of diseased animals leaching into the water supply. That caused us extreme anxiety. I remember the seriousness with which MAFF dealt with the matter and tried to produce a satisfactory proposal.

The countryside would have been a shambles, were it not for the hunt service. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) said, the hunts have worked with farmers in every county at a time of great difficulty for farmers. When we consider the pressure that farmers are experiencing as a result of the wicked, awful foot and mouth outbreak, as my right

hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal observed, how can the House waste a day debating the banning of a perfectly legal pastime? That reflects a warped and improper sense of priorities, at a time when farmers the length and breadth of the land are worried for the future of their industry.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am slightly confused by the hon. Gentleman's argument. I thought that his side was arguing that more than one day should be spent on the Hunting Bill.

Mr. Soames: We shall all leave the hon. Gentleman alone in a darkened room and let him keep taking the tablets.

Hunting with hounds provides a genuine agricultural benefit to farmers, in addition to pest control. As my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough pointed out, the collection from farms of fallen stock—that is, unsaleable dead farm animals—or the collection and humane killing of injured or sick animals is an extremely important service.

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Rooker), then an Agriculture Minister—and a very good one, incidentally—stated in a written answer—*[Interruption.]* I hope that the Under-Secretary will be good enough to do me the courtesy of listening to what I am about to say. If he could spare me a moment of his valuable time, instead of conferring with Deadbeat 2000, I should be grateful.

The parliamentary written answer to which I want the Under-Secretary to pay attention was from his right hon. Friend the Member for Perry Barr, then a Minister at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. It stated:

"a small survey undertaken by the State Veterinary Service earlier this year indicates that around 55 per cent. of calves, 35 per cent. of adult bovines, 25 per cent. of sheep and goats, and 10 per cent. of pigs and lambs, which have fallen, may be disposed of through hunt kennels."—[*Official Report*, 25 June 1998; Vol. 314, c. 606W.]

Mr. Gummer: Has my hon. Friend noted that it is he who has had to bring those figures to the notice of the House? Surely that is precisely the kind of information that the Government should have brought to the notice of the House in order for there to be a proper debate, but perhaps it is not in the brief of Deadbeat 2000.

Mr. Soames: The information is not in the brief of Deadbeat 2000, as it would show hunting for what it is—an integral part of the countryside, not just for sport but for the proper use and support of the farming industry.

Mr. Hogg: Does not my hon. Friend's point make it plain that the House is entitled to the advice of Agriculture Ministers, because the new clauses impact on agriculture? Is it not a scandal that no Agriculture Minister is present in the Chamber to advise us? If Agriculture Ministers could not be present, the proper course would be to adjourn the debate until they could be present.

5.45 pm

Mr. Soames: I wholly agree. My right hon. and learned Friend will recognise that had I worked for him, as I did for my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal so happily for almost 18 months, he would have insisted that a junior Agriculture Minister was present in the House with the Home Office team, in view of that Department's obvious ignorance of what MAFF does.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I find it somewhat ironic that the Conservative party yesterday demanded that MAFF officials and Ministers be present in the Chamber, and is now asking again for Ministers to be here, when those people have to deal with a foot and mouth outbreak.

Mr. Soames: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has been in the House for only a short time and that he will not be with us for much longer. We seek the presence not of officials but of Ministers. It is not they who are lighting the bonfires and dealing with the foot and mouth outbreak, but the state veterinary service—and a very good job it is doing. It is right and proper that an Agriculture Minister should be present, not least to dig the poor, wretched Under-Secretary out of the hole into which he is getting himself.

The Government cannot ignore the consequences of a ban, or merely wish or magic them away. One cannot ban hunting overnight without proposing compensation or some other arrangement for the farmers or the good order and stewardship of the countryside. Neither can one abolish overnight, at a time of enormous difficulty for agriculture, the method by which fallen stock has previously been disposed of. The Government cannot ask us to take such legislation seriously and not to believe and understand the deep and burning resentment in the countryside. That feeling exists not just because people who live in the countryside have given up on the Government for failing to understand the thrust of their complaints, but because of the Government's total ignorance and inability to understand the consequences of what they are doing.

I do not wish to bang on about figures, but I should like briefly to mention some significant ones. My hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough mentioned the Cobham report, which states that 179 hunts handled 352,000 carcases in 1995. The national survey of hunts recorded that 200 of the packs surveyed currently provide a fallen stock service. Those hunts handled a total of 366,000 carcases in the previous 12 months, at an average cost to each of £18,000 per annum.

Mr. Öpik: The hon. Gentleman will know that MAFF has tended to advise individuals with a fallen stock problem to take that problem to the hunt. That advice has been given by the Ministry itself.

Mr. Soames: Indeed it has. That is why my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham expressed concern about the absence of a MAFF Minister. It is not the poor, wretched Home Office that will have to deal with farmers ringing up and saying, "I've got 10 buli calves to be put away this morning. There is no market for them, so I'll have to get them destroyed. How am I to dispose of them?" What is to happen to such farmers? Will they have to ring the Reading office, which is Sussex's nearest regional office? What will the MAFF regional office tell them? It cannot tell them to find a knackerman, as there are no knackermen left. Those are the serious consequences.

[Mr. Soames]

The Under-Secretary is right to say that, by and large, we had a cordial and reasonably civilised debate in Committee. However, we are now dealing with the consequences that would flow from a ban on hunting. Those consequences are serious and cannot be magicked away. They require the most serious and detailed answer, to show that the Government understand and have catered for the consequences of hunts closing down and the lack of a collection service in, for example, West Sussex, which has a substantial dairy industry and a pretty substantial beef industry. The county places many requirements on hunts, which provide a wonderful social service for the farmers and the countryside by clearing away fallen stock. I urge my hon. Friends and Labour Members whose minds are not closed to these matters to think very carefully about the importance of the new clause.

Mrs. Llin Golding (Newcastle-under-Lyme): I wish to speak to amendment No. 36, to which the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) also spoke. Before I do so, may I declare an interest? Many Members will know that I am retiring at the election—and I am going fishing. It is time somebody spoke up in this debate for the fishing industry. No one knows better than fishermen the damage that mink do to the countryside and especially to fish. Mink do not eat many fish, but they destroy many of them. They bite them, tear lumps out of them and leave them looking deformed. Damage to fish by mink has cost one of my local fishermen who stocks a pool in Newcastle-under-Lyme £1,000.

I know that the Labour party has an anglers' charter and that that says that Labour will protect the environment for all to enjoy, especially anglers, but I must tell the Minister that if the Bill is unamended and mink hunting is banned, we shall not be meeting our manifesto promise. Many think that angling is just for a few people, but it is a big tourist industry. It has been encouraged in rural areas in order to attract work—but I see that the Minister wants to intervene.

Mr. Mike O'Brien *indicated dissent.*

Mrs. Golding: No; I beg his pardon.

Gamekeepers and water bailiffs who man many rivers call in mink hunts to sweep the rivers in order to get rid of mink. I have a letter from the Northern Counties hunt in Yorkshire, which states that more than half its call-outs are from gamekeepers on the Esk, Dove, Seph, Leven, Rye and Derwent, and from water bailiffs on the Ure, Cock Beck and Wharfe. Unless we consider the damage that mink do to our rivers, our wildlife and our fishing industry, we will not be taking the Bill seriously.

Many people will lose their jobs as a result of damage by mink. I say to the Minister in all seriousness that unless he can find £40 million to eradicate mink, he should not be supporting the banning of mink hunting and certainly should be considering compensating many anglers and river keepers—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Lady, but I am having a little difficulty linking her remarks to the particular terms of the amendment, which seeks compensation for people affected by this Act.

Mrs. Golding: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the amendment also refers to

"damage by wild animals which were previously controlled by activities prohibited by this Act"—

by mink, in other words.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It states "by this Act", which is concerned largely with hunting with dogs, not fishing.

Mrs. Golding: No, but mink are hunted with dogs. Mink are controlled by mink packs and mink hunting will be banned if the Bill is enacted. We really should be considering the fact that the Bill will ban mink hunting. I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for pointing that out, but I thought that that would be understood.

Mr. Öpik: Is the hon. Lady saying that damage to people involved in, say, fishing and so forth will be very much the same as that suffered by, say, a sheep farmer who loses lambs? She is trying to draw an analogy between foxes that predate on lambs and mink that predate on fish. She is saying that there is a case for compensation for the people about whom she is concerned, just as I am concerned about compensation for people who suffer as a result of fox predation.

Mrs. Golding: I agree. The poor fishing stock owner in my constituency never had the advantage of mink hounds, but he knew that the Government were not prepared to invest anything in controlling mink. It is estimated that it will cost £40 million to control mink if hunting them is banned. I seriously think that the control of these vicious pests should be considered when looking for compensation for people who will lose their livelihoods as the result of the ban.

Mr. Hogg: I rise to support my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) on new clause 1 and amendment No. 40. I do so on the basis that I am strongly opposed to the Bill, which I regard as an outrageous infringement of civil rights.

If we are to have this Bill at all, clearly we must try to address some of its consequences. The question of fallen stock is a very important consequence. The House would therefore be absolutely right to support the new clause, which would at least provide a scheme for dealing with fallen stock. I hope, too, that the House will recognise that if there is a ban, a very heavy cost will fall on the agriculture industry in the dealing with fallen stock.

It is bizarre that at the very time when the agriculture industry and livestock producers in particular are facing the crisis of foot and mouth disease, this House should be contemplating imposing on them yet a further charge. That makes it even more scandalous that there is not an Agriculture Minister on the Government Front Bench.

I am perfectly prepared to accept that the Minister of Agriculture is engaged elsewhere—although in his case it is probably in a broadcasting studio—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members may whine but the Minister of Agriculture made it absolutely plain to the House yesterday that he thought it inappropriate and a waste of his time to explain to the House the problems of foot and mouth disease and to account for his policies. We regard it as his duty to be in the House.

Let me remind you, if I may, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when I was Minister of Agriculture dealing with BSE, I came to the House on many occasions. On about 30—or perhaps 20—occasions, I or my ministerial colleagues came to the House, usually, or at least often, at the request of the then Opposition to account for our policies. We never suggested that that was a waste of our time or otherwise inappropriate: we regarded it as our duty. I very much regret the absence of Agriculture Ministers.

I return to the subject of new clause 1. We must not impose on livestock producers an even heavier burden at this time. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) is wholly right to speak of the very important services that hunts provide in the disposal of fallen stock. If we must have a Bill such as this, not to make proper provision for such disposal is a dereliction of duty.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): To put some value on the service, a New Forest pony might fetch—if one is lucky—£5 at the Beaulieu road market. However, to remove a dead pony that has been knocked over, as so many are every week by motor vehicles, to a knacker would cost in excess of £70. That is a measure of the loss to the commoners of the New Forest that we would be looking to this legislation to replace.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend is right to bring the detail before the House. If one wants more general information, one will find it in the Burns report on page 62, where it states that something like 336,000 carcases are disposed of by hounds. Dealing with such a number would be a significant cost to agriculture.

Mr. Soames: My right hon. and learned Friend is characteristically generous with his time.

Just outside my constituency is Ashdown forest, as my right hon. and learned Friend will know, in which there is a splendid and very healthy population of deer. Unfortunately, the deer are often run over. It is the hunt that collects those deer and, if necessary, puts them down and takes them away. If the hunt do not undertake that task, whom does he envisage doing so? Would it be Wealden district council, which presumably does not have a team of knackermen on standby? Who would do that extremely important work for the community?

6 pm

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend shows the importance of Report stage, which is being truncated. The House has naturally focused on the responsibilities of hunts for the disposal of fallen stock, but my hon. Friend has reminded us about deer on the roads. If there be no hunts, the cost will fall on district councils, and thus on the council tax payer. That is another example of the Government's not thinking through the problems that they are obliged to face.

Amendment No. 40 deals with compensation. I am perfectly prepared to accept that there have long been differences of opinion on compensation. The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) made a fair point against me. When I was Minister of Agriculture I did not provide a compensation scheme for head deboners. However, I provided extensive compensation schemes for the farming industry. I did not provide such a scheme for head deboners partly because of the precedents, which were comprehensive, and partly because of the fear of establishing another precedent that could subsequently be prayed in aid.

I was uneasy about that decision at the time, but I made it. On reflection, I think that it was probably wrong for a number of reasons—at least I would not make such a decision now. To start off with, the argument has moved on, partly as a result of law. The incorporation in domestic law of the European convention on human rights, in particular the obligation to pay compensation when people's property rights are interfered with, has changed the discussion in this area; the debate has moved on.

Then there are the precedents, some of which operated at the time and some of which have been brought into operation since then. The Firearms (Amendment) Act 1988 provided for compensation in respect of the owners of the firearms confiscated, although it did not extend to consequential loss. The same was true in respect of handguns. The scheme for fur farmers is more generous, and if it is properly implemented will probably extend to consequential loss. The precedents are changing in favour of compensation.

I am bound to say also that in the end it is a matter of principle, which makes me uneasy with the decision that I took with regard to head deboners. The plain truth is that we are proposing—in my view, wholly wrongly—to take away people's livelihoods. My hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) reminded us of saddlers. The Burns report identifies many other occupations of people whose activities are related to hunting. We will deprive them of their livelihoods. We will take away the employment of the people who work directly for the hunts, whether as kennel-men or kennel-maids or in the stables, and also of those who service the hunting industry. For what reason? The honest answer is that we are destroying people's livelihoods to indulge the prejudices and views of certain people in the House.

There should be a cost attached to that. If we are really going to do such a frightful and odious thing, by God we should pay for it. I do not see why honest, law-abiding citizens, who for generations past have earned their living in a way that they deem wholly respectable—and so do I—should lose their jobs without compensation. That is a scandal. I hope that this matter will be pushed to a Division, because I want to see Labour MPs voting against compensation. By doing so, they will declare their true colours. I view their position on this matter with contempt.

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): I do not want to encourage the debate to be any more bad-tempered than it has become. *[Interruption.]* I am surprised that hon. Members are allowed to call each other pea-brained, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) said, if one is pot-bellied one gets away with making such allegations in the House.

I have voted for the principle of the Bill, but I want some of the consequences of its enactment to be considered carefully. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Garnier: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: No, I want to make my point.

[Dr. Turner]

My experience as a member of the Select Committee on Agriculture, limited though it is, tells me that Conservative Members should be a little more sanguine about the BSE saga, given the consequences for many in agriculture about which they now complain and which lie at their door due to their incompetent handling of the crisis. *[Interruption.]* Given the problems that my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle referred to, and the outbreak of classical swine fever, which is still relatively—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman should be allowed to make his contribution without continual interruptions from a sedentary position.

Dr. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Given the great concern of farmers in East Anglia about the outbreak of classical swine fever and the present immense concerns about animal disease and the foot and mouth outbreak, the House and the Minister should reflect on what should happen to diseased animals in future. New clause 1 would introduce a regulated scheme under the control of the Secretary of State for the safe disposal of sick and dead animals.

Surely one of the lessons that we should learn from the past few years is that we must take greater care when dealing with sick animals. If we had a scheme that required animals to be checked by a vet, would not some of the recent outbreaks have been detected earlier than they were? We have the bones of a good scheme, but I am not sure that it is ideal as currently phrased. It should not be limited to animals that would hitherto have been collected. I believe that there is an argument for a national scheme for the disposal of diseased and fallen stock.

Mr. Baker: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but does he agree with me that this debate is not about what our views might be on hunting but about the safe disposal of stock? It is about farming and preventing further bills for the farming community.

Dr. Turner: That is precisely the point that I was trying carefully to make. There is a danger that the new clause will be seen as part of some other argument and debate. The House would do well to consider it in the broader context of the impact of animal disease.

Mr. Hogg: I am sure that we welcome the hon. Gentleman's support, but does he agree that, if we have such a scheme, the cost should not fall on the livestock producer?

Dr. Turner: I note that the new clause tabled by Conservative Members states that the charges should meet the cost of the scheme. This issue should be debated, because such a scheme is clearly in the national interest. Measures that would enable speedier detection of the problems to which I have referred could contribute to the safety of our agriculture industry.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): The answer to this problem is to rebuild the knacker industry, which was the traditional way of getting rid of dead stock in this country and in many parts of the world. That could be done within existing means.

Dr. Turner: I am less certain of that than is my hon. Friend. Given that the scheme could be widely drawn, there is no reason why there should not be alternatives and there would be good arguments for tightening up on notification before disposing of fallen stock. I hope that the Minister will carefully explain why it would not be sensible to consider the new clause more carefully, subject to amendments made elsewhere.

Those who argue the case for compensation are in great danger of over-gilding the lily. Many decisions made in Parliament on the rules and regulations under which people have to operate routinely put those people to expense. Indeed, we sometimes put people out of work, but we do so because we have good reason. Pest control has been mentioned. The pesticide and pharmaceutical industries exist in such an environment that should a perceived danger—let alone an actual one—become apparent, the House would think it responsible to act without discussing what compensation should be given to companies that would have to replace their manufacturing processes and that had invested heavily in research funding.

Mr. Baker: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: I shall develop my point before taking an intervention; I shall be happy to do so when I have made clear what I am trying to say. There is no automatic right to compensation when the House legislates to change employment or profit opportunities. On the other hand, when we took guns from people, we gave them the value of their gun. When the state takes from its citizens, there is a case for defining narrowly, not broadly, and the amendments are insupportable—a lawyer's nightmare would result from proceeding on such a basis. They are widely drawn because they are part of an important and emotional debate.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My hon. Friend mentions handguns, to which I referred earlier. He will no doubt recall that there was considerable debate about compensation, which he rightly said was paid for the market value of guns, but dealers were not compensated for loss of profits or future business. A limit was put in place.

Dr. Turner: That is precisely the point that I was seeking to make, and the Minister has added directly to it.

Mr. Baker: I understand that compensation should not be given when Parliament legislates; equally, I understand why compensation should be paid, but where is the consistency? How can it be right that mink farmers were compensated when no compensation is proposed in the Bill? What is the difference? Can the hon. Gentleman answer that point? Was it wrong to compensate mink farmers?

Dr. Turner: At this distance, I do not remember the details of the compensation and I do not like to make up an answer, but, as the Minister pointed out, there is a distinction between paying for guns that were taken and

compensating manufacturers who could no longer make them or dealers who could no longer sell them. My problem with supporting the amendments is that they are much closer to the latter.

The amendments carry an implication that would be the equivalent of compensating not only those from whom we took guns, but shopkeepers who could no longer sell them and the manufacturers who could no longer make a profit from selling them. That is the distinction that I draw.

Mr. Öpik: I do not seek to be unhelpful, but is the hon. Gentleman saying that, despite his concerns about the construction of amendment No. 36, a debate should be held on compensation? If so, am I right to say that he is describing where he would draw the line and that, even if I would draw that line somewhere else and although the practical outcomes would be different, we agree that there is a principle at stake?

6.15 pm

Dr. Turner: The short answer is yes. I accept that a debate should be held about the principle, but my problem is that the amendments strike the wrong balance. We must be careful, as we were with mink farmers, and we must consider whether people are able to diversify and reuse their materials. For example, many who argue for the banning of hunting say that it could be replaced by drag hunting. We should debate the nature of the compensation—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: I must finish.

There is a nub to the argument. That should be addressed, and I hope that the Minister will do so. The amendments are far too widely drawn and are part of the bigger battle rather than part of a careful look at whether compensation should be paid when it is clear that harm is being done and that those to whom harm is being done have no alternatives.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I suppose that we can give one cheer, but no more than that, for what might be the valedictory address of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner). He at least had the good grace to recognise that there is something to the case that has been advanced, but I am one of those who finds this a particularly sad day.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is being characteristically generous to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner). Is not it his interpretation that the hon. Gentleman began his speech supporting compensation, saw the Minister frowning at him intensely and retreated at a rapid rate of knots? Which press release will the hon. Gentleman issue in King's Lynn?

Sir Patrick Cormack: I do not know how many more press releases the hon. Gentleman will be able to issue in King's Lynn because before too long Mr. Henry Bellingham will grace these Benches again. Although it is always appropriate to introduce a note of levity to any debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is particularly good at that, I find this a sad day—indeed, a grotesque day. All around the countryside, farmers are facing ruin. All around the country, farmers are wondering not whether they will be compensated under the Bill, but whether they will survive at all.

We should be debating those grave issues, so it is grotesque for the Government to set aside a whole day to debate this mean, spiteful, vindictive, unnecessary and meddlesome legislation. The Government talk about human rights and civil liberties, yet they seek to extinguish the rights and liberties of some of the most decent, law-abiding people this country knows, many of whom are poorly paid.

In many ways, the most telling comments came from the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who has taken a distinguished and a distinguishable line in all our debates on hunting. He described them with a simple word, saying that they are about fairness. That is what our debates are about: being fair to people whom we are attacking.

I am not one of those who have been deluded into thinking that tonight we can convert Labour Members sufficiently to defeat the Bill on Third Reading. No, the Bill will be passed and the steamroller majority to which I referred in the earlier debate will be brought into play. There will be honourable exceptions, such as the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding). I am extremely sorry that my fellow Staffordshire Member will no longer represent part of the county of Isaak Walton after the election.

Apart from a few honourable exceptions, Labour Members will go into the Lobby in serried ranks to carry the Bill—which will be an act of appalling injustice if adequate compensation is not provided for those who will be deprived of their livelihoods.

I hope that the Minister will demonstrate clearly that he understands the points that have been made. He has already apologised for one extremely inapposite analogy, in which he sought to equate what we are discussing with burglary—he withdrew that, which was good—but he did not really face up to the question of compensation. Members of the official Opposition and Liberal Democrats have made a number of points about that: we have been at one on compensation, although we may take different lines on hunting. I think that the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), for instance, is wholly on our side.

We have talked about handguns, and the compensation provided under the very silly legislation introduced by a Government whom, in other respects, I was prepared to support. I said at the time that I thought the legislation unnecessary and silly, but the fact remains that those deprived of handguns were given compensation—albeit, perhaps, less than they should have received. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) mentioned an earlier Bill under which, much more justifiably in my view, other firearms were taken away. In that case, too, proper compensation was provided.

Compensation has been provided in other instances, the most recent being the Government's Bill banning mink farming. The hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme rightly spoke of the terrible depredations caused by mink in the countryside, particularly at the expense of the angling community. In doing so, she in effect appealed to the Government to be consistent. They have compensated

[Sir Patrick Cormack]

those who were farming mink; they must now compensate those who will suffer from the activities of mink if hunting is not allowed.

The Minister must face up to these issues. In example after example, the Government have shown that they do not understand the countryside, and do not appreciate the problems faced by people there. I hope that my hon. Friends will lose no opportunity to point out to their farming and other constituents just how far removed the Government are from an understanding of the countryside. There is, however, just a small chance for the Minister to salvage a little honour.

Mr. Soames: He can drop the Bill.

Sir Patrick Cormack: We know he will not do that.

Mr. Soames: He might!

Sir Patrick Cormack: That would be wonderful. Failing that, though, the Minister can at least show that he recognises the justice of the case being made for compensation.

Many of my hon. Friends have referred to the absence of any Agriculture Minister. One should be present. The issue we are debating is admittedly peripheral, given that we are debating it at a time of grave crisis in the countryside; but there should nevertheless be a Minister present to recognise the havoc that the Bill will cause. Where is the Minister? Where is a member of the ministerial team? Why cannot this Minister send his parliamentary private secretary—to whom he was talking a while ago—to find an Agriculture Minister, and explain that there is a demand in the House for an Agriculture Minister to come and listen to the debate?

Mr. David Heath: There is only agriculture spokesman present, and that is me.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am delighted that an agriculture spokesman is present. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we will happily produce one ourselves the moment a Minister enters the Chamber. Opposition Members are slightly different, of course, in that we have a genuine understanding of the plight of the countryside and of what the countryside is all about.

If we do not receive an adequate response to our basic call for compensation, the Government will have covered themselves in dishonour and obloquy, and will be remembered and castigated in the countryside for generations.

Mr. Rendel: In many respects, I have considerable sympathy with the principles behind the new clause and amendments. I sympathise with the case for a scheme to deal with fallen stock, given that the Bill would remove the methods currently available to some farms. I also sympathise with the call for compensation. I believe, however, that the way in which the new clause and amendments address those issues leaves much to be desired.

I agree with a good deal that was said by the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner), especially in regard to the new clause. If there is a case for a Government scheme to deal with fallen stock, that case must surely rest largely on the importance of ensuring that diseased stock is handled carefully and properly, and that any disease carried by fallen stock does not spread. It can be applied equally well to fallen stock on farms where there happen to be hunts at present, and to fallen stock on farms where there are no hunts. If there is to be a scheme, it should surely involve all fallen stock rather than, as new clause 1 clearly states, fallen stock

"which would have been collected by hunts but for the enactment or coming into force of the Schedule to this Act."

I feel that that aspect of the new clause should rule it out.

Even now, the collecting of fallen stock by hunts leads to what is, in a sense, an unfair relation between one farm and another. Some farms can dispose of fallen stock rather more cheaply than others. If hunting is abolished, that will no longer exist.

There is, of course, a case for saying that the finances of farming will be affected. We ought to ensure that there is a cheap way in which farms can dispose of fallen stock, or else introduce another form of compensation scheme so that farmers' incomes do not drop unnecessarily. Providing only for areas that are currently lucky enough to contain hunts that can collect their fallen stock comparatively cheaply, however, would simply continue the current unfairness.

I think that there is a good case for compensating those whom the Bill puts out of jobs. It is true that there are precedents in both directions. Presumably the question of redundancy payments would arise: not much compensation might be necessary. In any event, the amendments involved do not just cover those who would be put out of jobs. Amendment No. 36 in particular clearly refers to compensation for loss of stock as a result of, for example, foxes taking stock after the abolition of hunting. Amendment No. 40 is slightly less clear in this respect, but I assume that its reference to losses would also mean compensation for farmers who lost stock when a fox got into the henhouse. I do not think there is much of a case for that: after all, henhouses are attacked by foxes now, regardless of whether hunting takes place in the areas concerned.

There are strong arguments for the proposition that, if hunting is abolished, the fox population is likely to fall. I believe that farmers will take it upon themselves to reduce the fox population by, for example, shooting more foxes. Clear arguments have been advanced by the pro-hunting lobby that one reason why the fox population is high is that hunting exists. If that is a valid argument—I believe it to be so to some extent—once hunting has been abolished, there should be less reason for people to be compensated as a result of foxes taking stock. Therefore, I do not see that there is a good argument for that.

6.30 pm

Indeed, it will be impossible to say whether a particular attack by a fox on a henhouse would or would not have taken place had hunting still been in existence. Who can say which foxes would have been hunted and killed had hunting not been abolished? That aspect of the two compensation schemes rules them out, too.

Mr. Leigh: I must apologise because, in an earlier intervention, I may have inadvertently misled the House.

I was trying to work out exactly what the cost would be to the farming community if the fallen stock service provided by the hunts were taken away. I was trying to extrapolate figures from the Cobham report, which estimated that the total number of carcases handled annually by all packs—fox, deer and hare—was 415,000. I understand that it is reasonable to suggest that a knacker man would levy a charge of approximately £70 for the collection of a cow or a horse. I was simply multiplying 415,000 by £70. If we do that, we will get a very large figure.

That is the figure that I put to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), but I accept that that might be an exaggeration. I think that the case is interesting enough without having to resort to extrapolation. I shall try to share what information I have. The costs involved are an interesting fact, especially today, when the farming community is reeling from the impact of further costs imposed on it by the foot and mouth epidemic.

The national survey of hunts has found that, in the past 12 months, hunts collected 48,000 animals. The average price difference for collection by other means is £50 per beast, which means that the cost of collecting cows and horses alone would impose an additional burden of £2,400,000 per annum on farmers. That is a considerable sum.

The Cobham report calculated that 179 hunts handled 352,000 carcases in 1995, an average of 2,035 carcases per hunt. When the work of the harrier and beagle packs that also collected fallen stock was taken into account, it came to the figure of 415,000. The national survey of hunts records that 200 of the packs surveyed currently provide a fallen stock service. Those hunts handled a total of 366,000 carcases in the previous 12 months at an average cost to each hunt of £18,000 per annum.

The question is complicated by the fact that the hunts make some charge. In recent years, many of them have not been able to provide a completely free service. Some of them charge £20 for cows and horses, £10 per 50 kg of pig, £5 for each sheep and nothing for calves. One will see from those figures and facts that it is quite a complicated story.

I take on board the interesting point made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). If one is devising a compensation scheme, one will have to have some cognisance of the fact that the service is not available in all parts of the country. Presumably, when they produce such an amendment, Opposition spokesmen are prepared to negotiate on the issue. If the Minister comes back with good arguments about why the amendment may not be fair in all the circumstances, the Opposition will be prepared to withdraw it. I accept that he is a Home Office Minister, not an Agriculture Minister, but presumably the relevant information can be passed to him. It is incumbent on him to share with the House exactly what is going on in the countryside, how many of the carcases are being collected and what total cost would fall on the farming community.

I am happy to take back the figure that I gave earlier. I was trying to work it out as an ordinary Back Bencher, but the Minister will have much more accurate information. I wish that he could share it with the House.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Before my hon. Friend moves on, can he pick up a point that was made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel)? He talked about a level playing field, but he missed the point that a ban, and therefore the elimination of the fallen stock service, would have a disproportionate impact in areas with a particularly heavy livestock population such as in my patch, north Shropshire, and in Cheshire, the south-west or parts of Wales. The impact would be devastating in areas where there is a heavy concentration of livestock. Perhaps more arable areas such as Newbury will not be so badly affected.

Mr. Leigh: That is a fair point. I must accept that, if hunting is abolished and the fallen stock service vanishes, the type of area that I represent, a very arable area, could probably take the measure on board, leaving aside for the moment the other problems that agriculture is facing. We are not a livestock area. I accept the point that, for hon. Members representing livestock areas, the impact of the end of the fallen stock service may be much more severe. I am sure that the hon. Member for Newbury, who is a fair man, would accept that point and that, in certain parts of the country, the measure could have a serious effect on farmers who rely on that service.

I hope that the Minister will be able to share with the House exactly how the service can be replaced. The argument has been made several times, but it must be emphasised: surely, at this time of all times, whatever our views on hunting, we do not want to impose a further cost on farmers. When the farming community is going through a particularly sensitive and traumatic time, it would be unfair for the House of Commons and for Ministers to send out the message that they are ignoring the problem; that it is just a minor one that could be swept under the carpet. The Minister must come back with a sensible response. He must not simply dismiss our arguments, but accept that the collection of fallen stock is a valuable service and that, should it disappear, something must be done to replace it.

There has been a lot of argument about the number of jobs that will be affected. Those who support the Bill argue that the number of jobs that will be lost as a result of it is much less than the number alleged by the Countryside Alliance, but Burns accepts that between 6,000 and 8,000 full-time equivalent jobs depend on hunting. Obviously, an additional number of part-time employees may lose their jobs. That brings the full-time equivalent jobs lost to anything up to 13,600. That is a very large number.

I accept that, when Ministers are dealing with such a debate, they must tread carefully because the one thing that worries them more than anything else is arguments about compensation. The figures are potentially enormous and the Government do not want to be stuck on that particular needle. I understand where the Government are coming from, but they must understand that the people involved often earn very small salaries—that point has been made many times. A lot of them may earn about £10,000 a year. They may have jobs that are difficult to relate to any other activity. For them, the loss of hunting will be a devastating blow.

The proposed ban on hunting is different from many other bans. Certainly, it is unfair to equate it with the abolition in the 19th century of cock fighting or bear baiting. Those were minor activities carried out by groups of people who were simply interested in viewing animals being torn apart. Those activities did not offer full-time equivalent jobs to up to 16,000 people. They were not

[Mr. Leigh]

traditional activities. Foxhunting is quite a different matter. The Government must seriously address the issue of what will happen to those people. How they will find other jobs? How will they be retrained, and at what total cost to them?

The Burns report, which is very fair, honestly attempted to try to examine both sides of the issue. It stated:

"In the event of a ban on hunting, consideration would need to be given to possible action in respect of the fallen stock service provided by many hunts and to whether there would be a case for compensation if hounds had to be destroyed and hunts had no further use for their kennels."

I appreciate that Ministers do not want to set a precedent and that they have to be responsible for the public purse, and all those other arguments, but I hope that they will give some hope to those people. As hon. Members have said, there are precedents for compensation. Section 5(1) of the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, for example, which is the Government's own legislation, states:

"The appropriate authority may (and, in the case of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, shall) by order make a scheme for the making of payments by that authority to persons in respect of income and non-income losses incurred by them as a result of ceasing, by reason of the enactment or coming into force of section 1, to carry on their businesses".

There is no doubt that the Hunting Bill, if enacted, will be on all fours with section 5(1) of the 2000 Act. For better or for worse, although I would regret it, Parliament may in its wisdom decide that those 8,000 full-time jobs have to go. Parliament took a similar decision on fur farming, which accounted for far fewer jobs. Perhaps the Government found it easy to be generous in that case because fewer jobs were involved. Nevertheless, Parliament and the Government took the decision to stop fur farming, and quite rightly said that they had to compensate people.

The fur farming compensation scheme is also very different from other previous proposed compensation schemes, such as those for BSE and natural disasters, and perhaps including the foot and mouth disaster that we have been talking about this week. Those are natural disasters. The Government do not will BSE or foot and mouth on the nation; they have to try to cope with those difficult problems.

Ministers can create strictly constrained compensation schemes, and they are very anxious not to open the floodgates to wider compensation schemes. However, in all fairness, when Parliament deliberately takes a decision to abolish, for example, fur farming, hunting or—as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said—self-loading rifles, is there not an obligation on Parliament to pay compensation?

Mr. Bercow: I accept my hon. Friend's point that there is a difference in scale between fur farming and hunting, and the compensation that might be required. However, does he agree that it would be outrageous and despicable if the Government were to take the view that they would pay for the principle of equity only if they thought that they could afford the price?

Mr. Leigh: That is a very fair, rational and ethical point. I was trying to deal with the practicalities of what the Government can or cannot afford to do. If the Government have decided to abolish hunting—they have provided Parliament with the means of abolishing it—there is no way in which I would ever be able to persuade the Minister to compensate those who are losing their sport, those whose hunting horses are no longer needed or anyone else who is affected by abolition. I would never get away with that argument with the hon. Gentleman—who is a tough but fair-minded Minister.

Precisely because the Minister is fair-minded, however, I think that there may be some hope of persuading him that if Parliament takes a decision affecting people employed full time in what has hitherto been a perfectly respectable and legal occupation, a moral injunction would be placed on the Government to provide some type of compensation. Who am I talking about? Very often, they are in very modest occupations, such as groom, farrier, saddler, kennel huntsman, or gamekeeper. They may find it very difficult to find another job.

6.45 pm

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend has talked about the moral case for the Government to provide compensation, but has he considered that there may be a legal case for providing it? Has he considered the 1986 Lithgow *v.* United Kingdom case—which clarified the point not only that people may be deprived of their possessions only in exceptional circumstances, when it is in the public interest to do so, but that compensation should be paid except in exceptional circumstances? Does he think that if the Government were to proceed with the Bill without compensation provisions, it could give rise to a challenge in the European Court of Human Rights?

Mr. Leigh: I think that that is a very fair point. In his reply, the Minister—who is a Home Office Minister, not a MAFF Minister—could try to deal with it. I have no doubt that the Government are open to challenge on the matter in the European Court of Human Rights. Article 1 of protocol 1 of the European convention on human rights provides:

"Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions. No one shall be deprived of his possessions except in the public interest and subject to the conditions provided for by law and by the general principles of international law."

Ministers have to try to convince the House, and, presumably—if they proceed with the ban—the European Court, that they can satisfy the provisions of article 1 of protocol 1. It is not good enough for the Minister to brush aside the issue and say, "My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has put his imprimatur on the Bill, as is required by human rights legislation. Everything is all right, chaps; do not worry. There is nothing to worry about." I think that there is a lot to worry about. If I were a Minister, I would certainly be worried about a challenge being made in the European courts. A hunting ban would, for example, interfere with the rights of landowners.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I hesitate to intervene on the hon. Gentleman, who might pull out his *Hansard* on me, however, he will be aware that the European convention is now, of course, part of United Kingdom law. If the

point that he is making were taken, it would not have to be dealt with in Europe, as in the past, but could be dealt with in our own courts.

Mr. Leigh: I happily concede that point, which is a fair one. The Government may well be taken to law in our own courts.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend will be aware that, under the European convention on human rights, which has now been incorporated into our own legislation, every Bill passed by Parliament has to have a certificate stating that the legislation conforms with that convention. If what he is saying is correct, does he think that the Minister might have difficulty issuing such a certificate for this Bill?

Mr. Leigh: That is precisely the point that I made a moment ago. When we raise issues in this type of debate, the Minister replying may say, "Of course that point has been dealt with; my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has issued a certificate", as if that were the end of the argument. Civil servants do not seem to brief Ministers to reply to the legal issues that have been raised.

I believe that a ban could be in breach of protocol 1 because it would interfere with the property rights of landowners who participate in hunts on their own land. In reply to the specific point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that such a ban could be deemed by the courts as an interference with "substance of ownership" and with the "peaceful enjoyment" of those possessions, such a right is guaranteed in the first sentence of article 1.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold mentioned the case of Lithgow *v.* United Kingdom, which I do not want to deal with in detail. However, without trying to get into a long legal debate with the Minister, it would be very interesting if, with the help of those who advise him in these matters, he could tell us that Lithgow does not apply in this case. The European convention states that deprivation of possessions is acceptable only if it is in the public interest and conforms to international law or practice. Will the Minister say whether he believes that the European Court, or our courts, would interpret that to mean that a ban on hunting—which is a departure from existing practice—was in the public interest?

All such matters will be determined later in the courts if the ban on hunting comes into force, but I shall end with two brief points.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend realise the seriousness of what he has just said? In the past, Britain has led the rest of Europe in matters of human rights and individual freedom. Although I very often disagree with my hon. Friend about matters European, it seems to me that we ought to be the leaders in that regard: we should not rely on the European Court to protect human rights that, historically, we have protected for ourselves. My hon. Friend is saying that the Government are doing something that no previous Government would have done, and that British citizens will have to appeal to the European Court for protection. Is he fully cognisant of how serious a matter that is?

Mr. Leigh: That is why the issue is so important. We must pause and hold our breath for a moment to consider the issue raised by my right hon. Friend. Britain is one of the freest countries in Europe. As far as I know, Parliament has never decided unilaterally to take away the traditional rights of a quarter of a million people—and certainly the jobs of 8,000 people—simply because the Government believed that those people are acting unethically.

The proposal to ban hunting represents a major step. Before they proceed, hon. Members must be aware of the legal arguments involved. Those arguments can be dismissed as mere lawyer's talk, but what is the law for? The law is something very precious, whose purpose is to protect freedom and traditional liberties. That is why we have it.

The Government may have shot themselves in the foot on this matter. They have made it even easier for people to appeal to the European convention and other authorities. If this Bill is enacted, it could well fall foul of that convention.

However, let us talk not of laws, lawyers, conventions and Europe, but concentrate instead on ordinary people and the English countryside. At present, struggling farmers receive a free service. I accept that that service is not available throughout the country, and that in certain circumstances a nominal charge may be made, but the service exists. The Bill will take away that service.

Mr. Soames: Does not my hon. Friend agree that the problem is not merely that the service will be taken away, but that it is irreplaceable? There is no other infrastructure in the countryside to cope with the problem of fallen stock. Are not the Government therefore shooting themselves in the foot in a major way?

Mr. Leigh: One Labour Member attended the debate for a short time and in a throwaway remark said that the knacker industry would take care of the problem. I wonder whether that hon. Gentleman knows what is happening to the knacker industry in rural areas, or to small rural abattoirs. I wonder whether he has tried to visit one recently—if he could find one that still exists. If the fallen stock service is removed, can the knacker industry cope?

I am prepared to accept that I do not have access to all the figures, but common sense suggests that removing the free service provided by hunts might mean that what remains of the knacker industry will promptly up its charges.

Mr. Paterson: The hon. Gentleman to which my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) refers represents a Scottish constituency. Was not that hon. Gentleman imposing his prejudice on my English constituents, and those of my hon. Friend, whereas we have no say about what goes on in regard to this matter north of the border?

Mr. Leigh: When Opposition Members make a reasonable point such as that, Ministers say merely that this Parliament is supreme and that the Scottish Parliament is only a devolved Parliament. In his opening comments, the Minister implied that the Scottish Parliament is only a semi-Parliament, or half a Parliament. However, that does not resolve the problem that we have no control over the knacker industry or hunting in Scotland. Those obvious and powerful points have been made many times, and I need not repeat them.

[Mr. Leigh]

I make one final plea to the Minister. I do not ask for a general compensation scheme for people who are losing their sport, but I do ask that the Minister be understanding of the plight faced by the 8,000 people on low incomes who will lose their jobs as a result of the Bill.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): The hon. Gentleman is being careful to draw a fairly tight line with regard to who he thinks should be compensated. However, does not he agree with the hon Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that that is not what the amendments do? Amendment No. 36(1)(b) deals with compensation for

"damage by wild mammals which were previously controlled by activities prohibited by this Act."

The hon. Gentleman is making a reasonable point, but is not he speaking against the amendment, which was tabled by Conservative Members and some Liberal Democrat Members?

Mr. Leigh: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is terribly important that we do not indulge in debating points when we are dealing with real jobs and real people. Free votes on matters of conscience require hon. Members to develop their own arguments in their own way. We must relate those arguments to real conditions on the ground.

The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) is a reasonable gentleman. If the Minister were to tell him that the compensation scheme was too widely drawn and that it would cost a lot of money, but that he understood the argument and was prepared to respond positively, I am sure that the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire would be happy with that reply.

Mr. Öpik: The Middle Way Group proposal is about the principle of compensation. If the Minister were to say that the Government accepted that there was a case for compensation, we could reply that we were not hung up about the words in our amendment. However, we are committed to the principle of compensation. My hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) raised some genuine matters that we need to debate.

Mr. Leigh: That is a very fair intervention. I hope that the Minister will think on it. He may not be able to give us even half of what we are asking for tonight, but he is a fair-minded person and will know that many people on low incomes are very worried about losing their jobs. I hope that the Minister, when he replies to the debate, will be able to give them some hope that some compensation may be available to them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At the outset, may I say that farmers in my very rural Cotswold constituency will not understand why a debate lasting a full parliamentary day is being given to this Bill, when they are surrounded by cases of foot and mouth disease? Cases of the disease have been announced in Wiltshire and Herefordshire. My farmers' livelihood hangs on a thread, and they will not understand why Parliament is discussing this Bill rather than what is, for them, a matter of life and death. However, it has been decreed that we should discuss this matter, so that is what I shall now do.

7 pm

The new clause proposes an alternative method of disposal of fallen stock. Lord Burns, in his comprehensive and seminal work on hunting says, at paragraph 10.60:

"In the event of a ban on hunting, consideration would need to be given to possible action in respect of the fallen stock service provided by many hunts and to whether there would be a case for compensation if bounds had to be destroyed and hunts had no further use for their kennels."

New clause 1 and amendment No. 40 deal with those two matters.

I do not believe that the Government have properly considered the matter of fallen stock. In preparation for the debate on the Burns report, I asked the Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Ms Quin), two questions. Having given the breakdown of the number of animals that were estimated to be disposed of by hunts, the right hon. Lady said:

"No estimate has been made of the cost to the livestock industry of using outlets other than hunt kennels to dispose of carcases. However, the safe disposal of fallen stock is an important issue and officials will continue to liaise with the livestock and disposal industries to examine the best approaches to this issue."—[*Official Report*, 28 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 1123W.]

I have no doubt that the Minister will wish to update us as to what the thinking has been since that reply. Considering that the question was posed against the background of the Burns report, which the Government had had adequate time to consider, I thought that that was an extraordinary answer.

Mr. Gummer: Will my hon. Friend return to his earlier point about compensation being crucial? Is it not true to say that if this were a Bill to ban bingo in cities, the party that would be the first to demand that those concerned with bingo—the people who open the doors, take the money and run the operation—were compensated would be the Labour party? But apparently, because it takes place in the countryside, hunting does not count.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My right hon. Friend makes some extremely telling remarks. *[Interruption.]* Labour Members laugh. They laugh at the fact that they have produced a Bill that will deprive a substantial number of people of their livelihood without compensation. If that is not a disgrace, I do not know what is.

The actions of the members of the governing party will be scrutinised carefully by those in the countryside when they consider, very shortly, how to cast their vote, and I think that the governing party will get a big shock. Voters will be deeply influenced by what the Minister of Agriculture said yesterday in relation to the foot and mouth outbreak, and they will certainly be influenced by the conduct of the Government in this debate.

The second question that I asked in preparation for the debate on the Burns report was to the then Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food—now the Minister of State, Department of Social Security. I asked what alternative arrangements had been made for considering the disposal of fallen stock and the destruction of animal casualties if hunting were banned. The Minister replied:

"There are already arrangements for disposing of fallen stock and the destruction of animal casualties other than via hunt kennels. Disposal can be by rendering at an approved rendering plant, incineration or burial".—[*Official Report*, 17 July 1997; Vol. 298, c. 278W.]

Let us deal with those three possibilities. Unless the Minister can tell us otherwise, we will assume that the 200 hunts that currently deal with fallen stock handle 415,000 carcases in the course of a year. That is a considerable number of carcases, and it will require a considerable quantity of alternative disposal methods, knackers' yards and knacker men to deal with them. I am a farmer—it is in the register of members' interests—and I know that knacker men deal with animals which have, for example, a broken leg from an accident in the field. If those animals have to be loaded up into some form of transport to be hauled miles to the nearest slaughterhouse or facility that is licensed to take them, there will be a serious animal welfare problem.

In the past few days, since the foot and mouth problem began, we have seen how easy it is for virulent diseases to be spread as animals are transported from one end of the land to the other to be slaughtered. The increased journeys that the animals have to endure constitute an animal welfare problem, but the spread of disease is a real problem as well.

Mr. Paterson: I am loth to interrupt my hon. Friend in mid-flow, but there is an important distinction to be made here. In relation to this Bill we are talking largely about animals that are completely healthy. Dairy cows that have slipped in the yard because the ground is icy or that have died giving birth are impossible to move. The whole point about the hunt service is that the hunt staff come round immediately, within half an hour, and put the animal down, on the spot, without causing distress.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend, who understands these matters better than most hon. Members, is entirely right. The hunts offer an animal welfare-friendly service that is second to none. It would be a retrograde step if that service were in any way disrupted.

The idea, voiced by the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), that hunts are somehow peddling diseased animals that should not be fed to hounds, is a despicable slur on the hunting industry, which is very reputable. If the hon. Gentleman has evidence, he should report it to the local trading standards officer, who will investigate it immediately. The fact that he has been unable to produce any evidence today shows the poverty of his case.

Mr. Gummer: No one will take the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) seriously given that he cannot tell the difference between a forelock and a fetlock.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My right hon. Friend is entirely right. The hon. Member for Pendle clearly does not understand the industry and, indeed, the countryside—which he purports to represent—with any great depth of knowledge or feeling for those who work there. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) says, from a sedentary position, "Bitter and twisted." That is his description, not mine.

Serious issues surrounding the disposal of stock have been touched on tangentially in the debate. One is how the fallen stock will be dealt with. I intervened on my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) to ask what will happen to fallen stock. There is legislation preventing the burying of stock, and I sincerely hope that it will not be contravened. However, some of the livestock farmers on the top of the Cotswolds in my constituency are hanging on by a thread. Every day, extra costs are likely to be imposed on them by the foot and mouth crisis. The Government, insensitively, are talking about compulsory insurance costs. Disposal will be yet another cost, and it may be that, to remain in business, a livestock farmer will find it necessary to contravene a regulation and bury his livestock.

Mention has also been made of animals being left to rot in the field. Many farmers are facing bankruptcy. That is not an exaggeration; a parliamentary answer indicates that 41,000 people have lost their jobs in the agricultural industry in the past two years. There is clear evidence that many farmers are going out of business. If they are going out of business, they may well be forced to leave animals to rot in the fields or the buildings where they have fallen. That would be very detrimental for the country. If the Minister proposes to ban hunting and, therefore, to put a stop to the disposal of fallen stock by the hunts, he has to come up with some clear answers.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend would receive great reinforcement for his argument from page 63 of the Burns report, which contemplates precisely what he suggests—namely, that fallen stock will either be burnt or buried, with potential risks to the environment.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for giving the House a helpful reminder of a paragraph of which I was, of course, aware. If the Minister needs further reminders, he might recall that, when the landfill tax was introduced—making it more difficult to dispose of rubbish by landfill—the incidence of illegal fly tipping greatly increased. If that argument does not persuade the Minister that my suggestion about what is likely to happen in the countryside will be borne out, he should think carefully.

Amendment No. 40 deals with compensation. It has already been made clear that compensation has been awarded in other cases. When we discussed the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill, the Government were perfectly prepared to compensate fur farmers for the loss of business—and rightly so. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) pointed out, under section 5(1) of the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000, the Minister is required to provide compensation for fur farmers who go out of business.

If the Government are going to put out of employment the 6,000 to 8,000 people whom Burns estimates will be directly affected if hunts are put out of business, it would be wholly immoral not to compensate them. The Government are only too keen to compensate the car industry when its workers are put out of their jobs. Why is it that, through sheer prejudice, they do not even consider compensation for people who will lose their jobs under this Bill?

Increasingly, huge numbers of the urban population are becoming aware of the current suffering of the rural population. The Government must think carefully about compensation. To introduce a Bill with no provision for compensation will cause large waves of sympathy for people in the countryside.

Mr. Soames: As my hon. Friend is a farmer who also represents an important farming constituency, does he

[Mr. Soames]

agree that many farmers can no longer afford proper veterinary care—to their great sadness and the bad luck of their animals? Without the hunts, there is no chance that they could afford services to dispose of their fallen stock.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: My hon. Friend is right. He, too, understands the agriculture industry better than most Members of the House. For example, if a farmer has calves that are worth less than the auctioneer's selling fee of £1, he cannot afford to call out a vet at a call-out fee of at least £25 before the cost of drugs. Such circumstances cause severe difficulty. Currently, hunts provide a subsidised service at a realistic cost.

No doubt the Minister will tell us what alternative arrangements are to be set up, but those arrangements will have to be paid for at an economic cost. That is likely to increase considerably the current costs of dealing with fallen stock. The bureaucracy and inspection involved in any Government scheme are likely hugely to increase its cost. My hon. Friend makes a good point. An animal welfare problem is already brewing in the countryside. If no cheap method is available to dispose of fallen stock, the problem will increase substantially.

7.15 pm

The Minister and other hon. Members have talked about the moral aspects, but there is also a strong legal case. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) recognised that when he had to take extremely difficult decisions on BSE compensation. Sadly, that incident cost the taxpayers well over £3 billion. We never want it to be repeated. I hope that the present foot and mouth epidemic will not grow too much, but I suspect that it will and that the Government will find that they have to compensate a large number of people whose stock has been slaughtered. If that is right in those circumstances, surely it is right to compensate people who lose their jobs as a result of a ban on hunting.

As I pointed out earlier, the Lithgow *v.* United Kingdom case in 1986—8 EHHR 329—clarified the conditions under which compensation had to be paid. The Government should follow the dictum without having to be told to do so by the European Court, even if the convention is to be incorporated in our own law: it rightly states that it is only acceptable to deprive people of their possessions or livelihood when that is strictly in the public interest. There could, of course, be a severe argument as to whether it is strictly in the public interest to ban hunting. The Lithgow judgment states that deprivation of the use or peaceful enjoyment of possessions without compensation is justified only in exceptional circumstances. I am not a lawyer but I cannot for the life of me see that the prejudice shown by the Labour Government and their Back Benchers in banning hunting could possibly be construed as being in accordance with the requirement that such things should be done only in exceptional circumstances. These are not exceptional circumstances; this is a measure that merely meets a prejudice.

The Government must think carefully. They are about to undergo a severe test with the electorate. No doubt, the electorate will make their views known—especially in rural areas. People in those areas will listen carefully to this debate. The Minister would do himself a great deal of justice if he reconsidered. The issue is one of conscience, not of spite or prejudice—as the hon. Member for Pendle would have us believe. It is one thing for the Government to impose a ban on hunting, even though that is wholly reprehensible; it is something wholly different—a prejudice that is without precedent—to impose such a ban without compensation. I urge the Minister to think again.

Mr. Baker: As many Members know, I support a ban on hunting and want it to be implemented as soon as possible. Indeed, my criticism of the Government—of late—has been that they have so delayed the introduction of the Bill that it is unlikely to reach the statute book before the end of this Parliament. We are thus, to some degree, wasting our time in debates on the matter in this place and elsewhere.

I preface my remarks with that statement of my belief because I have some support for the principles espoused today by hon. Members on both sides of the House. With respect to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), the argument is not one of Government versus Opposition. The matter is subject to a free vote. Members from all parties speak from different perspectives.

It is not helpful to those of us who want to argue about compensation and about the impact of fallen stock on the farming industry to present the matter as a Labour-Tory argument. If it is, the Tories will lose—the number of Members demonstrates that. If we can go back to arguing about principles, there is a chance that those of us who hold the same views might make some progress.

I have some sympathy with new clause 1. It is about farming; it is not about hunting, bingo or anything else. I do not criticise the Government for the fact that no Agriculture Ministers are in the Chamber. With due respect, they have rather a lot to do at present. I should be extremely disappointed if they had to sit in this place for hours discussing a measure on hunting instead of trying to deal with foot and mouth disease, which greatly affects the farming industry in my constituency and elsewhere in the country. I am pleased that they are not in the Chamber.

The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and his colleagues must, however, acknowledge that there is an impact on farming that should be discussed with their colleagues at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Whether or not we are in favour of hunting, surely we must all agree that the removal of current provisions that allow for hunt kennels to deal with fallen stock will have an adverse effect on farmers. That is the fact of the matter, and I, as someone who wants to ban hunting, recognise that.

The farming community is up against the wall at the moment and having a torrid time as a consequence of foot and mouth disease, the legacy of BSE and the drop in farm-gate prices across a range of products, so I do not want to burden it with any more costs now. In fact, if the Minister puts no other scheme in place, the closure of hunt kennels will add to farming costs, but that is not an argument for keeping hunting. My opposition to hunting is based on moral and animal welfare grounds, but we must ensure that the farming community does not suffer as a consequence of any decision by Parliament to ban hunting.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) that it is invidious and odd to include in new clause 1 the words

"which would have been collected by hunts but for the enactment or coming into force of the Schedule to this Act."

Perhaps those words were included because the new clause would not have been acceptable without them. Nevertheless, fallen stock are an issue for the whole farming industry. I am worried, from an environmental perspective, about fallen stock being allowed to rot in the fields or, indeed, being buried, which may affect watercourses. That is not the best way to deal with fallen stock.

Surely, during the past few years, we have learned to be a little careful about how we deal with animal health. We cannot be cavalier any more; we have caused ourselves major problems because of our treatment of animals. We must ensure that the best system is in place, and leaving fallen stock to market forces, which appears to be the solution on offer, is not a sensible way forward.

If we were to tell a farmer—no matter how angelic he may be—that he is in a difficult position and his balance sheet is very bad, but we will give him no help at all so he must deal with fallen stock in the cheapest way possible, it would be a recipe for disaster. That is a farming point for the Home Office Minister, but he must address it in his response, otherwise many of us will have great sympathy for new clause 1. Perhaps its wording is not quite right, but the Minister must say, "Yes, we recognise that there is a problem, and we will do something about it." He has not yet done so.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument closely. He and I differ on whether it is moral to hunt with hounds, but that is irrelevant as the argument that he puts forward is sound. Will he help the House by telling us his views on the alternative to hunt kennels taking fallen stock? How does he believe we should deal with the matter?

Mr. Baker: I have considerable sympathy with new clause 1, which has been tabled by four Conservative Members, but with the caveat referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Newbury which I have just endorsed. New clause 1 seems to be an adequate way to deal with fallen stock. We must find a way to allow farmers to deal with fallen stock safely, without threatening animal health or the environment, and in a way that they are likely to endorse. That is our objective.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Would the hon. Gentleman care to speculate on what method might be employed? After all, the hunts offer a subsidised service. If the same service is to be provided elsewhere, someone must pay for it. Will he suggest who might pay for it?

Mr. Baker: Other methods are currently used. Although hunt kennels deal with many animals, other animals are dealt with differently. I refer the hon. Gentleman to new clause 1, tabled by his colleagues, which mentions the

"collection and disposal of fallen stock".

I am not particularly bothered about how it is dealt with, provided that the method is safe and that there is no disincentive to farmers to follow the recommended course of action.

I shall deal with a second point—compensation—because I am keen to give the Minister a chance to reply, at length, I hope, to the points that have been made. I ask him to give us a statement of his principle. The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) made the case for not giving compensation when the House legislates. He asked why compensation should be paid when the House passed many measures that impact on various people. That is a perfectly respectable philosophical position to adopt, but it is equally respectable to say that when we take away people's livelihoods, compensation should be paid as of right. However, it is indefensible to say that we will pay compensation in certain circumstances, but not in others. That is what the Minister has suggested.

I ask the Minister not to deal with handguns or bingo, or whatever, but to address the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000. As a Member of Parliament, I am genuinely troubled that a compensation scheme was introduced for an activity that was legal, that involved people's livelihoods and that the House rightly chose to ban because of the impact on the animals involved.

There is a close parallel with the Bill. I genuinely fail to understand why it is right to compensate fur farmers for their loss of livelihood, but not those who are employed in hunting in any way. I do not understand how that position can be adopted. I hope that the Government did not do so because there were few mink farmers so it did not cost much to compensate them, but many people are involved in hunt kennels, so it would cost a lot to compensate them. That would be a Treasury argument, and I hope such arguments are not being deployed to deal with moral problems. I ask the Minister to make a clear statement on the Government's policy on compensation. When and why is compensation paid? How can he justify including no such proposal in the Bill, when the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 included generous provisions.

I, too, am not a lawyer, but I ask the Minister to respond to the points made on legal advice, as that may help to illuminate the debate. What advice has he been given by Home Office lawyers on the likelihood of a successful challenge to the Bill if the Government are not prepared to include compensation?

Mr. Paterson: Time is getting on and many of the points that I would have made have been made already, so I shall be relatively brief, but I should like to repeat some earlier comments. It is absolutely crazy in the eyes of many people who live in the country that we are debating hunting today, when we are looking at probably the worst crisis that the nation has faced since 1967, with foot and mouth disease. I was about 11 when the last crisis happened, and it was absolutely horrific.

Farmers in my area are absolutely worried stiff. People have stopped travelling around. I cancelled meetings at the weekend. Foot and mouth is the one subject that we should be discussing, but instead we are debating hunting. That is absolutely extraordinary, and the public must think that we are simply mad. We are also mad, given the Government's extraordinary hypocrisy.

I was rung on Saturday afternoon by a man who was desperate; he had 17 carcases in the back of his lorry but was banned from moving them under emergency regulations, so I contacted the private office of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I should be grateful to the Minister if he would listen, rather than talking to his Whip, because this is relevant and he might like to talk to his colleague at MAFF.

[Mr. Paterson]

I am pleased to say that those in the office were very efficient; they sent a fax to my constituent and gave him a special licence to move those carcases. It is worth quoting paragraph 3 of the licence, because it states:

"A carcase to which this licence applies may be moved from the premises on which it is to a rendering plant, a knacker's yard or a hunt kennel."

So the private office—the inner sanctum—of the Minister at the heart of the operation, whom the Government tell us is beavering away on the national crisis, is giving out special licences with the specific instructions that 17 decomposing carcases should, if necessary, be taken to a hunt kennel. That represents the grossest hypocrisy, given that today we are debating the abolition of the free service provided by hunts.

I should like to stress the fact that the service is free to farmers in hunting areas, and it is humane. My hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who has temporarily left his seat, mentioned that fact. Hunt servants come out immediately as soon as a healthy cow falls down in the yard and breaks her leg. One phone call and the kennel huntsman comes around and puts the animal down humanely. The hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) is in a complete muddle. He is bleating on about diseased animals, but the vast majority of those casualties are healthy animals that suffer from accidents.

Mr. Gordon Prentice *rose—*

Mr. Paterson: I should be delighted to give way to the hon. Gentleman, and I shall try to improve his knowledge.

Mr. Prentice: The hon. Gentleman mentions that his constituents had 17 decomposing carcases in his vehicle. What were the circumstances that led to his constituent having so many decomposing carcases in his vehicle?

Mr. Paterson: That question is extraordinary. We have a national crisis with foot and mouth, and the movement of all beasts has been stopped, except by those who have a special licence. That is why my constituent rang me.

Mr. Prentice: But decomposing?

Mr. Paterson: Within hours, carcases begin to decompose. That is what the hon. Gentleman does not understand. The vast majority of casualties on farms are healthy, and he has not taken that point on board. They are not diseased, and the hunt comes in if an animal has an accident. It is put down swiftly and humanely. *[Interruption.]* The animals have not got foot and mouth; they are healthy animals. The hon. Gentleman should listen.

7.30 pm

Mr. Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth): The hon. Gentleman should make himself clear.

Mr. Paterson: I am making myself clear. I am talking about healthy animals that have suffered an accident on a farm and are put down in a humane manner. Someone has to dispose of the bodies. At the moment the animal is killed; it then has to be taken away and disposed of. The hunts provide a free service so that there is no health problem for farm animals or any human beings in the area.

This is a massive problem. Because the Government have made such a muddle of the beef export regime that is being reinstated, live calf exports are not allowed. An area such as mine has a large dairy population and large numbers of bull calves have to be put down on the farm.

Mr. Öpik: I think that I understand the confusion of the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice). For the sake of the record, it might help if the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) could explain that the 17 carcases were not diseased. If he knows the reason, it might help if he explained why the animals died.

Mr. Paterson: The man who collected the carcases is totally separate from the hunt service and he had them on his premises. Because of the emergency regulations, he was not allowed to move them although he would normally have done so.

The key issue is the volume and the disproportionate impact in rural areas. In my patch, the Wynnstay hunt has disposed of 2,500 calves, the North Shropshire hunt of 2,500 and the South Shropshire hunt of 3,000. Those are very large volumes of material.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To set the record straight, is the hon. Gentleman now telling the House that the 17 decomposing carcases were being held in a knacker's yard and that the knackerman wanted to move them to the hunt kennels? Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Paterson: The hon. Gentleman is trying to be clever, and trying to make a muddle out of a desperately serious problem in an area such as mine. He is laughing about it. The man is separate from the hunt service and he collects animals. These animals were destined for another destination, but they were temporarily frozen in his yard.

As other hon. Members have said, there are parallels to the hunt service, but the key point is that it handles large volumes of material. However, it cannot take it all, because of the muddle that the Government have made of the calf scheme. Therefore, the physical problem that the Government are landing themselves with is enormous. The Minister is looking confused, but who is going to dispose of the 2,500 calves that each of those three hunts in my area deals with? Who will do that when the ban goes through?

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is trying to make a serious point and we are trying to understand it. I am listening carefully, but I am looking a little bemused because I still do not understand the relevance of the carcases to the point that he wishes to make. I encourage him to calm down the rhetoric. If he makes his point, I shall try to answer it.

Mr. Paterson: I shall try in very simple terms to explain that there is a free hunt service and that, in my patch, three separate hunts have taken 2,500 calves each. Because there is such a volume of material, other people also provide a service. In this case, a knackerman had 17 carcases that he had taken from different farms. Because of the emergency regulations, which he was

obeying, they were temporarily frozen, on his van, and he was concerned that they were beginning to heat up and decompose. He telephoned me and I obtained the licence from the Minister's colleague in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. There are two separate services, but the point I am making is that the hunt service has reached its capacity now.

Mr. Garnier: Is not the short point that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food gave an emergency licence to the knackerman to move these dead animals to the hunt?

Mr. Paterson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Garnier: Oh, haven't I been helpful? I was under the impression that the MAFF licence enabled the knackerman to move the animals directly to the hunt in breach of the banning order. If my hon. Friend has confused me, perhaps he could explain the matter again.

Mr. Paterson: I am sorry that my hon. and learned Friend is in a muddle as well. The simple fact is that such a volume of material has to be disposed of that it is not just the hunts that take it away. The hunts are at capacity, and there are other methods. In this case, the knackerman had collected the carcases and was going to take them to a renderer, but he was temporarily stopped. The key point is that, if the Bill is enacted, there will be no service, and the hunts provide an extremely humane, free and efficient service. It will require an enormous state effort to replace it.

I am amazed that the Minister still looks bewildered, but it is a huge physical problem. In areas such as mine with a large livestock population, many animals, sadly, have accidents and have to be disposed of. I am absolutely staggered that the Minister is still in a muddle. He really must talk to his colleagues in MAFF.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am familiar with the role of the hunt. Certainly, my hunt takes fallen stock and often deals with it very efficiently; it provides a service to local farmers. I am very familiar with that process, and I am also reasonably familiar with the restrictions that are being applied. I think that I have grasped the hon. Gentleman's point. Is he saying that if the hunt service disappears, that will remove a proportion of the capacity to deal with fallen stock?

I was trying to figure out the point about the carcases, but I am not sure that they are entirely relevant. The hon. Gentleman is making a separate point with which I shall try to deal. I was perplexed—everyone, including those on the Opposition Front Bench, was perplexed—because we could not figure out the role of the carcases. I think that they are a separate matter, and I hope that I have been helpful in trying to clarify the hon. Gentleman's point.

Mr. Paterson: My point is the hypocrisy of a Government who from their inner sanctum recommend that people use the services of the hunt kennels and two days later push through a Bill that will ban that service. I hope that the Minister has taken that point on board, but I shall write to him with the figures for Shropshire. They are enormous and it is the volume of material that we should consider.

Mr. O'Brien: If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a serious point of detail on this issue, I shall happily engage in correspondence with him. I will be as helpful as I can.

Mr. Paterson: I am grateful for that offer.

I shall quickly deal with the issue of compensation. Again, there will be a disproportionate effect in rural areas. The Burns report talked about several thousand job losses. That may not sound very many to Labour Members representing urban constituencies, but a small saddler whom I know employs seven people and 75 per cent. of his turnover is devoted to hunting. That firm will close. I know a small family feed merchant that supplies the hunting community. It employs only three people, but it will close completely. That is 100 per cent. devastating for those businesses and those people. The disproportionate effect of the ban has not been considered by Labour Members.

Even employers of significant numbers of people will be affected. A feed merchant who shifts 25,000 to 30,000 tonnes of hay and straw a year employs 12 people, and half those jobs will be lost. That is appalling for the people involved. Labour Members have not taken into account the fact that there will be no public gain from a ban; they merely feel that the toffs may have taken a hit. Such ludicrous prejudice will damage hard-working, sensible and law-abiding people, whom the Minister earlier called burglars. That was outrageous.

Mrs. Golding: The Minister did not.

Mr. Paterson: If the Minister would like to withdraw the comment about burglars, I would be very grateful.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to say that he has completely traduced what I said. I was intervening on the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) who stated the general principle that people should always be compensated if the law were to remove their livelihood. I gave the very bad example of burglars, which I withdrew during the course of the debate. I in no way wish to compare hunters with burglars. That was never my intention. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that I sought to do that, he is traducing me. People who hunt in my constituency—many of whom I know well—are good and decent, and I would not put them in that category. My point was entirely different.

Mr. Paterson: The Minister makes a fulsome apology, which I accept wholeheartedly, and I am sorry if I upset him.

Mr. Michael: It is the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) who should apologise.

Mr. Paterson: No; Labour Members are being churlish.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: My hon. Friend has got the Minister to agree to consider fallen stock. Will he ask for

[Mr. Nicholas Winterton]

an assurance that the loss of livelihood will be taken into account by the Government before the Bill is enacted—if it ever is?

Mr. Paterson: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. It is not acceptable in a pluralist society to penalise a minority—in this case, by removing the livelihood of law-abiding people without providing compensation—to satisfy the prejudice of a majority.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: New clause 1 and amendment No. 40 relate to the disposal of fallen stock, and to compensation, which is also addressed in amendment No. 36. I take those important matters seriously. However, before I address the specifics, I shall deal with foot and mouth disease. I sympathise fully with the farming community—as I am sure every hon. Member does—following the recent outbreak. No doubt the whole House hopes that it will be contained quickly.

I represent a largely rural constituency and I am well aware of the anxieties felt by the farming community. Thankfully, there have been no reports of foot and mouth disease in my constituency today, but there is much fear and concern among farmers and other constituents.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am glad that the Minister can report that, but it is not the case in my constituency. Many people cannot understand why their Parliament has to discuss this measure today when there is a crisis in the countryside.

Mr. O'Brien: One or two other hon. Members made that point more aggressively, and I shall deal with it in a moment.

Foot and mouth disease poses a serious threat to livestock farmers throughout the country. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food informed the House yesterday of the steps that he and his officials have taken to control the disease so that we minimise the disruption and damage that it is capable of causing to the agricultural industry and to rural communities in general.

Some quarters have suggested that we should not enact the Bill when our farmers are facing what could be a grave crisis. Let me repeat that I have every sympathy for our livestock farmers and fully understand their anxieties. I completely support the measures that my right hon. Friend has put in place, which will be debated at greater length tomorrow. However, that does not mean that we should not proceed with the Bill. The issue of hunting with dogs needs to be resolved. The number of private Members' Bills and the amount of parliamentary time that has been devoted to it in the past 20 years bear witness to that fact. The Bill finally gives us the opportunity to deal with the issue. The question of what Parliament will do has been hanging over rural communities for a long time and people want it resolved.

7.45 pm

Foot and mouth disease is taken enormously seriously by hon. Members on both sides of the House, whether they are for hunting or in favour of a ban. It is wrong to suggest, as some hon. Members have got close to doing—although no one transgressed the line—that the only people who are concerned about the farming community, or foot and mouth disease and its impact, are those who support hunting. People who support a ban are also seriously worried about the problem. The issues are, to some extent, separate. However, I appreciate that there is some overlap when it comes to fallen stock.

The Bill will not come into effect until a year after Royal Assent. I am sure we all fervently hope that by that time the problems of foot and mouth disease will be a distant memory. It would be wrong to abandon the Bill now.

New clause 1 would require the Secretary of State to make a scheme for the collection and disposal of infirm, diseased or dead animals, which it refers to as fallen stock. The disposal of fallen stock is controlled by the Animal By-Products Order 1999. That specifies a number of permitted disposal routes for fallen stock, including rendering, incineration, disposal via a knacker's yard or hunt kennel and, in restricted circumstances, burial or—appropriately at the moment—burning on-farm.

If the hunts' collection service is withdrawn, farmers will need to use an alternative method of disposal. There are 288 hunt kennels and 73 knackers' yards in Great Britain that can handle fallen stock. The Burns report estimates that 200 hunts disposed of 336,000 carcases in one 12-month period. A small and limited survey by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food last year suggested that, of the animals that die or are killed on farm, about 40 per cent. of calves, 33 per cent. of adult bovines and 11 per cent. of sheep are disposed of to hunt kennels.

Mr. Soames: We all endorse what the Minister said about foot and mouth disease. We know that he represents an agricultural constituency and that many of his farmers will be as worried as those in my constituency and elsewhere. However, foot and mouth disease has nothing to do with the fallen stock that is covered by the new clause. Livestock that are at risk from the disease are handled by the state veterinary service in a completely different way. My hon. Friends have made it clear that the hunt service is fully stretched and has been tested to the limit in the past two years. Given what the Minister said about the one-year gap, it would be impossible for any organisation to step in and fill that role.

Mr. O'Brien: I agree with much of what the hon. Gentleman says. Animals that are affected by foot and mouth disease are dealt with separately. However, as several hon. Members said, many animals that are not diseased might have to be disposed of on the land. It will not be possible to remove or sell some animals. They may be ordinary fallen stock that have been injured or have died without being diseased. In such circumstances, hon. Members have asked what we should do about fallen stock. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that there is over-demand for the disposal services that the hunt and others provide to get rid of undiseased fallen stock.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I have an important point to make. It has been insinuated that hunt kennels take meat that is unfit to feed to hounds. Will the Minister confirm that all hunt kennels that receive fallen stock are licensed by the Animal By-Products Order 1999 and are rigorously inspected by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and

Food and trading standard officers? If any offences are committed, those bodies will come down with the full force of the law on hunt kennels.

Mr. O'Brien: I have no problem in confirming that.

While the clause—*[Interruption.]* I listened to my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), and I see the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) pointing at him. My hon. Friend was asking questions because he was confused by some of the arguments of Opposition Members. I do not want to rehearse those arguments. The hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) even succeeded in confusing those on the Opposition Front Bench. Perhaps the best thing to do is move on.

The new clause seeks to provide a collection and disposal service for fallen stock that otherwise would be collected by hunt kennels. In practice, it would be impossible to identify which animals went to a hunt kennel and which to a knacker's yard or other disposal facility. The new clause would establish a collection service for what would appear to be all fallen stock.

A difficulty with the new clause is that it seeks to provide a collection and disposal service also for infirm, diseased and dead agricultural animals, which are referred to as fallen stock. I am concerned that that would inadvertently open up the possibility for the killing of animals that are not 100 per cent. fit, or animals suffering from a minor ailment where veterinary treatment would be a more appropriate disposal.

The new clause would mean that instead of fallen stock being disposed of by one of the routes that I have mentioned, the Minister would regulate the collection and disposal of fallen stock. It would require the Minister to put in place a collection scheme for dead stock, to set up communication lines for the prompt notification of fallen stock to the body responsible for collection, to arrange for the transport and disposal of fallen stock and to regulate the cost of the scheme.

The Government would need to establish centres for farmers to give notification of fallen stock, to acquire sufficient vehicles to collect the stock promptly, and to ensure that disposal outlets were prepared and capable of receiving stock at that time. Such a collection scheme would require the Government, in effect, to set themselves up as a nationalised industry; otherwise, they would have to contract out. The service would have to be run almost entirely by the Government. It appears that the Opposition are proposing the setting up of a nationalised industry.

I was a little surprised by that. It appears that the clause would transfer the current responsibility in the private sector for waste disposal in the livestock industry to the Government. The Government are keen to see a proper collection service for fallen stock, but we remain of the view that waste disposal should be carried out by the private sector, not by a nationalised industry. It is strange that the Conservative party is proposing nationalisation while we are proposing to keep the service within the private sector. Perhaps that is new Labour.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Surely the Minister will acknowledge that the alternative methods of disposal, which are burial, subject to strict regulations, and incineration, which is subject both to licensing and the requirement of planning permission, already involve a significant amount of Government intervention and regulation, and rightly so. The hon. Gentleman will know that clause 2 provides for the schedule to come into force 12 months after Royal Assent. Is he confident that it would be possible within 12 months to set up alternative methods of disposal which would deal with all the carcases that are currently being disposed of by hunts?

Mr. O'Brien: We cannot consider only hunt kennels and their role in the agriculture sector, but I appreciate the fact that many farmers find the free disposal of fallen stock a substantial advantage. We cannot consider in isolation the possible implications of a ban on hunting in relation to the collection of fallen stock. Disposal goes far wider than hunt kennels. As a result of BSE controls, farmers have been facing increased costs in disposing of their fallen stock. As we have heard, there has been a decline in the number of disposal outlets.

Furthermore, the European Commission has proposed a new animal by-products regulation, which is expected to come into force in 2003. As drafted, the regulation would control the disposal of ruminant animals that die on farm. It would introduce environment standards for small incinerators. It would require all premises that collect fallen stock to meet certain standards.

As a consequence, some hunts may be unable or unwilling to continue to provide a fallen stock service to farmers, even if hunting were not banned as a consequence of the proposed legislation. Accordingly, the Government are keen to address the wider issue of fallen stock as a whole, and not only in terms of the impact that the Bill might or might not have.

Mr. Baker: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I will make some progress and then I will give way.

The Government want to facilitate the setting up of a collection and disposal service for fallen stock, but we do not want it to be run as a nationalised industry. I understand that officials at the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food have had meetings with representatives of the livestock industry and are seeking to discuss and formulate future arrangements for a wider disposal of fallen stock.

I can assure the House that the Ministry takes the issue extremely seriously, as do the House and the Government. We want to work with those affected to ensure that we can provide the most practical and efficient solution to the problem. I cannot predict what form the MAFF solution will take, but I do not believe that matters would be helped by agreeing to a prescriptive clause such as new clause 1.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. O'Brien: With that reassurance, the Government are alive to concerns about the disposal of fallen stock, which go much wider than the possible consequences of the Bill. I invite the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) to consider withdrawing the new clause.

Mr. Baker *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I promised to give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Baker: I welcome the assurance that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food is addressing the issue,

[Mr. Baker]

and that needs to be done. Can the hon. Gentleman give the House an assurance that whatever scheme is produced by the Minister will, first, not increase costs to farmers and, secondly, will not increase the dangers of animal health problems or dangers to the environment?

Mr. O'Brien: I wish that, off the top of my head, I could give those categoric assurances. Unfortunately, I am not in a position to do so. These matters must be discussed between the industry and the Ministry. In the past, we have normally taken the view that where an industry produces—I am not sure whether this is the right word—a by-product, which is in this instance fallen stock, it is the responsibility of those who produce the by-product to ensure that it is properly and environmentally sensitively disposed of. I am sure that the Liberal Democrat party would support the "polluter pays" principle. We would apply that sort of approach.

We are aware of and sensitive to the serious problems that are facing agriculture, not just over the past few weeks but over a much longer period. The Government will be much more sympathetic to the problems of the industry and will not merely apply a broad-based principle. I have talked to the farmers in my constituency, and they are concerned about what would happen if the hunt were to go. It is a real issue for them, and one that the Government need to consider in a wider context.

The Bill forms part of the wider issue. If people think that by keeping hunting they will somehow deal with the issues involving fallen stock, they are much mistaken. In considering the European regulations and the wider interest, we can see that the matter needs to be dealt with as a whole.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): Can the Minister clarify a point for me? In the debate two weeks ago on the BSE crisis, there was much talk of joined-up Government and Departments working together. Have his Department and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food co-ordinated effort with regard to the impact of the Bill? Will solutions be in place before the problems are created?

8 pm

Mr. O'Brien: MAFF has been very much involved in the Bill. The Bill was presented in such a way as to ensure that the House had an opportunity to debate three options. MAFF has considered the options and their implications. If—still an "if"—the House were to pass the Bill, it would still have to go to the other place, and we are all aware of other issues that might affect it. It may be that we shall have to consider it within the broader context of what we shall do generally about fallen stock. The Bill and other issues will affect farmers with respect to fallen stock. Considering the Bill in isolation would not resolve the problem. The suggestion from some Opposition Members that the Bill represents the whole fallen stock issue is simply nonsense. The issue goes wider, and the farming community deserves a better answer.

I shall give way once more, but I want to make some progress after that.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Will the Minister give us one good reason why he cannot answer the basic question of what he will do about fallen stock after the Bill has been passed? Who will pay for it? Will he assure us that the farming industry, which he has admitted is on its knees, cannot pay?

Mr. O'Brien: If the hon. Gentleman had listened to what I said, he would realise that I have dealt with that issue. *[Interruption.]* Even if he does not accept that, I am going to move on. This matter of fallen stock and farming goes far wider than the Bill. The problems of the farming industry face my constituents every day. The Government seek serious answers to serious problems, but the hon. Gentleman seeks flip solutions. If that is his approach, he is not doing justice to his own constituents.

Amendments Nos. 36 and 40 raise another important issue: compensation. The Government take seriously the job losses that may arise in the event of a ban on hunting. The details of such losses were set out in the Burns report, and I need not cite them. No hon. Member wants anyone to lose a job. All those who voted for a ban on hunting will have taken account of the employment implications before they decided how to vote. I certainly weighed that factor before deciding how to cast my vote. I concluded that the House needs to make judgments, as we did on handguns and other issues.

We must consider the wider good of the whole of society. Enactment of a ban must be seen in that context. Whatever passions have been aroused by legislation that has resulted in lost jobs in years gone by, the House has, by and large, sought to do the right thing. The House has considered job losses seriously; that issue was a key factor on Second Reading.

Both amendments would offer compensation at a level set by the Secretary of State, which would be paid to those whose paid employment depended on hunting with dogs. Who are those people? Apart from those directly employed by hunts—even Burns was unable to set an exact number of those people, which suggests some ambiguity—many others might claim to be in that position, particularly if generous compensation were on offer.

What about a farrier who depended on a hunt for 30 per cent. of his business? The business would probably continue, though perhaps with a reduced turnover. Would the owner, or the employees of the business, qualify for compensation? What would happen if a hunt decided, once the ban had come into force, to convert itself into a drag hunt? Why should an employee of that hunt, whose job description and conditions of service might change only slightly, be eligible for compensation?

Amendment No. 36 was tabled by the Middle Way Group and suggests that compensation should be paid in respect of damage caused by species of animals that had previously been hunted by dogs. I do not want to be too unkind about that well-intentioned suggestion, but it is not close to common sense. Foxes and other predators damage crops and livestock. From Burns, we know that in the event of a ban on hunting, other methods of fox control would be used. How it would be possible to say that damage had been caused by a fox that would have been controlled if hunting had still been legal I simply do not know.

Amendment No. 40 was tabled by Opposition Members and seeks to provide compensation for anyone deprived of any service previously provided by hunts. Leaving

aside the possibility of a claim on the public purse for any service unrelated to hunting that a huntsman may once have provided to the population as a whole, where on earth would the line be drawn? As Burns made clear, hunts provide a wide range of services, including voluntary assistance. It would be a bureaucratic nightmare to try to assess every claim.

On grounds of practicality alone, I would not recommend that the House make either of the amendments. The Government, as guardians of the public purse—the taxpayer's money—could not, as a matter of principle, support them. The commitments in them would be completely open and would not allow the kind of controls on the public purse that I expect.

In the past, compensation has been paid to those who, as a consequence of legislation, have been deprived of their property. The most notable recent example was firearms compensation, following the tragedy at Dunblane. However, as I have already pointed out, certain dealers in firearms were not compensated for the loss of their profit. We generally have not paid compensation from public funds to those who may have lost their livelihoods as a result of legislation. To go down that route would set a precedent that might have unpredictable consequences if it were done in the way that the amendments propose.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) mentioned the compensation scheme for the fur farming industry, which was shut down as a result of the prohibition on fur farming. That case is hardly analogous. The Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000 closed down an entire industry. The Bill, by contrast, simply restricts certain activities. Those who own hounds will still be able to use them for drag hunts, while those who own horses will be able to ride as part of an organised hunt or otherwise. Those who serve such people, such as the blacksmiths who shoe horses or the grooms, will still be required.

Hunt employees are precisely that—employees of individual hunts. It is open to those hunts, if they decide not to go in for drag hunting or some similar activity, to offer their staff appropriate payment. Before anyone tells me that hunts do not have resources, I can say that the hon. Member for Gainsborough said in Committee that hunting

"is an expensive sport requiring a great deal of commitment and involving large businesses."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 23 January 2001; c. 45.]

I shall make one further point, having been on my feet for long enough. It has been suggested that the absence of provision for compensation renders the Bill incompatible with the European convention on human rights. Our legal advice is that that is not the case. We are not dealing with deprivation of property, but with control of the use of property. There is a requirement in all but exceptional cases to pay compensation for deprivation of property, but there is no such requirement in relation to measures constituting the control of the use of property. We are satisfied that the Bill, without any provision for compensation, is fully in accordance with article 1, protocol 1 of the convention.

Mr. Öpik: The Middle Way Group accepts that the amendment may not be perfectly formulated. We are not hung up on its precise wording. Will the Minister clarify whether he is saying that, on principle, he and the Government oppose providing compensation for those who lose their livelihoods—indeed, their way of life—and that he does not believe that the circumstances are the same as those surrounding fur farming? If he is saying that, will he make clear why he sees a distinction between fur farming, as described by my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker), and foxhunting?

Mr. O'Brien: I may not have satisfied the hon. Gentleman, but I have set out the argument. The Government do not believe that it would be right to set the precedent that would be created by accepting the amendments, quite apart from the drafting problems inherent in them. I do not invite the House to accept either amendment, and I hope that hon. Members will see fit to withdraw them.

Mr. Garnier: With the leave of the House, I shall respond briefly to some of the points that were made during the debate, particularly those made by my hon. Friends and the Minister.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. and learned Gentleman does not need the leave of the House to make those comments.

Mr. Garnier: Perhaps I acted with an abundance of caution. One never knows where one is nowadays with the new procedures in this place.

The Minister's answer, which was no doubt sincerely meant, demonstrated more than anything the need for a Minister from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to be present this evening. The hon. Gentleman seemed to get a little lost when he dealt with some of the points that needed to be covered, not least the Government's proposals for the removal of fallen stock under any scheme that they may be preparing. It may well be that the Ministry is having discussions with relevant parties. In the context of new clause 1, it would have been more helpful if we had been told what stage those discussions had reached, and their detail. However, we shall have to do the best we can with the answers that the Minister gave.

In the three and a half hours or so that we have spent discussing two important subjects—the collection of fallen stock and compensation—there were a number of extremely useful contributions, not least that from my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd), who spoke of the leather workers of his west midlands urban constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) spoke of the clearing up of fallen ponies rather than farm animals from the New Forest.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), and the hon. Members for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and for Stroud (Mr. Drew) also contributed. Towards the end of the debate, there were particularly trenchant contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton), and from my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill), who speaks with all the authority not only of someone who is a farmer, but who, I believe, has an interest in the slaughterhouse industry.

We heard a particularly worthwhile contribution from the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) who, if I may summarise, said that to advance the Bill without

[Mr. Garnier]

compensation is just not fair. No reasonable hon. Member could disagree with him. Without either amendment No. 36 or amendment No. 40, the Bill is not fair. No one outside the House would disagree.

Mr. Donald Anderson (Swansea, East) *rose—*

8.15 pm

Mr. Garnier: Had the right hon. Gentleman been present for any part of the debate, I might have taken the time to hear what he had to say, but as he has been absent—no doubt for very good reasons—I shall refer to his hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), with whom I always enjoy debating the issue, because he engages in the issues. Whether I agree with him or not does not matter. What is important is that the hon. Gentleman exposed us to his views and allowed us to deal with them in a way that he may not have found helpful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), as always, contributed his special knowledge as a former Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and as someone who has represented farming constituencies for many years. I was also grateful to hear the views of the hon. Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding), who, sadly, has announced that she will not put herself forward for re-election. Even though she may soon no longer be a Member of the House, I hope that she will continue to campaign on behalf of those in her constituency and all who support the views that she and I hold about the need for the preservation of mink hounds and mink hunting.

My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), as always, applied his acute legal mind to a number of issues, including the European convention, and the fact that unless the Bill is amended in the way that we suggest, it will fall outside the convention.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) made what I would loosely describe as a confusing contribution. He began by giving some sort of support to new clause 1 and the need for something to be done about fallen stock; then he got into rather an intellectual muddle about compensation. No doubt, as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) pointed out, that will give him much sport when he comes to draft his press release.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack), as usual, gave a superb performance and demonstrated in a short space of time that this was a grotesque day for the farming world, and that the Bill was a grotesque Bill which did nothing to protect farmers or to advance the interests of the rural economy.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) spoke, and was followed by my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh), who spoke from knowledge of his constituency about the need for compensation for the economic hinterland that exists behind hunting, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who gave a particularly powerful speech, based on his knowledge as a farmer and as one who represents a rural and hunting constituency.

The hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) made an interesting contribution. As someone who wants hunting banned quickly and who complains that the Government did not introduce a Bill earlier, he said none the less that the issue under discussion this evening was not hunting, but farming. However, even his friends on the Labour Benches were unable to see that.

I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson). Because I was being obtuse, I did not fully understand his point, which was that the Government seem to extol the fallen stock service, through MAFF, but are prepared to introduce through the Home Office a Bill that damages the farming economy. He gave us direct evidence of the valuable work done by the hunt in his constituency and by neighbouring hunts.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): Will the hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Garnier: I should love to give way, but the hon. Gentleman must be patient. The debate has been going on for three and a half hours—

Hon. Members: Give way!

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Garnier: I apologise to the hon. Member for Workington (Mr. Campbell-Savours). I will not give way, as it is time we brought the debate to a conclusion.

Mr. Campbell-Savours *rose—*

Mr. Garnier: No, I will not give way; I have explained why.

Following my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire, we had the contribution from the Minister, for whose contributions we are always grateful. His understanding of new clause 1 seemed to boil down to this: "Something needs to be done. I think MAFF is doing something, but I'm not terribly sure what it is." When the Government find out, no doubt they will be the first to tell us. We know that the Minister for Agriculture does not like coming to the House. I only hope that the hon. Gentleman's boss, the Home Secretary, will be able to elucidate further—or even the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), when she winds up some other debate.

When the Minister dealt with compensation, he seemed to be completely at sea. He said that we must make judgments. Indeed we must. We will make a judgment both at the general election, and in the Division Lobbies shortly. He seemed to say that if we banned hunting, we would cause economic loss, but he was not prepared to do anything about it.

The economic loss that will be caused by the Bill and by the banning of hunting is both foreseeable and devastating. We already know that the rural economy is on a knife edge. If the Bill is not amended as we propose, it will drive a nail into the coffin of farming. A Government who fear precedent—the Minister said that he feared creating a precedent—are a Government who fear their own shadow. The shadow of that Government sits on the Conservative Benches, and we are itching to replace the Government. I can assure the House that the Under-Secretary's performance, which was no doubt given with the best will in the world, has done his party

no favours. I trust that when the Division bell sounds, all hon. Members who believe in justice and fairness will follow us through the Lobby tonight.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 160, Noes 280.

Division No. 131] **[8.20 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Day, Stephen
Edwards, Huw
Evans, Nigel
Faber, David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Austin
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stinchcombe, Paul
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nicholas Soames and
Mr. Edward Leigh.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John

Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Love, Andrew
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Colin Pickthall and
Mr. Stephen Hesford.

Question accordingly negatived.

Schedule

HUNTING WITH DOGS: PROHIBITION

Mr. Lidington: I beg to move amendment No. 76, in page 3, line 2, at end insert—

'Hunting which begins in Scotland

.—A person does not commit an offence under paragraph 1 if he hunts a wild mammal with a dog and his hunting of that mammal began in Scotland.'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 77, in page 3, line 2, at end insert—

'Hunting which begins and ends in Scotland

.—(1) Subject to sub-paragraph (3), a person does not commit an offence under paragraph 1 if he hunts a wild mammal with a dog in England only incidentally in the course of a hunt which begins and ends in Scotland.

(2) A hunt begins in Scotland if the pursuit of the wild mammal begins in Scotland.

(3) A hunt ends—

(a) when the wild mammal is killed, or

(b) by a decision to stop hunting

and no offence is committed under paragraph 1 if the hunt begins in Scotland and the wild mammal is killed in England.

(4) A wild mammal may not be dug out or bolted in England in the course of a hunt which begins and ends in Scotland.

(5) Where sub-paragraph (1) applies, no offence shall be committed under paragraph 2, 3 or 4.'.

Mr. Lidington: This couple of amendments deal with hunts that begin in Scotland. They seek to address the problem that would arise were we to have different laws governing hunting with hounds on the two sides of the Anglo-Scottish border.

Under amendment No. 76, an offence would not be committed if somebody hunted a wild mammal with a dog and that hunt began in Scotland. Under amendment No. 77, we try to approach the problem slightly differently. It is a more restrictive attempt to tackle the problem, and provides that no offence would be committed where a hunt both began and ended in Scotland, but where the pursuit of the fox, which is the mammal that we are talking about in these circumstances, continued over the English border during the course of the chase.

The Scottish Parliament has responsibility for the law on hunting north of the border. Recent reports of its deliberations show that if a new law is introduced in Edinburgh it is likely to differ significantly from the complete ban proposed in the Bill now before the House of Commons, which raises some practical difficulties.

Currently, eight packs of foxhounds hunt in areas either adjacent to or over the border between England and Scotland. The remote upland terrain in those areas is precisely the type of land over which, as Lord Burns concluded, lamping would be an impractical method of fox control. That region contains Hadrian's wall, which is a major tourist attraction popular with walkers, so the safety of humans would be at issue if farmers and landowners had to resort to lamping or other forms of shooting as an alternative method of fox control to hunting.

The border is not fenced and it is not marked out along fields and moorlands. If people in Scotland lawfully take part in a hunt after a ban has come into force in England and Wales, how are they to know when they are moving from one jurisdiction to another? A number of detailed, practical questions are raised as one explores the difficulties that would be faced were different laws on hunting to be in operation in England and in Scotland.

If a hunt started in Scotland but the dogs crossed the border into England, would an offence be committed? It has been made clear to us during our deliberations in Standing Committee that the act of hunting that is to form the criminal offence under paragraph 1 of the schedule does not have to involve the killing of a mammal. The pursuit of a mammal by hounds would be sufficient to bring that activity within the ambit of the Bill and make it a criminal offence as defined in paragraph 1. What would happen if a hunt started legally on one side of the border and moved into England? Would a criminal offence be committed or not?

Would an offence be committed if the people carrying out the hunting remained in Scotland but at any time during the chase the dogs crossed the border into England? That could be particularly complicated if a group of people were out hunting lawfully in Scotland and some of them followed the dogs across the border into England while others stayed behind in Scotland. All would be taking part in the same hunt, but would some of them be subject to criminal penalties under the Bill and others not?

The purpose of the amendments is to allow us to debate these issues, which will be of great importance to, admittedly, a small number of people in border areas. They suggest a way in which the House and the Government could deal with some of the problems that may arise.

Mr. Hogg: May I suggest to my hon. Friend that if the House does not accept the amendment, we will be derogating the authority of the Scottish Parliament? In reality, unless we accept the amendment, those who support the Scottish hounds will not be able to hunt close to the border. That will diminish the freedoms of Scots, which should, under devolution, be a matter for the Scottish Parliament.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. and learned Friend makes an important point. Without the amendments, the potential for conflict will be inherent in the Bill, because there will be different criminal regimes on either side of the border.

How will the offences relating to the use of land for hunting be affected by the border situation? Some properties span the border. If the Bill becomes law, a landowner who gives permission for hunting on his property in England will be committing a criminal offence.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): The matter goes further than that. Along the Tweed, in so far as hounds might go into the river, the border is not fixed. The stream of the Tweed fluctuates, so one might find oneself on an island in that river. One might also discover that the boundary has shifted from one side of that island to the other. I encountered that fact as a barrister while litigating in respect of fishing rights on the Tweed. Although the boundary was fixed by a joint commission in the 1840s, changes in the course of the Tweed meant that an island that had previously been assumed to lie wholly in Scotland was found to lie partly in Scotland and partly in England.

Mr. Lidington: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend because his intervention shows that we are not discussing some abstract possibility. He refers to a legal case that arose from a dispute over where the border lay in respect of islands in the River Tweed. Given the experience that he relates, and given the fact that Members on both sides of the argument in the Standing Committee accepted that, should the Bill become law, there would be a risk of malicious information being laid against people in an attempt to convict them of criminal offences, we are right to devote time to debating the matter, not least because we had fewer than 15 minutes in Committee to discuss the question of the Anglo-Scottish border before the guillotine fell, cutting off further debate.

On the question of the border between England and Scotland, a landowner in Northumberland who gave permission to hunt across his property would be subject to the criminal offence in paragraph 2, but let us consider the position of a landowner with land spanning the border who acceded to the request of a hunt lawful in Scotland to hunt foxes with hounds across his land, only to discover that, during the lawful hunt on his Scottish property, those taking part or the hounds had strayed, either deliberately or by accident, on to his English property.

Would that landowner have committed an offence in such circumstances? What evidence would he have to present to the prosecuting authorities in England to show that he had made it clear to those taking part in the hunt that they were allowed to cross only his land in Scotland, not that south of the border? Would any duty fall on him to mark out the border across his property so that he could be assured that he was fulfilling his duty under the law and could therefore show that he had not committed a criminal offence?

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point that is worth listening to, but what would happen if a stag hunted from England crossed the border into Scotland, where it is unlawful to hunt deer? That is a real situation that could arise now.

8.45 pm

Mr. Lidington: I think the hon. Gentleman is grabbing at a red herring. I understand that there is no organised stag hunting in Northumberland or Cumberland, which means that the question he raises would not arise. In any event, it is a question for Ministers to answer on behalf of the Government, because it flows from devolution. In the new constitutional circumstances, the House must be careful about addressing issues that will be affected by the existence of what are clearly different jurisdictions.

Mr. Russell Brown: The hon. Gentleman bases his argument on foxhunting, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) implies, the Bill is about hunting wild mammals, and deer fall into that category. As the hunting of deer with hounds in Scotland has been banned since 1959, it is widely assumed that the law in Scotland may be different from that in England.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman is wrong to assume that organised hunting of deer with hounds takes place anywhere in the border regions.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I can confirm that no hunting of deer with hounds takes place in any of the border counties. It does not take place in Northumberland or Cumberland; it happens only in the south-west of England.

Mr. Lidington: I am grateful to my hon. Friend.

I have based my remarks on foxhunting because it presents us, as a legislature, with a real issue. Foxhunting with hounds takes place in the border regions of both Scotland and England, and across the border. The practical issue that the House and the Government must address is, I submit, different from the theoretical speculations of the hon. Members for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and for Dumfries (Mr. Brown).

Mr. Atkinson: I should point out that one pack in my constituency, the Border Foxhounds, has hunting country on both sides of the border. Other packs hunt on one side but may cross; this pack crosses the border regularly, as a matter of course.

Mr. Lidington: That reinforces my point.

How would the ban be enforced in practice, in terms of the border between England and Scotland? If that border is not clearly marked along its length, people travelling in upland country will not be sure when they have moved from England into Scotland or vice versa. One can conjure up odd visions of police constables being deputed to stomp around farmland and moorland in galoshes and plastic macs, spreading out from path to path to make sure that the boundary was policed. I am prepared to accept that that is not the Government's intention, and I am sure that it is not the intention of any chief constable on either side of the border; but if there is one criminal law in England and another in Scotland, people will go to the police and allege that this or that group of individuals intends to hunt illegally in England from a starting point in Scotland. What are the police supposed to do in such circumstances?

My amendment would introduce clarity into an area of the law that would otherwise be confused and ambiguous. Moreover, it has the great merit of enabling people on both sides of the border between England and Scotland to know exactly where they stand and what the law requires them to do, or to desist from doing.

Mr. Beith: Mine is one of three constituencies directly affected by the subject matter of the amendment, the other two being Hexham and Penrith and The Border. Those constituencies are in England, are therefore affected by the Bill and border Scotland. In each case, there are substantial hunting activities on both sides of the border.

Appreciation of where the border lies is not widespread. This evening, talking to one of my hon. Friends, I was shocked to discover that he used the expression, "north of Hadrian's wall" in the mistaken belief that all that lay north of the wall was in Scotland. Admittedly, he was from the south coast, but it showed a distinct lack of appreciation. I do not think that many people appreciate that, for example, in parts of the area that we are discussing, it is possible to travel due north from Scotland to England, or due south from England to Scotland. The border follows a complicated line, which in most areas is not marked.

In some of the Cheviot areas, along the border, there is a two-strand wire fence that any small animal would have no difficulty in getting through. In much of the border country, there is no marking at all. As the hon. Member for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) has pointed out from his legal experience, there have been cases about islands in the Tweed. The border in the Tweed is a shifting border, or at least the land shifts. The border may stay in the same place, but the land shifts and that makes it difficult to define it, so we have a practical problem.

Eight packs of foxhounds hunt adjacent to and across the border: the Bewcastle, the North Tyne, the Border, the North Northumberland and College Valley, the Berwickshire, the Jed Forest, the Buccleuch and the Liddesdale. The West Percy in my constituency comes very close to the border and, I suspect, will face the same problem.

Many of those hunts regularly cross the border. The hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) said that Border Foxhounds hunts in country that crosses the border and therefore, as a matter of course, operates on both sides of the border. The same is true of the North Northumberland and College Valley hunt, which is kennelled in my constituency, but has country on both sides of the border, which is not clearly marked.

There is, therefore, a practical problem. Although the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) was right to point out that, for many years, there have been differences in the law between England and Scotland, the one that he cited has no practical effect because there is no stag hunting in the border areas of England. For that matter, I do not think that there was much in the border areas of Scotland before it was banned; it was mainly a highland activity. The deer legislation is drafted in such a way that, unlike this legislation, it does not ban deer stalking. There is deer stalking in forest areas in the borders. Dogs may be used to assist in the locating of deer prior to their being shot. That matter is intended to be dealt with by a later amendment.

I was slightly concerned when the Minister indicated two things that I had not realised. The first was that it had been his intention all along to ban deer stalking, but that he had now changed his mind. The second was that that

was only his view, that it was entirely a matter for the House and that there was no Government view on whether the Bill should ban deer stalking, but we will come to that later.

There is a practical problem in relation to foxhunting. There is a practical problem for a further reason, which is emphasised in the Burns report: the nature of the country in the Cheviot and other areas. Few areas in England are more wild than the Cheviot summits or the area north of Spadeadam Waste in the constituency of the hon. Member for Hexham. Fox control in those areas is very difficult and lamping is unsuitable. That is made clear in the Burns report. There was a pretty heavy steer in the report towards tolerating some sort of hunting of foxes with hounds in those upland areas. We have passed the point where the Government would have accepted that, but what they must recognise is that, in country on both sides of the border, dogs have to be used to locate foxes and, indeed, to deal with other pests.

That brings me to wider issues of pest control. Although we have looked at the matter primarily in relation to foxhunting itself and the difficulty faced by the hunts, gamekeepers, countryside wardens and others involved in pest control who operate on the border will face the problem of the difference in the law. It seems inconceivable that legislation will be passed by the Scottish Parliament that does what the Hunting Bill does—which is to insist that if a rabbit is flushed out, it is immediately shot with a gun. I cannot imagine that the Scottish Parliament will pass such legislation. I also think that it is now unlikely that there will be a total ban on hunting in Scotland. It is a matter of speculation, and hon. Members cannot assume that there will be comparable legislation in Scotland.

Therefore, if a gamekeeper with a dog is dealing with rabbits and reaches the border, although there was not necessarily a requirement for him to carry a gun or to use it on his side of the border, the moment the dog chases the rabbit into England the gamekeeper will have to shoot at the rabbit. It is not sensible to put that gamekeeper in such a situation.

The legislation would have a similar effect in relation to the celebrated topic of rats in cellars, on which we shall vote later. If a dog goes underground in pursuit of a rat and crosses the border—which is perfectly easy to do along the banks of the Tweed, for example, or in any other rough country—the situation would immediately change. The dog would have to be called off, or the gamekeeper would have to prove that he did not have any intent that the dog should cross the border.

Much will turn on the defence that can be used in court. In many cases, it could be difficult if the prosecution insists that, as the gamekeeper was so near the border, he must have known that there was a risk of the dog crossing it. Unfortunately, however, once a gamekeeper is employed in a particular place, he has to deal with the rodents and rabbits in that place. Consequently, his work may be along the border. In such circumstances, there is no way in which he can simply exclude the possibility of his dog crossing the border.

Mr. Hogg: Does the right hon. Gentleman therefore agree that, in reality, unless we accept the amendment, the Bill's effect would be to prevent the gamekeeper or anyone else engaged in country sports from practising them close to the border, for fear that they would contravene the criminal law in England? Is that not to derogate from the rights of Scots?

Mr. Beith: A solicitor might advise the gamekeeper's employer that it was unsafe to allow his gamekeeper to work in the usual way, close to the border area. I put it no stronger than that. It is similar to the situation in relation to many issues. Nowadays, employers have to take legal advice or they take risks. A solicitor might advise that it is unwise to allow such work as one might be unable to sustain a defence in court. That in itself is a limitation of British democracy.

I do not, however, entirely follow the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) in making a constitutional issue of that, as it seems that there will inevitably be some differences on either side of the border. The job of this place when passing legislation is to consider the practical implications and decide whether the law goes too far in creating practical difficulties with far-reaching consequences for people on the other side of the border. Therefore, although the point is a genuine one, I do not believe that it is constitutionally improper for the Government to legislate differently for our side of the border. We just have to consider the practical consequences.

I contend that, if we do not have some provision along the lines of that suggested by amendment No. 76, the practical consequences could be difficult. If the Bill is passed without the amendment, it would extend across the border difficulties that gamekeepers will have in England. The Bill would affect gamekeepers on the other side of the border who could otherwise perform their work in their traditional way, and might expose them to legal challenge.

I therefore agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's contention, but with a slight modification. I say that we would be creating an unfair and unreasonable practical difficulty if we did not adjust the legislation to meet that particular case. Although that is not the biggest issue raised for those categories of people by the legislation, it is a real practical issue.

If I were a member of the North Northumberland and College Valley hunt, I would want to retain if I possibly could the hunt's rights in its own country, on the Scottish side of the border, to continue hunting. However, the kennels are in England. As there is now so little country to hunt, the hunt can hunt only one day a fortnight rather than a couple of days a week. Nevertheless, each time we hunt, we take the pack and the horses over on to the Scottish side—south into Scotland. Does that show an intent to hunt in England? I am not a hunting person, but I am putting myself in the mind of people who are. Proving one's innocence in court will be difficult, and so genuine rights are put at risk. Any cautious solicitor will tell people not to risk any such action, as a successful prosecution could ensue. It is therefore worth pursuing a proposal along the lines of the amendment, and I hope that Ministers will be sympathetic, as they have been to some of my other suggestions.

9 pm

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I rise to support what my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) said in moving the amendment, and I also agree with the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

I speak tonight not as the Member of Parliament for Aldershot, but as the son of a borderer, and the grandson of a Scottish border farmer. My family was one of those that did so much to create that beautiful border countryside that lies just north of the Carter bar and runs up to Edinburgh. They will clearly be affected if the ban were to be implemented by the Scottish Parliament, and the problems will be worse if the amendment, or one like it, is not accepted by the Government.

I spoke tonight to my uncle, Charlie Douglas, a former master of the Jed Forest hunt. He tells me that the hunt often crosses the border. However, it is not always possible to delineate where that lies, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed made clear and as I may have told the House before.

When the Ministry of Defence was seeking to establish precisely where the border ran over the Cheviot hills, officials had to call on another of my uncles. The Otterburn range extends right to that point, and my uncle, Garry Douglas, a tenant farmer on the Roxburgh estates, was responsible for farming the land right up on the border. That was sometime in the 1950s. The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed referred to a two-stranded wire fence, and that it is probably the only delineation of the location of the border.

There is therefore a real problem in defining the point at which people who are legitimately engaged in the lawful pursuit of hunting in Scotland become criminals in England. As the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed said, there are eight hunts in the area. Four are on the Scottish side. They meet regularly, very close to the border.

Why should people who hunt there have to change tens or hundreds of years of practice and move away from their traditional hunting grounds to go and hunt where they can be sure that they will not run the risk of becoming criminals in England? That could happen if their hounds chase after a fox which, not being clear of the geography and not having global positioning system equipment to guide it, runs off into England.

Unless the amendment is accepted, the Bill will restrict the rights of people in Scotland to pursue their lawful activity without incurring the risk of prosecution. The Bill will require them to rearrange their hunting so that there is no conceivable risk of straying anywhere over the border. That is an important consideration. Hunting is a very popular sport in that part of the world, which fits Lord Burns' description of those remote areas where hunting is so much part of the glue and fabric of rural and agricultural society. The Bill threatens that activity.

Hunting provides support for the local economy. It not only provides support for those who supply saddlery and farrier services but attracts foreign tourists who bring their foreign currency into the border area. That is also a help.

There is a real risk that we are in danger of legislating to make criminals of people who are perfectly entitled to pursue their lawful activity north of the border. I am astonished that the Government have not already addressed the issue. As I recall, on previous Bills brought before the House, such points have been specifically addressed.

Mr. Hogg: May I remind my hon. Friend that when we considered the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), we dealt with the position in Northern Ireland and the problem that arose with regard to the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic?

Mr. Howarth: My right hon. and learned Friend is entirely right. The Government owe us an explanation as to why they have not recognised this difficulty, given that it has already been drawn to their attention on previous occasions. As with so much else that the Government do, they really do not care. They certainly do not care about the countryside. They will simply ram the legislation through. I expect that they will vote against the amendment, quite oblivious to the very real risks that would be run by those engaged in lawful hunting in Scotland if their hounds or the fox strayed across the border.

I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, will not tell us that we are talking about something theoretical that is unlikely to happen. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Lady indicates that she will not say that. That is encouraging.

Lest anyone believes that the police officers will not be interested in pursuing these matters to ensure that no criminal activity takes place, I have to say that plenty of hunt saboteurs will congregate in that part of the world. All the hunt saboteurs who will be out of a job in England and Wales if this illiberal and obscene measure goes through will gravitate up to Scotland to disrupt the lawful hunting that takes place there.

We all know how these people work. They will go out in droves to watch the hunting. They will presumably mark out the border or have extraordinarily detailed maps of where they think the border is. They will monitor the hunting that takes place, report to the police anybody who strays across the border and demand that the police prosecute. So the police will have that pressure placed on them. We know that they are unhappy with the measure in its totality in any case.

People in Scotland will find it extremely disturbing to have imported all these ghastly hunt saboteurs. I have never understood how people who call themselves hunt saboteurs could do other than fall foul of the law, for sabotage, I thought, was an unlawful activity in this country.

If I were the chief constable of the Lothian and Borders police force, I would be extremely concerned about all those people coming across the border if the Bill goes through. They would cause mayhem for the police, seeking, in particular, to find those who were hunting while straying across the border.

I feel very strongly about the personal dimension. I do not see why members of my family who fought for the freedom of these islands should be subjected to this outrageous attempt to criminalise them. If they pursue their perfectly legitimate activity in Scotland, they run the risk of being criminalised because of straying inadvertently across the border. My uncles did not fight in the second world war so that such a gross intrusion into their freedom could take place—*[Interruption.]* The Minister shakes her head. I can tell her that some of us do not just recite the briefings; some of us feel strongly about the matter—*[Interruption.]* It is not the Minister's position to tell me to sit down. We feel strongly about this important issue. The Minister has had time to address

it, but she and her Government have constantly failed to do so. I congratulate my hon. Friends on tabling the amendment, which I shall support.

Mr. Hogg: I shall be brief. I support the amendments proposed by my hon. Friends. Of the two, amendment No. 77 is to be preferred but I shall accept amendment No. 76 if the Question is put on it.

The points are simple. Foxes do not respect frontiers. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) has demonstrated from his family experience, foxes cross the boundary between England and Scotland—a fact that comes as no surprise to anyone who knows about foxhunting or any country activity.

Whatever the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) says, the plain truth is that we are diminishing the freedoms of Scots. No Scots hunt could sensibly hunt close to the border where it might cross the boundary. That is also true of gamekeepers—the example cited by the right hon. Gentleman—or of people who are using hounds or dogs for rabbiting. Such people will cross the border. Having done so in the course of hunting, people who started a lawful activity at 10 o'clock in the morning will suddenly find that they are engaged in unlawful activity at 11 o'clock. The only sensible conclusion that they could come to would be that they must withdraw from the frontier, so that there is no risk of crossing it. At that point, we are derogating from the freedoms of people in the United Kingdom—for no good reason.

For that reason, the Government ought to accept the amendment. They are in no position to say that they did not know about the matter or have had no opportunity to think about it. As I pointed out to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot, that precise difficulty was identified during proceedings on the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), when we drew attention to such problems in relation to the border between the Province of Ulster and the Republic of Ireland.

Difficult definitional questions will arise if we do not accept the amendment. Let us assume that the gamekeeper, referred to by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, or my Scots hunt cross the border and that the person in charge of either the gamekeeper's dog or the hounds wants to recover the straying animals. At what point in that process of recovery does the huntsman or the gamekeeper cease to be a person hunting and become a person recovering the dog or the hound? Presumably, one has to address that principal motive. That person began by hunting and then crossed the border. Was he still hunting or was he trying to recover his hounds? That is a difficult question.

We do not want to encourage prosecution. We do not want to diminish the freedoms of Scotsmen. The only sensible course is to accept a provision such as amendment No. 76 or amendment No. 77. If the Government say that those provisions are not well formulated and that we should reconsider them, my response is that they have access to parliamentary counsel so that is the course they should adopt.

Mr. Beith: There is not much difference between the right hon. and learned Gentleman and me on this issue. We are talking of the freedom not only of Scotsmen, but that of any person—Scots or English—who chooses to exercise his right to behave lawfully on the Scottish side of the border. It would be lawful for an Englishman living in England to offer to do some rabbit clearance for someone on the Scottish side of the border.

Mr. Hogg: The right hon. Gentleman is right. We are creating a trap for our fellow citizens, but it is not one without cure. We could remedy the matter by accepting an amendment along the lines of those proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

Mr. Grieve: I am aware that the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) will know more about such matters than me, but my recollection—from staying with friends who live close to the border—is that several farms straddle the border. The gamekeeper would thus be both a Scottish and an English gamekeeper.

Mr. Hogg: Absolutely. My hon. Friend is quite right.

I should like to make a final point about fox sanctuaries. If foxes can be lawfully hunted one side of the border, but not on the other, they will congregate in England. That will not be terribly popular with English farmers close to the border, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) will tell us. In fact, the farmers will then shoot foxes with a will, and there will be a butchery of foxes, which is not manifestly in the interests of the fox population.

The Minister has got herself into a pickle, but she has no possible excuse for that. She should accept the amendment; if she does not, she should table another one, and if she does not say that she will do so, we will vote against her.

9.15 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson: This is a wonderfully esoteric issue. Amendments Nos. 76 and 77 address a problem that has existed for many hundreds of years, although the dispute over the border between England and Scotland has entailed a lot bloody history and loss of life over many years and I do not think that even the amendments could end that tide of history.

If I had known that my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) was related to the Douglases, I would not have been so kind to him during my time in Parliament. My mother's side of the family is descended from another border family with whom the Douglases were in something of a state of enmity. They were an interesting family because they lived on both sides of the border and made a steady living during the middle ages by joining the Scots when they raided and pillaged England, and joining the English when they raided Scotland. They did very well until the forebears of the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) hanged them all at a place called Kershopefoot just after 1620.

The serious matter is that, as the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) has said, the border is simply not defined. It is extremely difficult to know where the border lies amid the moorlands and forests that cross it. Indeed, the borderline has never been fixed. There is an approximate line on a map, but that is it. A fence, which still more or less exists, was put up before the war to define landowning interests, but in practice the border is not defined. In fact, a large chunk of the border was

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

historically known as the debatable land, because it was never agreed. It was only after the union of the Crowns that an attempt was made to define the border exactly.

The old border law of hot trod allows people on one side of the border to pursue a criminal on the other side. It is only, I think, in the past five years that the problem of Scottish police officers operating in England and English police officers operating in Scotland has been solved. I understand that a Scottish police officer called to help the Northumbrian police in Berwick-upon-Tweed had no right as a constable until only a few years ago, when that legal anomaly was put right. There is a vast amount of historical confusion about the location of the border.

There are predominantly two hunts in my constituency. The Border Foxhounds, which I mentioned in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), has defined country on both sides of the border, so it regularly hunts across it. Other hunts will cross the border during their daily activities. It would be absolutely nonsensical if it were only legal to take a fox on the Scottish side when a pack of hounds hunting near the border split, as sometimes happens: if another fox appears, one half of the pack may go after that fox while the other half goes after the original fox. No huntsman wants his or her pack to split, but it happens from time to time. In such cases, it is not the intention but the inevitable consequence to hunt on both sides of the border.

As I understand it, the proposals of the Scottish Parliament represent a move to a compromise and the licensing of hunts. The Border Foxhounds and other hunts would no doubt be licensed to perform their duties on the Scottish side of the border, but not on the English side. Where landholdings cross the border, that would make fox control extremely difficult.

Incidentally, the Border Foxhounds hunts over the Otterburn military training range, which runs up to the border. The tenant farmers on the range have allowed the hunt to be their method of fox control. All the tenant farmers have a duty to control the foxes on their land and, as they have far better things to do than spend their time trying to hunt foxes, they leave the job to the Border Foxhounds, which is thoroughly efficient at controlling foxes in that area. We have debated the lamping of foxes, but one could not do that on the Otterburn training range. The Army runs night exercises there and people crawling round with high-powered lamps and rifles would not be conducive to the safety of the soldiers taking part in those exercises. The current proposals will create difficulties for the hunts that operate on the border.

Although I am not a lawyer, I am surrounded by lawyers and that gives me some comfort. The Bill does not appear to resolve the question of intent. One may start to hunt on the Scottish side of the border and have no intention of hunting on the English side, but it is quite easy to cross the border without intending to do so.

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed also asked what would happen if the hounds were kennelled on the English side of the border, but were allowed to hunt only on the Scottish side. If they crossed the border during a hunt, would the fact that the kennels were on the English side where hunting was outlawed have an effect on the issue of intent? That is an interesting point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot mentioned the importance of hunting as a social activity in the borders. It is an extremely remote part of the United Kingdom and people in the borders often live many miles from the nearest supermarket or entertainment facilities that are normally found in cities. The hunts play a key role in the social life of the countryside. They run dances and their social activities are well patronised by many people even if they do not hunt themselves. Any attack on hunting will constitute an attack on an important part of social life in those areas.

The whole Bill is illiberal and disgraceful. If we are to make some sense of the nonsense in the Bill, I urge the Government to accept amendments Nos. 76 and 77.

Mr. Grieve: I am familiar with the area in question from my cousins who live in those parts. My right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) has touched on the issue that I wish to discuss, which relates to our responsibility for the Scots and their activities. I think that the issue goes a little further than has been suggested so far, and merits some consideration.

In the proceedings on the Scotland Act 1998, the point was frequently made that, although that measure altered the Act of Union by introducing a devolved Parliament in Edinburgh, the Act of Union and the intentions that underlay it survived in respect of those issues that were not touched by the 1998 Act. I clearly recollect from my study of history that one of the primary benefits that sold the Act of Union was the removal of the border as an impediment to movement. It may not have impeded reivers such as my ancestors in Roxburghshire—and we have heard something about those activities—because they were unlawful visitors. However, the miracle of the union of the two Crowns in the early 17th century was that an area that had been lawless was rendered lawful in a short time, and started to prosper agriculturally. The point has often been made that, although two different legal systems operate on either side of the border, the border has become one area for the purposes of inter-marriage and the movement of people across it. Indeed, the border is unmarked in most places and is, in practical terms, completely irrelevant.

It is right that we have a Scottish Parliament that passes laws for its part of the United Kingdom, but it has not passed any laws to ban foxhunting, which remains a lawful activity there. From my visits to Edinburgh as Conservative spokesman for Scotland, it is clear to me that Lord Watson's Bill may never reach the statute book, so hunting may never be banned in Scotland.

Although we respect—as the Government say they do—the intent behind the creation of the United Kingdom through the conjunction of the two realms, it is astonishing that we should decide in legislation involving England, which we are entitled to make, that no exception will be made for people in Scotland who unintentionally and inevitably cross the border while going about their lawful business. The Minister will probably say that nothing can be done about that, but it is a matter that is simple to address. In the context of the Government's stated policy on devolution and the preservation of the Union, it is bizarre that they cannot create an exception that enables traditional pursuits to take place in Scotland, even if they lap over the border. That would not cause frightful difficulties.

I hope that the Minister will surprise us all and announce that the Government are prepared to think about this issue. Their approach illustrates the petty-mindedness that has underlain everything to do with the Bill's passage through Parliament. The bigotry that has been exhibited has been woeful. I hope that we can achieve some common sense. It is possible to get this wretched Bill on the statute book and, at the same time, to provide a reasonable and common-sense exemption for traditional activities north of the border that respects the fact that the border is no more than a line on a map. That would not take us closer to putting up barbed-wire fences.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Jane Kennedy): The amendments presuppose that hunting is banned in England but remains legal in Scotland. Amendment No. 76 would allow a hunt that began in Scotland to continue in England without an offence being committed. Amendment No. 77 defines when hunting would begin and end.

I am aware that the Scottish Parliament is considering a Bill on hunting with dogs. The hon. Members for Beaconsfield (Mr. Grieve) and for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) speculated on what it might permit and on its fate. I do not want to predict the outcome of the Scottish Parliament's deliberations. The future of hunting with dogs in Scotland should be left to the Scottish Parliament to decide.

The amendments would allow a hunt that began in Scotland to continue into England without breaching the law that bans hunting with dogs in England and Wales. That cannot be right. The Bill's provisions extend to all of England and all of Wales. There is no reason why a person, because he commenced an activity in another country—in this case, Scotland—should be exempted from the intention of the House to ban hunting in England and Wales.

9.30 pm

If we took such a course, we should be creating a tremendous loophole which hunts in the border areas would be quick to exploit. They would ensure that they began their hunting on the Scottish side of the border, and would be able to hunt in England with impunity. Hunts that have hunt kennels located near to the border, such as those in the constituencies of the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) and the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), will be required to carry out their activities in Scotland, if Scottish legislation permits, in such a way to ensure that they do not inadvertently cross the border and hunt in England.

I am sorry to disappoint Opposition Members, but I cannot accept their arguments. The situation is far from unprecedented. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said—the hon. Member for Aylesbury referred to the matter in his opening comments—that already there is a different legal regime operating in respect of animals on different sides of the border. There is legislation prohibiting the use of dogs to take and kill deer in any circumstances in Scotland, but we know that the activity is still legal in England and Wales.

Opposition Members argue that that is not a relevant example. However, that is a matter of opinion. I believe that it is a pertinent example. The right hon. Member for Berwick–upon–Tweed talked about gamekeepers chasing rabbits and rodents and argued that they would have particular problems in border areas. Several hon. Members asked where the border is drawn. As the right hon. Gentleman is well aware, we would shortly, if time permitted, be coming to amendments which would have the effect of allowing both unrestricted rodent hunting and unrestricted rabbit hunting. If the House decides to agree to those amendments, as I hope it will, the concerns that the right hon. Gentleman raised about gamekeepers will not arise.

It has been suggested that if hunting were legal on one side of the England-Scotland border but illegal on the other, there would be problems for the police as they tried to enforce the law. The members of the Committee and Members who have read the *Official Report* of our proceedings—I am sure that many have done so, but those who have not should read especially the proceedings of the final day, which I think they will find entertaining—will know that cross-border policing was referred to in Committee, under what is now clause 4, which relates to the extent of the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department explained in a letter that he sent to members of the Committee that cross-border policing is dealt with in part X of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. That Act provides that the English police may execute warrants issued in England in Scotland, and vice versa. The Act also gives English police powers of arrest in Scotland in respect of offences committed in England provided that certain conditions are met—and, again, vice versa.

These powers apply to all relevant offences, and hunting with dogs will not be treated any differently. The police will be able to use the powers across the border irrespective of whether the conduct in question would constitute an offence had it occurred on that side of the border. There will be no problems for the police if different regimes apply on the two sides of the English-Scottish border.

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Jane Kennedy: I know that I shall regret doing so, but I give way to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Hogg: Let us take a Scots hunt that is hunting foxes. It crosses the border and the huntsman is aware that he has crossed the border. The hounds are chasing foxes in England. However, the huntsman wants to recall the hounds and take them back to Scotland. At what point does the huntsman cease to be a person hunting?

Jane Kennedy: I have already said that it is the responsibility of those undertaking hunting to ensure that their conduct does not become an offence. I do not think that that is difficult for the House to understand. I reiterate that there will be no problem for the police if different regimes apply on the two sides of the English-Scottish border.

The amendments have no basis in logic and would simply create a large loophole. If it is the will of the Westminster Parliament that an activity should not be permissible in England and Wales, that must be so. The fact that the activity began in another jurisdiction should not cut across this Parliament's wishes.

Mr. Grieve: I do not understand the Minister's final piece of reasoning. It can be the will of this Parliament to

[Mr. Grieve]

do what it likes. If this Parliament willed that hunting should be banned in England and Wales, but that, because of the problem of hunting on the border, there should be an exemption for Scottish hunts that crossed the border, there would be nothing abnormal or odd about it. Will the Minister reconcile those two concepts? I do not follow her argument.

Jane Kennedy: The amendments were tabled by Members who oppose the decision that the House took to support the third option. In my opinion, they are intended simply to provide a loophole that would allow individuals to continue foxhunting with hounds by beginning in Scotland and bringing the hunt into England. We should not accept an amendment that would cut across the wishes of this Parliament and I invite the hon. Member for Aylesbury to withdraw it.

Mr. Lidington: I am disappointed by the Minister's response. I should have understood it if she had said that amendment No. 76 gave too wide an exemption to the general prohibition defined in paragraphs 1 to 3 of the schedule. I do not understand, however, why she is not prepared to accept amendment No. 77, which provides a more limited and tightly defined exception, or willing to offer an alternative Government amendment if she believes ours to be technically defective.

I find it depressing that the Minister did not even pretend to address the range of detailed and practical issues raised by my right hon. and hon. Friends and by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith). We received no answer to the issue of how people were expected to take decisions that the Minister expects them to take in order to keep within the law if they had no idea where the border lay. We received no answer to the intervention of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) about the point at which someone would cease to be a participant in the hunt and became in law a person who was seeking to recall the hunt in order to comply with the law.

There were no answers to questions about the position of a landowner who gives permission to a Scottish hunt to hunt across his Scottish territories or about what he would have to do to ensure that he was protected if, deliberately or inadvertently, the hunt crossed to his properties on the English side of the border.

I had hoped to be able to seek leave to withdraw the amendments. I remain prepared to withdraw amendment No. 76, if I may press for a Division on the more tightly defined amendment No. 77, which would defeat the Minister's argument that passing the amendment would blow a massive hole in the principle of the Bill.

Mr. Speaker: It is quite in order for the hon. Gentleman to do so. With the leave of the House, he can seek to withdraw amendment No. 76, and he can then move amendment No. 77 formally.

Mr. Lidington: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 77, in page 3, line 2, at end insert—

'Hunting which begins and ends in Scotland

.—(1) Subject to sub–paragraph (3), a person does not commit an offence under paragraph 1 if he hunts a wild mammal with a dog in England only incidentally in the course of a hunt which begins and ends in Scotland.

(2) A hunt begins in Scotland if the pursuit of the wild mammal begins in Scotland.

(3) A hunt ends—

(a) when the wild mammal is killed, or

(b) by a decision to stop hunting

and no offence is committed under paragraph 1 if the hunt begins in Scotland and the wild mammal is killed in England.

(4) A wild mammal may not be dug out or bolted in England in the course of a hunt which begins and ends in Scotland.

(5) Where sub–paragraph (1) applies, no offence shall be committed under paragraph 2, 3 or 4.'.—*[Mr. Lidington.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 135, Noes 312.

Division No. 132] **[9.40 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark

Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Dominic Grieve and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell–Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'd Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick

Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Dr. Nick Palmer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Hogg: I beg to move amendment No. 62, in page 3, line 6, after "a" insert "deer, boar, mountjack,".

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take the following: Amendment No. 63, in page 3, line 6, leave out "fox, hare or rabbit" and insert "wild mammal".

Amendment No. 64, in page 3, line 11, after "a" insert "deer, boar, mountjack,".

Amendment No. 65, in page 3, line 11, leave out "fox, hare or rabbit" and insert "wild mammal".

Amendment No. 66, in page 3, line 20, at end insert—

', or

(d) for the purpose of shooting dead the mammal after it was found or flushed out.'.

Amendment No. 67, in page 3, line 25, after "the" insert "deer, boar, mountjack,".

Amendment No. 68, in page 3, line 25, leave out "fox, hare or rabbit" and insert "wild mammal".

Amendment No. 69, in page 3, line 31, after "(3)(c)" insert "or (d)".

Government amendments Nos. 46 and 47.

Mr. Hogg: Amendments Nos. 62 to 69 are my amendments, and amendment No. 66 is perhaps the most important of them. It is my intention to sit down before 10 o'clock, because I am anxious that we should have a Division on the amendment.

The amendments are designed to ensure that the use of dogs for the purposes of shooting remains lawful. I am sure that the House does not appreciate that, by introducing the Bill, the Government are striking a blow against shooting. Under clause 1, it is an offence for a person to hunt a wild mammal with a dog. The defences are set out in clause 7. Under that clause, the defence operates only if the first condition in clause 7(3) is satisfied.

In the context of hare shooting and/or rabbiting, the first condition may not be satisfied. Under the first condition, in order to use dogs to flush out rabbits or hares the purpose must be to protect crops, for example. Those who go rabbiting or hare shooting may do so simply for the sport of it, which is different from protecting crops. The first condition is satisfied if it is

"for the purpose of obtaining meat to be used for human or animal consumption."

That may not be the purpose of the person who goes rabbiting or hare shooting for sport. On page 100 of his report, Lord Burns fully recognised that people go hare shooting for sport, and not for the purposes set out in clause 7(3).

The Government have frequently and loudly said that they have no intention of outlawing shooting. The Bill as originally drafted had that effect in respect of rabbiting. It is true that the Government have tabled amendment No. 49, which does not appear in this group but is in the next group, so the position of rabbiters is safeguarded. They would also be safeguarded by my amendment No. 66.

However, the position of those who want to use dogs for the purpose of shooting hares for sport is left open. They cannot lawfully use dogs to flush out hares if their purpose is to shoot them for sport, because that does not satisfy the narrow first condition in clause 7(3). The House—and, more particularly, the shooting fraternity—needs to know that the Bill as originally and as presently drafted is a direct blow against shooters. That is the significance of my amendments.

The Government are by stealth—like they do so much else—diminishing the right of people to go shooting, which is a lawful sport. It is just possible that the Government have made that error by inadvertence, but I have no reason to be charitable to them. I believe that, on the whole, they do things deliberately, and this is part and parcel of an overall policy of taking away rights by stealth.

It is extremely important that the House asserts the rights of shooters. The best way of asserting and defending the rights of shooters is by pressing the amendment to a Division and voting on it. By that means, shooters will know that the Conservative party stands by their rights. That is what I hope my right hon. and hon. Friends will do.

Mr. Banks *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Has the right hon. and learned Gentleman finished?

Mr. Hogg: I have.

Mr. Banks: I know that there is only a minute to go, but one can say an awful lot in a minute.

I tell the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) that, yet again, he has repeated the slur, which those on his side have used consistently, that the Bill is the thin end of the wedge and that in the end it will lead to a ban on shooting and fishing. That has never been our intention or that of those in the campaign. Yet again, he has tried to confuse the House, but we are not confused.

It being Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Orders [7 November and this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 134, Noes 324.

Division No. 133] **[10 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clappe, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Garnier, Edward
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hoey, Kate
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Wiltshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra

Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and
Dr. Nick Palmer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 36, in page 6, line 37, at end insert—

'.—(1) The Secretary of State shall by order make a scheme for the making of payments to persons in respect of losses incurred by them as a result of—

(a) ceasing, by reason of the enactment or coming into force of this Act—

(i) to carry on their businesses so far as they consist of activities prohibited by this Act, or

(ii) to continue in paid employment so far as that employment was dependent on activities prohibited by this Act;

(b) damage by wild mammals which were previously controlled by activities prohibited by this Act.

(2) A scheme may, in particular—

(a) specify the descriptions of losses and businesses in respect of which payments are, or are not, to be made and the basis of valuation for determining losses,

(b) specify the amounts of the payments to be made or the basis on which such amounts are to be calculated,

(c) provide for the procedure to be followed (including any time within which claims must be made and the provision of information) in respect of claims under the scheme and for the determination of such claims,

(d) include provision for arbitration of any dispute as to a person's entitlement to payments under the scheme or the amounts of any such payments.

(3) Before making a scheme under this paragraph, the Secretary of State shall consult such organisations as appear to him to represent persons likely to be entitled to payments under such a scheme.

(4) An order under this paragraph shall be made by statutory instrument which shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.'.—*[Mr. Öpik.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 156, Noes 281.

Division No. 134] **[10.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baker, Norman
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hoey, Kate
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Austin
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
St Aubyn, Nick
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stinchcombe, Paul
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Rt Hon John D *(Strangford)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Lembit Öpik and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Gunnell, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David

Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr Evan
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and Dr. Nick Palmer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 43, in page 3, line 6, leave out ", hare or rabbit" and insert "or hare".

No. 44, in page 3, line 11, leave out ", hare or rabbit" and insert "or hare".

No. 45, in page 3, line 25, leave out ", hare or rabbit" and insert "or hare".

No. 49, in page 3, line 49, at end insert—

'Rabbits

. It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under paragraph 1 to prove that the conduct to which the charge relates consisted of hunting a rabbit.'.

No. 51, in page 4, line 3, leave out "rabbit or".

No. 46, in page 3, line 37, at end insert—

'7A.—(1) It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under paragraph 1 to prove that—

(a) the conduct to which the charge relates consisted of stalking a deer or flushing it out of cover, and

(b) the conditions in this paragraph were met.

(2) The first condition is—

(a) that reasonable steps were taken for the purpose of ensuring that as soon as possible after being found or flushed out the deer would be shot dead, and

(b) in particular, that any dog used in the stalking or flushing out was kept under sufficiently close control to ensure that it did not prevent or obstruct achievement of the objective mentioned in paragraph (a).

(3) The second condition is that the stalking or flushing out took place entirely on land—

(a) which belonged (within the meaning of paragraph 22) to the person doing the stalking or flushing out, or

(b) which he had been permitted to use for that purpose by someone to whom the land belonged (within the meaning of that paragraph).'.

No. 48, in page 3, leave out lines 39 to 49 and insert—

'. It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under paragraph 1 to prove that the conduct to which the charge relates consisted of hunting a rodent.'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Amendment proposed: No. 50, in page 3, line 49, at end insert—

'Mink

. It is a defence for a person charged with an offence under paragraph 1 to prove that the conduct to which the charge relates consisted of hunting a mink.'.—*[Mr. Dowd.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 119, Noes 295.

Division No. 135] **[10.28 pm**

AYES

Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Harris, Dr Evan
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Hoey, Kate
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Major, Rt Hon John
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Austin
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Nicholls, Patrick
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Webb, Steve
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. A. J. Beith and
Mr. Douglas Hogg.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ilsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*

Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Powell, Sir Raymond
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Ms Bridget Prentice and Dr. Nick Palmer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 15 (Exempted business),

That, at this day's sitting, the Motions in the name of Margaret Beckett relating to Deferred Divisions and Mr. Stephen Timms relating to Vote on Account 2001–02 may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—*[Mr. Mike Hall.]*

Question agreed to.

Hunting Bill

Order for Third Reading read.

10.39 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Mr. Hogg: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As you will know, 11 groups of amendments were before the House and it debated only two of them, which means that nine groups were either largely undiscussed or not discussed at all. Under the programme motion, I know that you, Mr. Speaker, must proceed to Third Reading, but it is within your discretion formally to inform the Lord Chancellor that this House has not properly or fully debated the Bill. I respectfully ask you to do that.

Mr. Speaker: I have no responsibility to do that, and I will not be doing so.

Mr. Michael: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. It should be pointed out for the record and for the benefit of their lordships that, in the debates in Committee and in the House today, those who are opposed to the Bill in principle have sought to talk at great length and with minimal content rather than debate the Bill properly. The Bill's opponents are entirely responsible for ensuring that the debates have not been as full as they might have been.

Mr. Speaker: We have *Hansard* as a record of our proceedings, and the other place can draw its own conclusions.

Mr. O'Brien: In commending the Bill to the House for its Third Reading, I am pleased to say that the Government have achieved their objective in promoting it. By that, I do not mean that we, as a Government, are necessarily pleased that the House has decided to adopt the option that would ban most hunting. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary might have his own views on that. However, as he explained when he opened the Second Reading debate just before Christmas, our aim was to enable the issue of hunting with dogs to be resolved. The House has now taken a clear view on how it wants to proceed, and I expect that view to be strongly endorsed once more if anyone decides to divide the House at the end of this debate. We have moved closer to a resolution of this long drawn out and contentious matter.

It has always been clear to us as a Government that it would be difficult to resolve the issue of hunting through the private Member's route. Private Members' Bills work best when there is general agreement that the policy to which they give effect is broadly supported and desirable. The only way the issue of hunting could be resolved was by making Government time available, and that is what we have done. We introduced a multi-option Bill and left it to hon. Members to decide which of the options they wished to adopt.

Overall, I think that our deliberations have been very productive and surprisingly good natured. It comes as no surprise to anyone that there have been strong and at times diametrically opposed views on this issue—there have even been middle-way views on them. Nevertheless, the debates have been broadly constructive.

The fact that earlier today we made a number of changes to the option that the House had earlier endorsed bears witness to the fact that those on both sides of the House felt that it was possible to engage in a genuine attempt to ensure that we passed the best possible law.

I would like to thank those who helped to draft the Bill. In particular, I thank the Countryside Alliance. It did not want the Bill, but it engaged in the process of policy making in a way that deserves great praise. I extend to it my personal appreciation of the courteous and commonsense approach that it adopted in the discussions that have been undertaken. I wish, in particular, to thank John Jackson for the way in which he has managed to guide the policy development of the Countryside Alliance.

I also want to compliment the Middle Way Group. Without resources or large numbers, it fought a sterling battle for its views to be heard, whether or not we agreed with them. The hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) and for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) did the House a great service by promoting such views. They are a credit to us and I thank them for their contributions.

I extend my thanks to Deadline 2000, which prefers to be called the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals. In particular, I thank John Rolls of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Douglas Bachelor of the League Against Cruel Sports, Mike Baker of the International Fund for Animal Welfare and Bill Swan, the veterinary consultant who, with supporters throughout the country, provided a great deal of information on the option that was supported.

Those people and organisations engaged in a sensible parliamentary approach and showed that they could get results. They faced up to the policy issues and demonstrated leadership. People on the extreme wing of the animal rights movement—some of whom have engaged in the most appalling thuggery and violence—have said that the parliamentary system cannot work. I must tell them that the recent attack on the managing director of Huntingdon Life Sciences was appalling and should be condemned by all hon. Members. I know that most people who support animal welfare condemn it.

The way the Bill has been handled and the constructive debate on it have shown that the parliamentary system can indeed work. Whether we agree or disagree with the outcome, hon. Members can be proud that they have demonstrated that the system allows them to listen to the debate that is taking place in the country. They have proved that Parliament is a forum for the discussion of strongly felt issues, where issues are properly debated, and that a resolution can be achieved.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Minister help those people who believe in democracy by saying whether the Government would proceed with the Bill, in the likelihood that it does not become law, if they are re-elected? Although I accept that their re-election is a possibility, it is not something that I would want.

Mr. O'Brien: I have made it clear that it is for the House to determine the way in which the Bill is handled. I am not going to jump ahead, which the hon. Gentleman—no doubt for good reasons—invites me to

[Mr. O'Brien]

do. We will listen to the debates as they proceed in another place. We have set out our neutral position, which is to facilitate debate. When the Bill goes to another place, we will take the earliest opportunity to table amendments to restore the ability to debate the three options that were placed before this House. Members of another place will be able to discuss those and form a view. The Government will facilitate that, as was done in relation to legislation on Sunday trading. We said from the start that we intended to proceed on that basis. We have tried to play as straight a bat as possible by ensuring that people know about our approach.

Mr. Soames: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. O'Brien: Perhaps in a moment; I want to make some progress.

Today's changes have improved the Bill. They bear witness to the fact that hon. Members have listened. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), who led for the Opposition. Like most—although certainly not all—members of his party, he is opposed to restrictions on hunting with dogs. He has advanced the view of people who favour the retention of hunting. I accept that he is at odds with the central purpose of the option on which the House decided, but he approached consideration of the Bill in Committee with a positive attitude and sought to improve it during its passage. I commend him for that. Some Opposition Members' speeches could have been much shorter, and there were suspicions that there was an attempt to delay progress, but I do not want to go into that. It is important that we recognise that the issue was debated sensibly and constructively.

Mr. Soames: The Minister says that he is proud of the way in which the House has handled the issue. Does he mean that he is proud that the majority in this place has been used to crush the rights of an entirely legal minority which has enjoyed its sport and way of life for thousands of years? Does he believe that that is something to be proud of?

Mr. O'Brien: The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who speaks from the Opposition Front Bench, has voted consistently for a ban on hunting. On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary expressed his views in relation to these matters. Members have been able to put forward their views as constituency representatives. The outcome may not suit the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), but that is democracy.

The debate throughout the country has been reflected in many ways in the outcome in the House. It is good that we have been able to have a sensible debate about these matters. I know that the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex is angry about the outcome, but he has contributed in a sensible and reasoned way on many occasions and added to our knowledge of the issues. The improvements that we have seen to the Bill, and the way in which the House has contributed to making it better law, are thanks also to him. I am sure that making good law is important to the hon. Gentleman.

I pay tribute to the Middle Way Group, to other organisations, to the Opposition and to the Liberal Democrats—we have heard four different views from them, and three in Committee. I thank all concerned.

I should pay a final and important tribute. The House will join me in thanking Lord Burns and the members of his team. The fact that the committee's report was cited so often by all sides who participated in the debate demonstrates what an invaluable and objective document it is. I am grateful to those who were responsible for it.

We have had private Members' Bills on this issue almost year upon year. I am delighted that on this occasion the House has been given the opportunity to consider it again collectively and reach a collective view. The vote in Committee of the whole House was decisive. Even those who do not agree with the outcome must accept that. The Bill is before the House for Third Reading, and I commend it to the House. The House should be able to endorse the Bill because it reflects its will on a free vote on a matter of conscience. It has been a good debate. It is a good Bill, and I commend it to the House.

10.54 pm

Mr. Lidington: I thank the Minister for his kind words, but I for one will not be tempted to set up house in the Government's big tent. The courtesy and humour that characterised the debate in Committee and most of the exchanges at all stages of our proceedings have been welcome. That proved possible, despite strong feelings being expressed by hon. Members on both sides of the argument. To some extent, that atmosphere has been helped by the fact that there are honourably held differences of opinion within the three main political parties. In addition, some of the heat went out of the debate when it became apparent that the Government were engaged in a charade. Trying to ram the Bill through the Commons when a spring or early summer election was more than likely meant that it stood no chance of becoming law in this Parliament.

I welcome the limited concessions made by the Government as a result of the Standing Committee's discussions. However, they do not make a fundamentally bad and misguided Bill acceptable. The Bill creates serious new criminal offences that will apply to the activities of a large number of our fellow citizens and to activities that are lawful now, and that have been for many generations past.

The Minister and other champions of the Bill have always argued that restrictions on individual liberty are justified in order to end cruelty to animals and improve animal welfare. I have gained growing confidence as our debates have proceeded and we have argued our case, examined the detail of the Bill and explored the principles behind it. It has become clear that the weight of the argument has been with those of us who opposed the Bill in principle from the start. There is welcome evidence that our arguments are being increasingly understood in the country as a whole.

Mr. Soames: Does my hon. Friend accept that what has been so shaming about the Government's behaviour is their complete ignorance, as revealed today, of the consequences of a ban on foxhunting? For example,

on the removal of fallen stock, the Minister was all at sea. The Government clearly have not thought through the consequences of the Bill, which therefore stands at risk.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. My concern about the practical consequences of the Bill is one of three reasons why the House should deny it a Third Reading.

First, intellectual confusion lies at the heart of the Bill. Its supporters have consistently made their case on the grounds of animal welfare and seeking to end cruelty. Those are laudable aspirations, but the Bill says that hunting rodents, and, after this evening, rabbits, with dogs, is somehow okay. One need not be an expert zoologist to think that a rat must surely feel fear, exhaustion and pain every bit as much as a fox.

If one presses that point, the ground shifts. We are told that exceptions should be made for rodents or rabbits because they are vermin and because of the damage that they do. The moral argument has been abandoned wholesale, and the very same utilitarian argument about vermin control can, and should, be applied to mink and foxes as much as to rats or rabbits. There is no consistent moral argument from the proponents of the Bill, and they can make no logical difference on the grounds of cruelty or animal welfare between the different species that the Bill treats entirely differently.

My second objection concerns the impact of the Bill and relates to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Mid–Sussex (Mr. Soames). Earlier today we debated the economic impact, the impact on the disposal of fallen stock and the fact that the Bill would render jobless and homeless significant numbers of decent, law-abiding people in some of our most remote rural areas. We know, too, from the debates that we have had on the detail of the Bill that there is still a great deal of uncertainty and ambiguity about what the measure would mean in practice.

We know that the Bill is intended to lead to the demise of organised hunting with packs of hounds, but exploration of its detail makes it clear that it would have a serious impact on the work of people such as gamekeepers and farmers in their task of controlling vermin. To cite just one example, the National Gamekeepers Organisation has pleaded with hon. Members to allow its members to continue to use dogs to flush out and sometimes to catch stoats. The organisation's argument is that the control of mustelids through the use of dogs is an essential part of practical, everyday gamekeeping work, which has been ignored by the authors of the Bill.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will not another major practical effect of the Bill be to ban hunting with dogs in the national parks, whereas the Burns report made it clear that that could not be done without the use of dogs? How can the Minister ask us to accept a Bill on the basis that the Government have won the argument, when they have ignored the conclusion of their own Burns report?

Mr. Lidington: The evidence of the Burns report and the arguments about the Bill have started to highlight exactly the sort of practical problem described by my hon. Friend. Many people who might previously have said that they favoured ending animal cruelty and that that probably meant banning hunting will pause and reconsider whether that point of view is right, and whether a ban on hunting might have serious consequences for people trying to control pests, especially in areas of the country where the alternative methods of control investigated by Lord Burns and his team are clearly impractical.

My third objection relates to the way in which it is proposed to enforce the criminal offences provided for in the Bill. As we have not had time to consider the relevant part of the Bill in Committee or on Report, I hope that it will be debated in particular detail when the Bill passes to the other House.

Not only does the Bill create new criminal offences carrying a penalty of a fine of up to £5,000, but it provides for a specific power to arrest someone who has committed or is believed to have committed an offence. It therefore brings hunting with hounds into the category of arrestable offences that, under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, is generally restricted to extremely serious criminal offences. Even those who argue for a ban on hunting cannot reasonably classify hunting with dogs in that category.

The Bill gives a constable the power to arrest not only someone whom he reasonably suspects may have committed an offence, but someone whom he reasonably suspects may be about to commit an offence. On 25 January I received a letter from the Minister's colleague, the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), who stated in answer to a question of mine that he had investigated what other offences were arrestable. He had found that there were a number of powers of arrest without warrant, such as those contained in the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which stand outside the definition in PACE. However, he continued:

> "None of them allow for arrest on the grounds that a person is about to commit an offence."

For the purpose of trying to stop hunting with hounds, we are giving the police draconian powers, including a power of arrest that appears to be unique and unprecedented in existing criminal legislation.

I could describe many similar examples if I had time to do so. The Bill grants power to seize a dog, but contains no provision on what is to happen during the weeks or months between the seizure and the outcome of any court proceedings. On that point, the Kennel Club told me in a letter that the Bill follows arrangements previously provided for in the Dangerous Dogs Act 1989. I would hardly regard that as an encouraging precedent. There are also powers to impose a life ban on owning a dog, which is a wholly disproportionate penalty for the offences that are being created.

I am conscious that many hon. Members on both sides of the House want to contribute. I believe that the Bill is hostile to individual freedom and that it will produce no gain in terms of animal welfare. It will damage the livelihoods of thousands of our fellow citizens and harm the liberty of many thousands more. I believe that it is a thoroughly bad Bill and that the House should reject it. If the majority of hon. Members insist on carrying it forward, those of us who have opposed it from its inception will carry on the struggle with growing confidence in our arguments, both in another place and in the country.

11.7 pm

Mr. Banks: For many years I have been involved in various campaigns in this place to ban hare coursing, deer hunting, foxhunting and mink hunting. In fact, a ban was one of the first things that I tried to achieve when I was elected in 1983. The House will therefore understand that I am delighted with the progress that has been made on the Bill.

I suppose that I can understand the strong feelings that have been generated on all sides of the argument. I am glad to say that friendships have remained intact despite all that, even though there have been some strong disagreements, which have occurred not only across the arguments, but within the different parties. This not a single-party issue. Splendid support has been given by a number of Conservative Members, although it has clearly not been easy for them to give so much support to the cause of banning the hunting of wild animals with dogs.

I said that I understood the deep feelings about the issue, but I must say that after all these years of listening to the views that have been expressed—I have studied as much as anyone the various arguments—I cannot understand how anyone can take pleasure in killing animals. That is non-negotiable for me. I cannot understand or comprehend how anyone can take pleasure from that activity.

I say to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) that there are some loose ends in the Bill, which is untidy in certain respects. Concessions have been made, and he was right to point them out. Some of them may have been made because of the strength of the argument. Of course, one does not want to make the law unenforceable. The fact is, however, that one cannot be absolute in any legislation. I have been unhappy even about some of the concessions, but I understand why we had to make them. We have to be political about the matter, as other dimensions must be taken into account—not least what happens to the Bill when it goes into another place. I do not think that we should be berated or criticised for not being absolute in our approach. If I had my way, I would say that no one should be able to kill anything other than the odd flea, wasp or insect that gives us problems. I know that I can be categorised as an extremist in that respect, but I know how we must make this place work and I am more than happy to ensure that it does so. Even if the legislation is not all that I would want, it has certainly gone much of the way to making me feel that we have achieved something significant.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury hinted, as no doubt others will, that the argument is by no means finished. I know that the opponents of this legislation will not give up in this place, although they might have to for the moment, and that they will certainly not give up in another place. We expect much opposition in the House of Lords.

I am fully aware of the fact that the Bill will fall before the election: it will not reach the statute book. That is a perfectly reasonable statement on which we could all agree. I say to my colleagues on the Front Bench, however, that I hope that re-introducing the Bill will be a manifesto commitment—*[Interruption.]* This issue will never go away in this House.

I am wise enough to know that although we might be winning tonight, there are many more battles to come. I am merely saying to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they cannot walk away from the issue. I do not want anyone in government to feel that they have discharged their responsibilities and that they can forget about the matter. It cannot be ignored, it must not be forgotten, and if it is defeated in another place, it must be brought back. There will be people like me in this place who will make *sure of that until we succeed.*

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my hon. Friend agree that the statesmanlike remarks of the Minister on this subject about the power of democracy to achieve change will only finally convince people out in the country if, at the end, a final decision is made rather than leaving the issue dangling for years to come?

Mr. Banks: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend. Although I have given up my ambition to be a world statesperson—

Mr. Soames: You are.

Mr. Banks: That is very decent of you, old chap. I am afraid that that view is not necessarily shared by all of us.

This is the place where we decide. There has been a majority in this House and in the country on this issue for some years. There is not a division between rural and urban people. There has always been a majority—and there is a clear majority for this legislation in rural areas as there is in urban areas. That should never be forgotten. Those who say that the Labour party does not understand the countryside or the rural vote should wait and see—as they did at the previous election—what happens at the next election. We are quite happy to sit back and rest on our record in that respect.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) and the Minister said, this is where we decide issues of animal welfare. We have always decided issues of animal welfare in this place. Looking back over the decades, one thinks of bull baiting, cock fighting, dog fighting, otter hunting—the list goes on, and we have decided on it. Many of the arguments used when such legislation was going through the House are precisely the same as those used against the Hunting Bill. We will look back in years to come on the legislation that we have passed and wonder what all the fuss was about from those who opposed it.

I am delighted, therefore, that we have reached this far, although I accept that there is some way to go. Like others, I should like to offer a few thanks. I should like first to thank the Minister. With my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, he has had to put up with a great deal, but he has always been cool, reasonable and honest with the House, which we can all respect. Like him, I pay tribute to the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, the League Against Cruel Sports, the International Fund for Animal Welfare and all their professional workers and helpers for their compassion in conducting the campaign. They deserve a great deal of thanks from us and all animal lovers in this country and around the world. I am delighted with this Bill, and I am looking forward to voting in favour of its Third Reading.

11.14 pm

Mr. Öpik: It is funny to recognise that all three organisations claim that the Burns report proves that they are right. The Middle Way Group is of course the one that really is right about the Burns report, and we hope to make that case in another place.

I thank the Minister—and the Parliamentary Secretary—for his very kind words about the Middle Way Group and my colleagues. Although the debate has sometimes been heated, everyone involved genuinely believes in doing the right thing and finding the best outcome. There is a shared belief that animal welfare is important, but the difference between us is on the degree to which animal welfare should be balanced with civil liberties, and on the best practical way of balancing those two considerations.

From the beginning, the Middle Way Group has tried to put a rational and well-argued case for balancing animal welfare with civil liberties. My hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Mrs. Golding) and I have formed a gang of three—the three musketeers of justice—to bring reason and sense to the debate. Given our enormous secretariat, consisting of Jim Barrington, who is both our chief executive and our typist, I am surprised by and delighted with the amount of support that we have been given. I should like to thank right hon. and hon. Members who have listened to our arguments. Some of them have been persuaded, including the Home Secretary and three other Cabinet Ministers. Others may not have been persuaded to vote for the Middle Way Group's proposals, but I am satisfied that these are now treated with respect. People understand that we are genuinely trying to provide a third option between an outright ban and self-regulation.

Dr. Palmer: What has always puzzled me about the position of members of the Middle Way Group is that they seem to oppose their own legislation. On Second Reading, they voted against a Bill that would, in principle, have given them the chance to implement their proposals. Tonight they have consistently voted against the Bill, and I would be surprised if they voted in favour of it on Third Reading.

Mr. Öpik: *Hansard* will answer the hon. Gentleman's questions. We have tried to make consistent judgments as best we can. He may differ with us, but that is a matter for him. I like to think that most hon. Members do not question our motives.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Öpik: I shall not give way, because time is short.

It is interesting to note that a Deadline 2000 advertisement in a national newspaper cost twice the entire budget of the Middle Way Group for three years. People should judge us on the resonance of our idea, rather than question our motives. We have battled against incredible odds, given the huge resources that other organisations have had. I am glad to say that the Middle Way Group has been on to something important, and has had a new way of looking at the issue. If it had been in existence five or 10 years ago, perhaps regulation would have been introduced, and we would not have ended up where we are now.

There are problems with the Bill. The way in which it has been constructed has produced enormous logical contradictions. Members of the public could be criminalised if their dogs persistently chased mammals in the prohibited list even if the owners meant no harm in their actions, but were merely not 100 per cent. in control of their animals. The Minister reassured us that, through an act of faith, we should trust that a solution will come to replace the important role played by kennels in dealing with fallen stock. The public do not share his optimism. Such an act of faith does not sit comfortably on the shoulders of a nervous rural population, who have felt hard done by for a long time as a result of Government policy.

No regard has been paid to compensation. For me at least, the Minister did not effectively explain any logical difference between a ban on fur farming, which attracted compensation from the Government, and a ban on hunting with dogs, which in his judgment does not warrant compensation from the Government. That will be an important consideration for the public.

There are other examples of moral randomness. Why is falconry all right? Why is angling okay? Why is hunting fox with dogs not acceptable? The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) again said that he was opposed to hunting any animal for fun, yet not once has he said that he wants a ban on angling, but perhaps he will intervene to correct that. It is very clear that those contradictions undermine the Bill's philosophical consistency.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: For the sake of clarity, I ask the House to accept that I shall not give way. I think that I have a fairly good record of giving way under normal circumstances, but time is short.

What is the difference between a rodent and a mink? Mink are one of the most persistent and pernicious pests in our countryside. They are environment destroyers and they are not a natural part of our countryside and yet, for some reason that I just do not understand, the House chose not to allow the hunting of mink with dogs.

Mrs. Golding *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: I give way to my hon. Friend, for obvious reasons.

Mrs. Golding: So my hon. Friend should, and I thank him for it. Can he see the logic in producing publicity about protecting the water vole, whose main predator is the mink, while passing a Bill prohibiting the extermination of the mink?

Mr. Öpik: I cannot add to what my hon. Friend says. She has been assiduous and consistent in her position. Hon. Members who voted to ban mink hunting may choose to think hard about the consequences of what they have done.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones *rose—*

Mr. Öpik: I shall not give way, and I cannot make that any clearer. *[Interruption.]* It is perfectly obvious why I gave way to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme and I do not need to explain why I did so.

[Mr. Öpik]

My conclusion on the dynamic is that there is some emotional attachment to the fox, which may have been caused by television images. Perhaps we grew up loving foxes just as future generations will love other animals. Sometimes, cynically perhaps, I ask myself whether Roland Rat will have the same impact on a future generation of parliamentarians as Basil Brush appears to have had on the present one. If we allow emotion to determine legislation, the result will be bad legislation.

There is another contradiction about which we should be clear: the debate is about not banning the killing of foxes, but banning one method of killing foxes. The Bill will not save the life of a single fox and might serve to increase suffering through the process of fox control.

Deadline 2000, even at this late hour, can think again. It can win, but win in a fairer way. The Middle Way Group's proposals are still available. We think that they are good, and they are free. We offer them to Deadline 2000.

Again and again, the Middle Way Group's tenets have come to the fore and our claims have been reaffirmed. We still believe that stopping cruelty would be best achieved by inspection, regulation, fines and licensing and that all that could be paid for by a licensing fee. Do hon. Members who support the Deadline 2000 proposals realise that 13 of the 23 paragraphs of their Bill are in ours and that 70 of the 102 sub-paragraphs of the Middle Way Group's proposals are the same as theirs?

I did not enter the debate to beat Deadline 2000 and I did not participate to win. The Middle Way Group is not seeking victory. We are looking for solutions, so here is the deal. The Middle Way Group is still promoting its ideas and will do so until the game is completely up. We shall carry on trying to balance animal welfare considerations with civil liberties. We shall debate the issue and take feedback, as I have done tonight on the group's behalf on compensation.

If Deadline 2000 came round and began to think that perhaps regulation would achieve its goals, that would be a victory not for the Middle Way Group, but for Deadline 2000 and for the hon. Members for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) and for Worcester (Mr. Foster), who put the issue on the agenda. If we achieved such a result, that would be a triumph not for any individual, but for the House because it would show that, once in a while, and even on extremely emotive issues of conscience, hon. Members have the courage, maturity and humility to think again when they consider a proposal that would improve on the position from which we started.

11.24 pm

Mr. Michael: May I respond to the remarks of the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik), who made some good points and, with respect, some weak ones? The fact that there is a good deal of respect in the House for the way in which the Middle Way Group has put its argument, been constructive and tried to produce a workable proposal was reflected in the comments of my hon. Friend the Minister, but we must make it clear that the respect for those individuals and the effort that they have put in—in particular, I offer my respect to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire for the way in which he has conducted himself—should not be taken for acceptance of the strength of their argument, which I do not think has stood up to scrutiny.

It is entirely wrong to think that a licensing system, giving rise to all sorts of bureaucracy and complications, would resolve the problems relating to animal welfare and caused by animal cruelty. That does not reduce my respect for the attempt by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues to explore the possibilities, but I do not think we should go too far in demonstrating respect for individuals. We should not let it be thought that arguments have stood the test of debate when they have not.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for having the grace to give way. Will he comment on the Middle Way Group's position on the regulation of hare coursing? In what sense will the public perceive that as a genuine compromise on animal cruelty—a compromise of the kind that the words "middle way" seem to suggest?

Mr. Michael: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The objections to hare coursing are strong. Doing away with it, rather than regulation, is the answer: that is where the Middle Way Group's proposals have fallen down.

I want to say a little about the authority with which the Bill will move from here to another place. Doubt has been cast by Opposition Members who have sought to confuse the situation rather than clarifying it. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) suggested that there had not been enough time for proper debate of the issues, but there was a massive amount of time in Committee. We heard the same arguments repeatedly, some of them not about issues related to the Bill but intended to delay the proceedings. That is a perfectly legitimate way in which to seek to oppose a Bill, but let us not pretend that this was quality debate: sometimes it was like watching paint dry, and on some occasions it was like watching paint dry three times, and the same coat at that.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury said that he was worried about the fact that the Bill created new crimes, but we do that frequently in the House. Gone are the simple days of the short Bill which—as many of us point out to our constituents when we take them around this place—in a couple of lines dealt with the control of crossbows. Some of us might like the use of similar items to be controlled on our estates, but many pages would now be needed to produce such legislation. The legislation that we handle nowadays is often complex, and it is clear that legislation on hunting will involve complex issues.

Sir Patrick Cormack: The right hon. Gentleman speaks of complexity. Does he know the difference between a rabbit and a hare, and can he tell me which feels pain the most?

Mr. Michael: It would have been an extremely good thing had the hon. Gentleman spent some time in the Committee, where he would have heard such points raised ad nauseam—philosophical points, which are part of the diversion that the Bill's opponents seek to introduce.

The weight of the argument has not favoured those who have tried to introduce philosophical complexities into a simple Bill. Its opponents have not been willing to engage in the detail that must be followed through until the point of principle has been dealt with once and for all. That is

why we need the Bill to be passed, and to put beyond doubt the principles it establishes. I hope that, on reflection, the hon. Member for Aylesbury will withdraw some of his remarks about battling on for ever. I hope he will recognise that we have had adequate debate, and that clear decisions have been made by a parliamentary majority.

That majority has great authority. The decision was taken by a large majority of hon. Members on a free vote. It is that weight of individual decisions, that choice made by hon. Members in accordance with their own consciences, that gives the decision such authority. There were those who suggested that the Bill would have greater authority had it been treated entirely as a Government Bill. It has greater authority for having been decided on on the basis of the individual choices of hon. Members. The free vote gives it that authority.

The House has a responsibility to take decisions in such matters. I know that there are hon. Members who do not like this decision: we heard from them at great length in Committee. There have been occasions on which I have been one of the minority in the House and have seen something go through that I have not liked—when we were in opposition, we saw that frequently—but this is not a matter on which the parties should have been polarised. Indeed, hon. Members such as the shadow Home Secretary have demonstrated that it is possible to do other than simply go with the flow.

The authority of a decision taken on a free vote by such a large majority in this House should be respected in another place. There is a constitutional issue here, since the decision has been taken by those elected to this place to take such decisions.

I regret that the hon. Member for Aylesbury has again sought to confuse some of the issues. Any Bill has to draw lines. Sometimes those lines involve things that are untidy on one side or the other. That is what we explored in Committee. We heard about the problems of taking decisions if someone is taking a walk in the countryside. I think that many of us were satisfied that the legislation was clear and dealt with those issues satisfactorily, but the House has had the opportunity tonight, and has taken that opportunity, to clarify the lines and to ensure that there is no confusion: rabbits are out of the Bill, while it is clear that the stalking of deer is not forbidden by the Bill.

On the difficulties of demarcation with regard to rodents and vermin, the hon. Member for Aylesbury cannot argue that we need clarification and then complain about the situation when an amendment is tabled and hon. Members unanimously choose to make that clarification. The issues that were shown to be unclear in Committee have been made clear by the House's choices tonight. The Bill before us is a clear Bill. It bans the hunting of foxes with hounds. It bans the hunting of deer with hounds, but does not ban stalking. It bans hare coursing. It bans the hunting of mink on the grounds that the parallel with foxhunting with hounds for pleasure is clear. On the question of nuisance from mink, the maximum damage is caused by hunting mink with hounds.

We therefore have a clear Bill which carries the authority of a large majority in the House, not least since individual decisions were made on the basis of hon. Members' individual consciences. That should be respected by the other place, which should pass the Bill with speed into law.

11.33 pm

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I have always argued that one should have a debate in the House, but when I heard the speech by the hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael)—[HON. MEMBERS: "Right hon."] I apologise. Having heard the speech of the very right hon. Gentleman, I am not surprised that he lost his position of leadership of the Assembly in Wales.

I was not able to catch the eye of the occupant of the Chair on Second Reading. I was not on the Committee and this is the first time I have spoken on this particular Bill. I have three packs in my constituency. If Labour Members really think that they represent the view of the countryside in bringing the Bill forward, they are so out of touch as to be living in wonderland.

Ever since I began representing Honiton, and then East Devon, I made it absolutely clear that I would take no action whatever to limit activities that have been countryside pursuits for centuries, or join in any attempt by this place to alter the wishes of those who form a minority in the United Kingdom but a majority in my constituency. It is quite wrong that a vast city and town element should be able to force on people in the countryside something that is unacceptable to them.

I believed that this place should be willing to support and look after the minority interests of this country. There is no way in which this Bill does that. There is no way in which this Bill takes into account what is necessary to support activities that have been countryside pursuits for centuries, and that is entirely unacceptable. I am a parliamentarian who believes that all aspects of the nation's pursuits should be considered and dealt with fairly. The Bill does not do that at all.

An analysis of the Bill reveals that aspects of those pursuits have simply not been considered. In my constituency, a farmer had to have a cow put down because of a broken hip. However, because of the problems with foot and mouth disease, he was unable to move the dead animal without a special licence. A special licence was issued. Believe it or not, that licence allowed the animal to be moved either to a certain knacker's yard or to hunt kennels.

It is tragic that such kennels will no longer exist if the Bill's provisions are implemented. You know and I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that the Bill's opponents are trying to defend those kennels, with which the Government wish to do away. It is a terrifying prospect that the Bill will seek to turn quite ordinary, everyday people living in my constituency into criminals—*[Interruption.]*

I suggest that those who laugh at that come down and tell my farmers and constituents that they think it is funny. If they came down and did that, they would be laughing on the other side of their faces. But they do not come down to consider the issue with local hunters and farmers and with other local people. It is laughable to say that the three packs in my constituency are other than supported by farmers and the ordinary, everyday people who follow the hunt. Many of those people are Labour supporters, and they find it very strange that their particular activity is being set upon by a Labour Government.

If people believe that it is wise or intelligent to turn those people into criminals, they are so out of touch that they cannot understand. The right hon. Member for

[Sir Peter Emery]

Cardiff, South and Penarth shakes his head. Why does he not come down and talk to the people whose jobs will be thrown away by the Bill?

Mr. Michael: The right hon. Gentleman assumes that people who support the Bill have not discussed the matter with those whose lives will be affected by it, or listened to what they have had to say. We have done that: over time, many of us have listened, and understood.

Sir Peter Emery: If that is correct, you paid little attention to what those people had to say. You paid no attention to the way in which they will be affected or to their belief that they will be made criminals. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry to say that I do not believe that many ordinary, normal, law-abiding people will wish to implement the Bill. Many will take positive action against what they consider to be wrong, and they will end up in the courts. I hope that you have enough prisons to put them in, but I do not think that you will, because— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. The right hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of the House, and he must not keep using the word "you".

Sir Peter Emery: I am very sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that you are on my side—*[Interruption.]* I withdraw that remark immediately. I understand your stricture only too well.

What I am really trying to say—

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): Keep going. You are winning over the waverers. *[Laughter.]*

Sir Peter Emery: The strange thing is that Labour Members think that this is funny, and that people in my constituency do not consider it very important. If I began laughing at the views that Labour Members might express about the miners, for example, they would say that that was terrifying. This issue is as important to my constituents as are the problems faced by miners in constituencies that have mines.

What I want to hammer home is that the Government will come to regret this Bill. They have not heard the last of the matter. They do not really understand what the Bill's effect on the country generally will be. Labour Members smile about that, but they are out of touch. They believe that the Bill will be passed tonight and then get through the Lords and become law automatically. I only hope that they are proved wrong, because the proposals in the Bill would be a tragedy for the majority of people in the countryside.

11.43 pm

Mr. Gordon Prentice: Who speaks for the countryside—the right hon. Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), with his three packs, or me, the hon. Member for Pendle, with my one pack? I represent a rural constituency. Every week of my life, I meet people who work on the land. I do not represent an urban constituency; it has towns, of course, but it has a large rural element. Many Labour Members represent rural constituencies. What has always stuck in my throat is that Conservative Members, with all their prejudices, proclaim in Parliament that it is they who speak for countryside. They do not.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) has left the Chamber, but he talked about the majority crushing the minority. The majority view has the right to prevail. That is the reality. John Stuart Mill made that point in his classic essay on liberty—the majority view has the right to prevail but it must exercise that right defensively and not offensively. So we said, in the Chamber and in Committee, "Let's hear the arguments." However, Conservative Members have not persuaded us of their views and, more important, they have not persuaded people outside.

The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex and the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) referred dismissively to Deadbeat 2000 rather than Deadline 2000. That upset me. Deadline 2000 has the support not only of the League Against Cruel Sports and the International Fund for Animal Welfare—organisations which Conservative Members may consider rather tangential—but of the RSPCA, whose patron is Her Majesty the Queen. The Queen is on our side. The RSPCA has millions of members. Conservative Members paint a picture of millions of people disagreeing with what we are doing, whereas the reality is that those people support us and want the Bill on the statute book.

We hear about country sports and field sports. Why do we not hear about blood sports? Hunting is a blood sport—it is killing for fun. I think that hunting with dogs brutalises people. Conservative Members will say that I have got this wrong, but I believe that hunting brutalises people because it is cruel. For that reason, it should no longer be tolerated.

Finally, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), on piloting the Bill through the Committee stage with great skill. We owe them a great debt of gratitude.

11.47 pm

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): I could not believe that the Government would proceed with the Bill today, given the state of agriculture and the countryside. I make no secret of the fact that I am opposed to the Bill.

There has been despair about farming for some months now—perhaps for a couple of years; now there is real fear. Vets on farms are examining animals to see whether foot and mouth will be identified on those farms. Farming is not what it was the last time there was a foot and mouth outbreak, when farmers had a setback and then recovered. For most farmers today, if their animals get foot and mouth, it will be the end of their livelihood and of a family occupation which may have gone on for generations. However, the implications are much wider than that.

On the hunting of stags, there are 10,000 magnificent red deer in the west country and the south-west of England. There are 4,000 to 6,000 in the area covered by the three packs of stag hounds. I think that many Labour Members still do not understand the point, although I have spoken about it before, that the hunts are, in a very real

sense, the guardians of the deer. Hunts inhibit poaching, protect the deer and deal with the casualties. Without the hunts, nobody knows what will happen to injured deer hit by cars. Traffic has been a threat to the deer, but now a more deadly threat exists.

Deer can catch foot and mouth disease. If that happens, the Government will be faced with a ghastly decision: not on the niceties of whether or not there should be hunting or culling by shooting, but on whether to authorise the complete extermination of deer—*[Interruption.]* Hon. Members know that what I am saying is true. Despite the magnitude of such issues, the House has spent the day debating this measure.

I have been a Member of the House for a long time—too long, some hon. Members might say. The House has not done itself great credit by engaging in an exercise about which there is deep cynicism. No one in the Chamber actually thinks that the Bill will go through, although we know that we have no chance of preventing Third Reading. The Government will have their victory tonight. Many decent people who are in the depths of despair will be desperately distressed by these events. Although the Government will win, their insensitivity today will not be forgotten in the countryside. The time will come when they will pay the penalty for it.

11.51 pm

Mr. Garnier: I pay tribute to the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King). He and my right hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Heseltine), who spoke on Second Reading, have given signal service to the House and have spoken up for the issue that we seek so valiantly to defend. I also congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery), not only on his 75th birthday but on all that he has done during his many years as a Member of the House.

I join the Minister in that I am happy to congratulate the Countryside Alliance and to thank it for all that it has done to bring some sanity to the debate. I found the Minister's thanks to Lord Burns rather extraordinary; they were more like a gin trap than true thanks. The Government and the Bill's supporters have wholly ignored the Burns report.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater pointed out, the Bill is a complete waste of parliamentary time and public money. Nobody who has given the matter any thought believes that the Bill will become law. The rural economy is in crisis and the country suffers from a host of problems, yet the Government decided that we should discuss the Bill today.

The Bill is more like a colander than an iron-clad. Although we plugged one or two holes in Committee and on Report, it is still more holes than metal. It will sink—and good riddance. The Bill is disastrous—drafted by Deadline 2000. It is inimical to the interests of the countryside and to the country as a whole.

A law that we frequently pass in this place is the law of the unforeseen consequence. Nothing demonstrates that more easily than the Bill. The measure was published last autumn. One did not need to be a rocket scientist to anticipate its likely consequences. Its deficiencies have been apparent to all, yet its proponents have done nothing to cure them. In the Standing Committee, it was interesting to see how the jaws of the Bill's supporters dropped as they discovered that it was incompetently drafted and infelicitous.

The Bill is intellectually confused and illogical. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Mr. Öpik) has ably demonstrated that, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington). The Bill is also politically inept. It is economically illiterate and it tries to legislate against nature. It is a recipe for social division and is draconian in its criminal penalties. It brings with it none of the countervailing benefits for animal welfare claimed for it by its proponents. The Bill is morally flawed. It will seriously compromise the welfare of the fox, the deer, the mink, the water vole and the hare. It is illiberal. It is unfair.

According to recent polls, a majority opposes a ban, yet the thoughtless majority in the House continues to press the measure right to the wire. Not only is the Bill unfair but it will not even serve the purpose that its proponents claim for it. The only thing to do with it is to throw it out—let us do so now.

11.54 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may I thank those whom I need to thank? First, I thank the Home Office officials and parliamentary counsel for the work that they have done. Secondly, I thank the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), for her solid support and for weathering the slings, arrows and outrageous compliments of the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), who is not now in his place but was certainly very evident in Committee.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), who has been present for most of the debates and whose contribution to a ban, if it is enacted, will have been historic. As someone who originates from Worcester, I can say that Worcester ought to be very proud of him because he is one of the few new Members who have made a great impact on the House. I thank my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) for his wise advice; my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) for his help in dealing with some complex policy issues; my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) for his solid support; and my hon. Friend the Member for Weaver Vale (Mr. Hall) for his sterling job of not whipping the Bill. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members for High Peak (Mr. Levitt), for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for Lewisham, East (Ms Prentice) who have served as Parliamentary Private Secretaries.

This short Bill was debated at length on the Floor of the House on Second Reading. There was a second full day's debate on the Floor of the House on the options and there were 15 Committee sittings, so there was ample time for debate, if only some of the speeches made by Opposition Members had been just a bit shorter.

I thought that the comments made by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King) were ill judged. He suggested that the only people who care about foot and mouth disease in the farming community somehow support hunting. His comments were cheap and opportunist in attempting to use the issue of foot and mouth disease to support hunters' views. Views in rural

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

communities are strong on foot and mouth disease, and he should not seek to use the issue in that way. The House is united in supporting the farming community in its battle against foot and mouth disease, so he is wrong to suggest that the House is somehow divided on the issue. I think that that was cheap.

The Bill will give effect to the wishes of the House: it will ban the hunting of wild mammals with dogs, except in specific circumstances. As a result of the changes made earlier today, it will remain legal to hunt rabbits and rats with dogs and to use dogs for deer stalking. The Bill is now more clearly focused on foxhunting, deer hunting, mink hunting and hare hunting and coursing. It is probably fair to say that those activities cause the greatest concern in this country, and the Bill reflects that.

The Bill finally puts paid to the suggestion that there is somehow a slippery slope to a ban on fishing and shooting. That is complete nonsense. After debate, rodents and rabbits were removed from the Bill, and Members showed that they would have no truck with slippery slopes. The Government support fishing and shooting. Let me unequivocally repeat the guarantee that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave: there will be no ban on fishing and shooting while he is in No. 10 Downing street.

As I have said, the Government have been neutral throughout the Bill's proceedings. Our sole aim has been to facilitate debate and to ensure that this most contentious subject can be dealt with once and for all. Let me say on a personal note that I support the Bill, even though it deals with civil liberty issues, because I do not believe that there should be a civil liberty to be cruel for entertainment. Killing for fun is wrong. I personally commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 319, Noes 140.

Division No. 136] **[11.59 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Ashton, Joe
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baker, Norman
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Borrow, David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Campbell-Savours, Dale
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Day, Stephen
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grocott, Bruce
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ms Ruth
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin

McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Ms Margaret
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morgan, Rhodri *(Cardiff W)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rogers, Allan
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Alan W *(E Carmarthen)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony Banks and Ms Bridget Prentice.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan
Duncan Smith, Iain
Emery, Rt Hon Sir Peter
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gorman, Mrs Teresa
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heseltine, Rt Hon Michael
Hoey, Kate
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Rt Hon Sir Peter *(Fareham)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Nicholls, Patrick
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prior, David
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Ross, William *(E Lond'y)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and Mr. Douglas Hogg.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Deferred Divisions

12.11 am

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): I beg to move,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 7th March, notwithstanding the provisions of the Sessional Order of 7th November 2000 (Deferred Divisions) votes on divisions which have been deferred until half past Three o'clock on that day shall be recorded for one and a half hours after half past Five o'clock, no account being taken of any period during which the House or committee proceeds to a division.

I think that it would be helpful and appropriate, even at this late hour, to explain the effect of the motion. I shall be brief because it is straightforward. It simply shifts the time for taking deferred Divisions on Budget day, Wednesday 7 March, from 3.30 pm to 5 pm to 5.30 pm to 7 pm. I believe that this will be for the convenience of the House, as it will enable Members to listen to the Budget statement in its entirety, provided that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer speaks with the brevity that is traditional on such occasions. I have no knowledge either of the length of the speech or its content. I hope that the House will agree to making this minor and convenient change.

12.12 am

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): I was sorry that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office did not include in his remarks the time that will be allocated to the Opposition to respond to the Budget statement. We would wish to hear that speech in its entirety too. That appears not to have come into the Government's consideration.

I understand why the Minister has brought the matter to the House—

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): It is not only the Conservative Opposition who are involved. I suppose that some people might want to hear what the Liberal Democrats have to say.

Mrs. Browning: It is not often that I disagree with my right hon. and learned Friend, but I think that his supposition is questionable.

When the House debated deferred Divisions on 7 November, it was a rather hurried affair. It was the night of the American presidential elections; Labour Members had other matters to consider. However, the Opposition flagged up our discontent with the length of time that the House had to consider the matter that night, and our principled opposition to deferred Divisions per se. That opposition, having seen such Divisions in practice, is no less now than it was then. Deferred Divisions are an abomination and we shall scrap them when we come to office later this year, or possibly next year, depending on events.

The fact that the Minister has had to come to the House to vary the Sessional Orders for one date only shows the lack of consideration and preparation that was given to and made for them when they were put before the House and debated on 7 November.

Can the Minister indicate what other parliamentary occasions might take place on a Wednesday that would require him to come before the House with such a motion again? Clearly, he will not be able to tell us the day of the Queen's Speech, but in the time that remains to this Parliament it is unsatisfactory to have deferred Divisions that have not been properly thought through in practice—quite apart from the fact that we oppose them in principle.

I appreciate that the Minister is trying to be helpful, but the motion simply shows the weakness of the system. We are all busy, and Wednesday afternoon is a busy time even when there is no Budget statement. Hon. Members have just about got used to the time allotted for the papers to be handed in, but now it is to be varied. If that keeps happening, the chances are that people will miss Divisions. Nor will Members focus on the important matters debated in the previous week. That can only diminish Members' understanding and appreciation of the work done in the previous week on matters that they themselves may not have considered, but which other Members have dealt with.

I appreciate that the Minister is trying to be helpful, but deferred Divisions are an abomination. The sooner they are finished with, the better.

12.16 am

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning). The point of deferred Divisions, which, like her, I opposed, was that we should hold them when everyone was here. Yet the motion asks us to defer them further because everyone might be here. I do not understand.

Originally, we were meant to have Divisions on Wednesdays because everyone turned up that day and it would be convenient for them to vote. Now we are to have them at another time because everyone has turned up. Somehow, it seems, people cannot stagger round to the No Lobby to vote. That seems to negate the purpose of deferred Divisions. If everyone will be here on Budget day, it will presumably be possible during the two hours allocated by the Minister for the Budget for hon. Members to walk from the Chamber to the No Lobby.

Given that the votes take place in the No Lobby, let me assure the Minister that we Conservatives will be in our places in the Chamber, listening as the shadow Chancellor makes his reply. There will be no inconvenience for Ministers or Labour Members who want to walk past us to vote at that time. We shall be rivetted to the shadow Chancellor's speech because we shall want to know what tax rates and spending decisions will apply from April, May or whenever it is. There will be no question of Conservative Members getting in the way while the Government's Back Benchers seek to troop from their side of the House to vote in the Lobby behind us.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has lost faith in his leader, who, I believe, usually replies to the Budget. My substantive point is that I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, as a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, does not support a motion that will allow the whole House to listen to the Budget statement. Is he against that idea?

Mr. Fallon: We have had no indication from the Minister that the Budget statement will last the full two hours that he has allocated. If it is anything like the previous Budget statements to which we have all had to

listen, I am sure that there will be plenty of opportunity, while the Chancellor drones on about the latest research and development tax credit, or whatever wheeze he may have dreamt up to appease some lobby group, to slip out to vote.

Mr. Hogg: In all probability, the Budget will be leaked in advance anyway.

Mr. Fallon: That possibility had occurred to all of us, and may afford us more time to vote.

My third reservation about the procedure is that the Minister assumes that the Budget will consume a full two hours. The previous Budgets introduced by the Chancellor have not consumed two hours, so I am a little puzzled about why the Minister is allowing us from 5.30 until 7 pm to vote. He may want to detain or divert his troops into voting in the Lobby so that they do not have time to plough through the press releases attached to the Budget. Who knows? He may not want them to focus entirely on the Budget message.

The fourth and final reason why I am suspicious about the motion is that yet again we are changing the Standing Orders of the House to please the Prime Minister. It is he who has not been turning up to vote in Divisions. We have arranged Divisions specially on a Wednesday so that he can be present and vote on all the various matters on which he has missed voting at 10 pm. The Minister now wants to change the Orders of the House yet again.

The Budget has had to be moved from the Tuesday to the Wednesday because the Prime Minister cannot come to the House on the Tuesday. Notwithstanding his duty to the House, he will be making some speech on the environment on the Tuesday. The changes are all because the Prime Minister cannot be here on the Tuesday and he must be here on the Wednesday. Once again, we must change the hour of voting to accommodate him.

We have been messed about enough. As my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton said, deferred Divisions are an abomination. If Divisions are to be deferred, they should be deferred to the day after the debate has taken place. If there is a problem with hon. Members attending at 1, 2 or 3 am, why cannot they turn up the next day?

To move the entire procedure to a Wednesday—as one of my hon. Friends once said, just to allow hon. Members to turn up to sign the visitors book—is an abomination. Now, because there is some special event on the Wednesday—there will be other special events and speeches on Wednesdays—we are told that voting will have to be shifted yet again. To time the voting for the entire previous week to a particular hour and a half to suit the Government of the day is an abomination piled on an abomination. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose it.

12.22 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): I echo the remarks of my neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). Let us be clear about what has caused the proposed change. We have seen many examples recently of the Government's casual and arrogant attitude to the House and its traditions and procedures.

It is bad enough that we have the ghastly deferred Division nonsense on a Wednesday—I hope that when the Library starts to produce the Division lists, that will be shown as the sham and the mockery that it is—but it is compounded by the fact that the Government have decided that the Budget will be on a Wednesday this year, for reasons that are not clear to any of us. That has caused the Government to get themselves into what they perceive as a difficulty. There is a conflict between the nonsense of the deferred Divisions and the Budget statement. Why does that conflict arise?

I question the assumption that underlies the motion. The assumption is that at 3.30 on Wednesday 7 March the Chancellor will start to deliver his Budget speech, and of course, 3.30 is the time specified in Sessional Orders for the deferred Divisions. But how do we know that that will be the case? Is it not possible that a private notice question could be granted on that day by the Speaker? We live in times of crisis. Crises surround us daily—almost hourly. I saw on my television this evening that there was a crisis Cabinet meeting this very day. How do we know that there will not be further crises? Regrettably, the existing one may still be with us on 7 March, which is not so far distant. It is entirely procedurally possible that Mr. Speaker may see fit to grant a private notice question for that day.

Mr. Tipping: The right hon. Gentleman knows the procedures of the House. If he reflects on them, he will remember that private notice questions always come after statements.

Mr. Forth: Yes, but the issue that arises has been mentioned by my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for Sevenoaks: the casual assumption about whether my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition will be squeezed out by some combination of events that we cannot foresee. With their usual arrogance, Government Front Benchers are saying that they want to arrange the business of the House to protect the Chancellor of the Exchequer's speech, but they do not give a damn about the contributions of my right hon. Friend and—let us be charitable just for a moment—of the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

One way or another, the House is being asked to change its own arrangements, including even the Sessional Orders that were thrust upon us only a few months ago, because the Government cannot get their act together or organise their business properly. For that reason, they are asking us to sweep aside for their convenience not only longstanding Standing Orders, but the Sessional Orders that they imposed to deliver this ghastly sham of deferred Divisions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks said that the proposed arrangement was designed to protect the Prime Minister. I wonder whether that is the case. On the face of it, it is designed to enhance the Chancellor's glory, but whether that is to the benefit of the Prime Minister is another matter altogether. Some people—admittedly they would be uncharitable—might argue that the glorification of the Chancellor would not benefit the Prime Minister. However, the question of whose benefit the arrangements are designed to serve is significant and deserves exploration. Are they for the benefit of the Prime Minister or the Chancellor? I shall not dwell on that question; I leave it hanging in the air, as it is relevant to the motion.

[Mr. Forth]

All in all, the new arrangements now appear to be a complete shambles. There are conflicts of Standing Orders and Sessional Orders, and the Government want simply to move things around to suit themselves and the Chancellor. They are arrogant enough to ignore one of the great longstanding traditions of the House: the guaranteed opportunity of the Leader of the Opposition to respond immediately to the Chancellor's Budget statement. That task is always acknowledged as one of the most difficult to be faced by a Leader of the Opposition. It was regularly mangled by Commissioner Kinnock, but has been carried out with some brilliance by my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), so I can see why the Government might want to conspire on this little plot. They are afraid of him and they might want to squeeze him out.

We are not afraid of that, but, in the context of granting the Government ever more frequent opportunities to play fast and loose with the traditions of the House and its Standing and Sessional Orders, we are afraid that the motion is merely yet another example of how they regard the House of Commons and way in which it works. That is deplorable. The Parliamentary Secretary tried, as Ministers now routinely do, to say that this was a small technical matter of little consequence. He seemed to suggest that it could be dealt with late at night and nodded through, and that nobody need be concerned or interested. We are concerned and interested, however, and I hope that we will hear from him some more substantial and persuasive reasons for the Government's actions than he has so far been prepared to provide.

12.29 am

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I rise to support my hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

I have particular and general reasons for opposing the motion. My particular reasons are those identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton. The motion makes provision to protect the Chancellor, but Government Front Benchers entirely overlooked the need to provide time for my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). They also overlooked the need, if that is the proper word in this context, to provide time for the leader of the Liberal Democrats.

Three possible conclusions can be drawn, and they probably overlap. One is that Government Front Benchers are plain selfish; another is that they are plain discourteous; and another is that they are wholly incompetent. Indeed, there is another—that they are all three together, which I suspect is the truth.

The Government's decision was probably taken this way: "Oh, we must protect the Chancellor." They did not initially think of the Opposition's response, because they never think about the Opposition. They do not want to hear a response; they simply want to ram their business through. Someone probably then said, "But what about the Opposition?" to which they said, "Damn the Opposition", as they usually do in one way or another, and "Wouldn't it be funny to see their Members going out to vote while the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks was speaking?" Plain selfishness, plain discourtesy and plain incompetence are bound up together, which is rather typical of this Labour Government. That takes me to the second point.

We should not be conferring respectability on deferred Divisions. The Parliamentary Secretary is doubtless worried that none of his right hon. and hon. Friends will vote in a deferred Division. If that happens, I say jolly good show. We should not be having deferred Divisions. It is profoundly humiliating to see right hon. and hon. Members with their little pink forms in their hands, scurrying around to see a little Whip to say, "Oh do tell me how I should vote", when they had not attended the debate, know nothing about the subject, care not about it all—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must remind the right hon. and learned Gentleman that we are not discussing the principle of deferred Divisions but the particular deferred Division that is to take place next week.

Mr. Hogg: Indeed; I am talking about the particular as well. I was theorising that the Parliamentary Secretary was concerned that Members would not vote in the deferred Division on 7 March. I was saying that it would be a jolly good thing if they did not, and was explaining why, not in general but in particular terms—the particular term being that the process is a disgrace. Therefore, on 7 March, if Labour Members choose not to vote or are unable to vote, that will be a jolly good thing.

I shall be careful not to vote on Wednesday 7 March because I do not wish to confer respectability on the process. I was very cheered by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton saying that we would bury the practice. If she had not said it, I would have done so. When we are in government, let me make it plain that I shall never, ever vote in a deferred Division because I think that the practice is a disgrace.

Mrs. Browning: I reassure my right hon. and learned Friend that he will never be asked to do so.

Mr. Hogg: That is a good thing because if I were asked, I would not do so. Little pink forms and little Whips, running around asking how I propose to vote on 7 March or, indeed, at any other time are an absurdity.

There is the final point, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst drew attention: this Government's fast and loose practices. Not so long ago, we laid down the Standing Orders that provided for this nonsense. In order to placate or accommodate the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or the Prime Minister of the day—here today, gone tomorrow—we are being asked to change our rules again. Why on earth should we? Here we are in this old, established legislature, and we are being made a monkey of by monkeys.

12.34 am

Mr. Tipping: This has been a lively debate. It has become more lively and enthusiastic as the evening has progressed. I do not wish to curtail the debate, but hon. Members who have opposed the motion opposed in principle the issue of deferred Divisions. They have made their position very clear. The position of the House is very

clear: deferred Divisions are an experiment and the time will come when Members will have the opportunity to reconsider the experiment.

A number of points have been made about the time available for deferred Divisions. The No Lobby will be open until 7 o'clock, which will give Members ample opportunity, if they wish, to listen to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and to the Leader of the Opposition's reply. The shadow Chancellor may reply to my right hon. Friend after the next general election when a new leader of the Conservative party is in place.

The point has been made by Members who are well versed in the traditions of the House that it is traditional for a Budget statement to be made on a Tuesday. If they looked back at the record they would see that Budget days are not always on a Tuesday. In 1997, it was on 2 July, which was a Wednesday. In 1980 and 1963, it was on a Wednesday. In the 1960s, it was always on a Monday. There is nothing in particular about this year's statement being on a Wednesday.

I am disappointed but not surprised to be called selfish and discourteous.

Mr. Hogg: And incompetent.

Mr. Tipping: I am happy to live with that last insult, but not selfish and discourteous.

Mr. Hogg: And incompetent.

Mr. Tipping: I shall not engage in that debate. It was a lively debate, and it gets livelier as we proceed. I believe that the motion is for the benefit of all Members. I do not believe that it is selfish or discourteous. It is right that all Members should have the opportunity to listen to the Chancellor and to the response, and to vote in deferred Divisions if they wish.

Question put:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Tipping: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thought that this would be a deferred Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker: My apologies to the House. It must have been the liveliness of the debate.

Mr. Hogg: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Once a Division has been called, I think that it has to be proceeded with.

Madam Deputy Speaker: That is not the case. The Division will be deferred.

Division deferred till Wednesday 28 February.

Vote on Account 2001–02

12.38 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move,

That paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall apply on a day not later than 18th March as if the words '(aa) votes on account for the coming financial year;' were inserted after line 21.

I have no doubt that we shall have an equally lively debate on this motion. Standing Order No. 55(2)(a) covers votes on account with questions to be put not later than 6 February. The purpose of the motion is to amend the Standing Order so that a vote on account resolution can be taken with the spring rather than the winter supplementary estimates.

The procedure is to meet the requirements of the House when it is necessary to take estimates at a different time than is normally allowed for in Standing Orders. This procedural change is part of the process of introducing resource accounting and budgeting to allow Parliament an additional three months to scrutinise 1999-2000 resource accounts before voting Supply for the first time, and to produce a more accurate reflection of Departments' needs for the early months of 2001-02 by basing the proportion on account for resources and cash on the anticipated provision for 2001-02 main estimates. I commend the motion to the House.

12.39 am

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): We have no objection in principle to the change of date.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Oh really!

Mr. Letwin: I speak for the official Opposition. I may represent forces unseen rather than those visible in the House.

We have no objection in principle to the alteration of the date, which was prefigured in either 1997 or 1998 and is a necessary consequence of resource budgeting. As the Financial Secretary is well aware, resource budgeting commands the support of and was originated by the Conservative party. While we are at it, resource budgeting is a matter of consensus between all parties, which is not something that recommends itself to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth).

Mr. Forth: My hon. Friend says that the alteration was prefigured in 1997 or 1998. Can he guess, imagine or speculate as to why such an important change to Standing Orders is being considered by the House now?

Mr. Letwin: No, I cannot. My right hon. Friend makes the good point that it would undoubtedly have been better had the House had time to consider the issue. Indeed, we could have had upwards of two years to do so. Although it is remarkable that we have been given only a few days, I would not wish to oppose the substance of the change of date.

I reiterate two points that emerged during proceedings on the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 and which, alas, do not seem to be reflected in the documents that underlie the debate. First, the Supply estimates for

[Mr. Letwin]

2000-01 remain wholly obscure to any ordinary intellect and it is impossible for any ordinary Member of the House to discern from them what on earth is going on. It was presumably Gladstone's intention when he devised the system that it should illuminate rather than obscure the nature of Government accounts. It has remained the case, however, that the presentation of those accounts obscures rather than illuminates. To put it mildly, that is regrettable.

It will take time to change the system under which we have all laboured for some years. Although I do not accuse the Government of having invented it, no Member of the House has the slightest idea of what is voted for what and why or the size of any increase, and the Select Committees that inspect those matters do so in a manner that unfortunately leaves much to be desired.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Shameful.

Mr. Letwin: This is not a party matter and, as the hon. Gentleman says from the Liberal Benches, it is ultimately shameful that we all sit here, year after year, voting on account and, ultimately, voting on the estimates themselves without having the slightest idea of what we are collectively doing.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): As an extraordinary intellect, perhaps my hon. Friend can explain why he supports changing 6 February to 18 March in paragraph (2) of Standing Order No. 55? Why is such a change suddenly wholly defensible? Can he explain the significance of the extra 40 days?

Mr. Letwin: Yes, I think I can, although I cannot explain the substance of the Supply estimates, which is a more serious problem. My hon. Friend is a member of the Treasury Committee and I suspect that he cannot explain that to me, either. The 40 days, the Financial Secretary will agree, are occasioned by the fact that the timetable set for resource accounting some years ago envisaged a termination date approximately 40 days later than that used in cash accounting. I believe that that will occur only in the first year of resource accounting, although I am subject to correction.

As we began the practice of resource accounting and have supported it throughout, and as it is material to implementing certain of our most important policies—for example, restructuring the approach to pensions—we want to give a fair wind to whatever needs to be done to make resource accounting work.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My hon. Friend said that most Members do not have the slightest idea of what Ministers intend. Does he think that the Minister whom he faces this evening is acting knowingly or from a position of nescience?

Mr. Letwin: If I may, I shall correct my hon. Friend, who is normally punctilious in his accuracy. I did not say that I thought that very few Members knew what was going on. I said that no Member did, and I meant that. I do not believe that there is any living Member of the House of Commons—indeed, there has probably been no living Member for a long while—who has, or had, the slightest idea of what is really going on in the supplementary estimates.

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury is probably one of the most intelligent members of the Government, and I do not mean that ironically.

Mr. Forth: It would not be difficult.

Mr. Letwin: I shall let my right hon. Friend's comment pass in silence.

I suspect that, despite having the advantage of—if I remember correctly—some 2,000 of the most intelligent officials in Whitehall behind him, the Financial Secretary also has not the slightest idea of what is in the estimates, because no living human being could understand them. They were not invented to be understood; they were invented as an art form. There is a serious administrative problem here, which is not being faced.

Before I end what I had intended to be a rather briefer speech, let me mention another problem, which I think could be cured much more quickly.

Mr. Fallon: Before my hon. Friend deals with that problem, may I point out that some Back Benchers try to keep up with policy that is made on the Front Bench? Obviously, it involves us from time to time.

My hon. Friend seemed to say that he supported this change because it was a one-off. I see no reference to that in any of the four estimates already presented for the next year in the Vote Office. Is my hon. Friend saying that he supports this change in resource accounting just for the coming financial year, as a one-off change, and does not support a permanent change in the Standing Order?

Let us be clear. We are not being asked to change a Sessional Order; we are being asked to change a Standing Order, which is a serious matter.

Mr. Letwin: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. I understand—although I am subject to correction by the Financial Secretary—that in either 1997 or 1998, when the matter was first raised, it was intended that the change of date should apply to the first year's preparation because of the delay entailed in the original programme for resource accounting. I believe it is intended that thereafter resource accounts should be produced according to the timetable that previously applied to cash accounts, which would permit—and, I suppose, therefore necessitate—a reversion of the Standing Orders to their original form after the event.

Mr. Edward Davey: I think I can elucidate. The Financial Secretary may wish to intervene, but the Order Paper specifically refers to a "Vote on Account 2001–02". I understood that to mean that the change in the Standing Order would apply only to that vote.

Mr. Letwin: That is what I, too, understand the effect to be—the Standing Orders will subsequently revert to their original form.

Mr. Fallon: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It might be helpful if the Chair clarified one point. The phrase to which both my hon. Friend and the

hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) have referred—the title of the motion, "Vote on Account 2001-02"—does not feature in the motion. The motion simply translates the words "votes on account for the coming financial year"—and, once we have changed the Standing Orders, that will apply to any financial year—from Standing Order No. 55(2) to Standing Order No. 55(3), thus allowing for the extra 40 days.

As far as I can see, nothing in the motion specifically relates it to the year 2001–02. I should be grateful if you, Madam Deputy Speaker, could clarify whether we are changing the Standing Orders simply for the accounts in the coming year, or whether we are doing it for every financial year, as the current Standing Orders suggest.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): We are merely changing the Standing Orders.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Your understanding—which is also mine, from my reading of the Order Paper—seems to contradict what the Minister indicated to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), from a sedentary position. The Minister indicated that, as far as he was concerned, this was a change to the Standing Order only in respect of the accounts for the financial year 2001-02. It might assist the House if the Minister told us whether your understanding and mine, Madam Deputy Speaker, is incorrect.

Mr. Timms: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I help the House by making the position a little clearer? The intention is that the change will apply to this year only. The vote on account, which would normally be based on a proportion—45 per cent.—of the current year's figures, cannot be so based this year because there is no set of resource accounts to use. Therefore, exceptionally, the 45 per cent. proportion is based on the projection of spending next year. Therefore, the measure needs to be used only once. When we get to the winter accounts next year, we will be—

Mr. Fallon: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister was replying to a point of order. I would prefer him to conclude his remarks before taking a further point of order from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Timms: Next year, it will be possible to construct the vote on account in the normal way. It will then be taken with the winter estimates, as has always been the practice.

Mr. Fallon: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister's explanation is absolutely correct and assists the House. However, the motion cannot be right because it amends our Standing Orders, not a Sessional Order. The changes apply permanently. Standing Orders are not changed from Session to Session and will incorporate the words

"votes on account for the coming financial year".

That will apply for every coming financial year. If it is a one-off motion—I think that the Minister has made it clear that it is—the title of the motion should have been incorporated in the motion. I therefore ask you whether it would be possible to defer the matter until the Financial Secretary has reworded the motion and cleared the matter up.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The matter cannot be deferred. Those are matters for debate.

Mr. Forth: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Surely if the Minister's intention were to be reflected in the motion, it should have said, at the very least, "on a day not later than 18 March 2001", to put it beyond doubt that it was a one-off and time limited. What the Minister has stated as his and the Government's intention is not reflected in the motion. That obviously causes the House some confusion. Are we to believe the Minister's explanation, or the words on which we will be asked to vote? That is what we need your guidance on.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The points that the right hon. Gentleman has raised are not points of order, but matters for debate.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. It seems that you understood, and I and my hon. Friends understand, that the motion is to change Standing Orders.

Mr. Fallon: For any year.

Mr. Howarth: For any year. If the Minister's intention is that the motion should apply only to the accounts relating to the coming year, it will be necessary, once those are disposed of at some later date, for the House to be invited again to change the Standing Orders. Therefore, it seems to us that the motion, in the terms in which the Government have moved it, is defective.

Madam Deputy Speaker: The motion that we are discussing is as on the Order Paper. Whatever the interpretations or implications of that are, they are a matter for debate.

Mr. Bercow: Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am sorry, but the position is now gloriously unclear and hon. Members will, I think, require clarification. If the practice that is proposed this year to embody the Government's intention is to be discontinued in a future year, will a motion of revocation be required—yes or no?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have already dealt with the point of order.

Mr. Bercow: No, you have not.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I have given a ruling on the point of order. The motion that we are debating is as stated on the Order Paper. The other points that have been made are matters for debate.

Mr. Letwin: I come back to the Dispatch Box a humbler and a wiser man. I think that it is clear that the debate—which was not a debate but rather a series of

[Mr. Letwin]

points of order—has brought out an important point that is a point of debate: that although the intent of the change is entirely innocuous, it is so drafted that it will necessitate, as I first speculated, a further change at a later date to achieve the intent. I take it that, later in the debate, we shall receive an assurance from the Minister that the change in relation to the following year will be forthcoming on a subsequent occasion. If so, I can return, but wiser, to the proposition that, in principle, we have no objection to what the Government are seeking to achieve.

Mr. Fallon: Madam Deputy Speaker has surely ruled absolutely correctly. The Minister is trying to change the Standing Orders and has tabled a motion so to change them. However, as a consequence of Madam Deputy Speaker's ruling, he has made it clear that he will have to change the Standing Orders again. I submit to my hon. Friend that that is an abuse of Standing Orders. The purpose of Standing Orders is to be standing—they should govern our conduct Session after Session. The Minister has said that he is changing a Standing Order but will have to have to change it again for the next financial year. Therefore, he should not be pursuing this particular procedure today.

Mr. Letwin: I agree with my hon. Friend that, now that the debate which was not a debate has revealed that the motion is less well worded than it should have been, it would have been better if the Minister had arranged for it to be properly worded initially.

Mr. Timms: The procedure that we are following is an entirely normal one. As I understand it, a subsequent change will be needed. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support for the intent of the motion. However, to achieve that intent, we have had to proceed as we have. There is no other way of achieving that intention.

Mr. Letwin: I am learning more and more, but, unfortunately, I am learning conflictingly from my hon. Friends and from the Minister. I know not whether this is the ordinary way of proceeding. Regardless, as we are agreed that the intent is reasonable, I shall rest there for a moment.

I should like, however, to draw attention to what is not in the right order at all—the matter of how we are to reconcile the columns in the vote on account that are to be the subject of the vote to which the change in Standing Orders refers. In our consideration of the Government Resources and Accounts Act, we very carefully and—I am sure that the Financial Secretary would agree—at inordinate length spelled out the dangers and difficulties of operating simultaneously a cash and resource accounting system. We made it completely clear, and abundantly clear to the Financial Secretary, that, to enable any sensible discussion of those votes on account to occur, it would be necessary for the House to be able to reconcile the cash figures with the resource accounting figures.

Even a cursory inspection of the figures in the columns will show that, as is not unexpected, the cash requirement is in many cases significantly in excess of the resource accounting figure. The difference between those figures will lie, presumably, in that part of expenditure that is investment and which is not therefore a loss, in profit and loss terms, and so does not enter into the resource accounting figures. That is understood.

However, there is an oddity. In principle, in a steady state, the cash expended in one year as investment should replace depreciation from a previous year. It is of the utmost importance that we are able to understand the relationship between the excess cash going into investment and the depreciation in the resource accounting figures. Otherwise, we will not know what is happening to capital expenditure and its relationship with the assets being depreciated.

That is a severe, and odd, deficiency. I have not checked *Hansard*, but I seem to recall that we were given assurances during the passage of the Government Resources and Accounts Act that the problem would not arise and that reconciliations would be shown. I hope that the Financial Secretary will ask his officials, at a more opportune time of day, to provide reconciliations. In that way, when the accounts come up for voting, we will at least be able to understand the broad headings and their reconciliation one with another.

As I said earlier, no one in the House will understand anything about the supply estimates. That is a much greater problem but one that can be remedied over time, as we develop a system of accountability that enables the House of Commons to hold the Government to account in a knowledgeable and pellucid way, rather than in a form that is opaque and lacking in knowledge.

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I apologise to the House that I was not present at the start of the debate, but I have been watching it in my office. I hastened here before retiring to make a considerable point.

If the Government intend that the provision should apply only for the limited period of this year, they should introduce a Sessional Order, which will fall. They have introduced an alteration to Standing Orders which they will have to change again. Can anyone imagine anything more crazy than that?

Mr. Letwin: I have moved from ignorance, through a wiser state of confusion, and now the clouds have parted and I emerge into the light. My right hon. Friend knows more about the House's procedures than almost any other living person. He has explained for the first time how the Government should have acted. I hope that the Minister will take due account of that preferable way of achieving his intention.

1.2 am

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): We have heard some fairly poor arguments in the debate, and especially in respect of the motion. If I am wrong, I stand to be corrected, but my understanding is that Standing Orders cannot contain temporary provisions, and that Standing Orders relating to financial matters cannot be changed by Sessional Orders.

If Standing Order No. 55 were not amended in the way proposed, the House would not be able to receive votes on account for the coming financial year, based on resource accounting. The arguments that have been advanced tonight therefore fall at their first examination. We should put aside what we have heard so far, and address the substance of the motion.

Like the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), Liberal Democrat Members have nothing against the proposal. The proposed timing change is exactly right, and the proposal has not been foisted suddenly on the House. I was a member of the Select Committee on Procedure that considered the issue. We published the second report, HC 438, for the 1997–98 Session. All these issues, particularly the need to have resource-based accounts for 2000–01 in the spring, were foreshadowed in Treasury memorandums to the Select Committee inquiry and were reported on by the Committee.

The Comptroller and Auditor General, Sir John Bourn, in evidence to the Select Committee, referred to that change, as did the chief officer for accountancy, Professor Andrew Likierman. Therefore, nothing should come as a surprise to right hon. and hon. Members if they have followed the process carefully.

I am concerned about two issues at the heart of the argument and what lies behind it. The first is how the House changes its Standing Orders. The Government propose changes to Standing Orders. Although that has been the case for a number of decades, it did not used to be. The Chair used to propose changes to Standing Orders until, in the 1920s or 1930s, the Government took over that power. I believe that it was a major constitutional change that slid by the House. We should revert—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. I must stop the hon. Gentleman there. This is not an occasion for a wide-ranging debate on how Standing Orders work. It is a very narrow motion and I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman and any other hon. Members who were thinking of contributing would confine their remarks precisely to the motion before the House.

Mr. Davey: Of course I will do that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was merely seeking to argue that the process of changing the Standing Orders that is before us is not a good one. I think that I have made that point.

My other concern is that the reason for this change that was foreshadowed in the Procedure Committee report has not been met. Paragraph 30 of the report shows that the Treasury said, and the Committee accepted it, that the reason for this specific change was that

> "Since parliamentary approval for the Vote on Account would not then be sought until March 2001, that would allow Parliament an additional three months to scrutinise the first set of published Resource Accounts"—*[Interruption.]*

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) says from a sedentary position that the Financial Secretary has already said that. He did not say that in specific terms—he gave a separate excuse for that point. I am going back to the reason that was given to the Select Committee—the real reason. As I was saying, paragraph 30 of the report says:

> "Since parliamentary approval for the Vote on Account would not then be sought until March 2001, that would allow Parliament an additional three months to scrutinise the first set of published Resource Accounts before voting Supply on a resource basis for the first time."

I took the liberty earlier this evening to talk to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. I asked him whether, to his knowledge, either his Committee or a Select Committee had scrutinised the first set of resource accounts.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman again that the motion is to do with a simple change to a date in a Standing Order. That is all. I would be grateful if he would confine his remarks to that.

Mr. Davey: With respect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I am doing that. I wish to explain myself. The quote to which I referred was about that change. I am concerned that the reason that was originally given to the Select Committee for the change has not been met.

I am concerned that the House and Select Committees have not scrutinised the first set of published resource accounts—the reason we were given for the need for delay. The Financial Secretary to the Treasury might argue that that is the fault of Select Committees. That may be so, but why have they failed to take those measures? I have raised the matter previously in debates on the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000. If I went into the reasons for what has happened, I should be out of order, so I will not take that route—

Hon. Members: Go on!

Mr. Letwin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the idea that such scrutiny could be conducted effectively between now and 18 March is ludicrous?

Mr. Davey: I concur with the hon. Gentleman on that point. Indeed, I agreed with what he said during his opening remarks—that the accounts and estimates produced on the resource basis are not as clear as we were promised in the Standing Committee on the legislation that foreshadowed this proposed change in the Standing Orders.

The House spends much time debating such matters as Standing Orders and procedures, but spends little time on the substance—the cash and resources that we are sent to this place to scrutinise. That is a major problem—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is again wandering off the subject. I should be grateful if he would now conclude.

Mr. Davey: I have done so, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

1.11 am

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Mr. Deputy Speaker, the motion presents the House with a difficulty that your predecessor in the Chair this evening was able to clear up. Madam Deputy Speaker reminded the House that we can debate only the specific motion before us.

We are in a difficulty for two reasons, however. The title of the motion, which is not of course part of the motion, is "Vote on Account 2001–02". Madam Deputy Speaker ruled and the Financial Secretary to the Treasury clarified that the alteration of the Standing Order cannot possibly apply simply to the vote on account 2001–02, because we are altering a—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I make it plain to the hon. Gentleman that, this evening, we are simply changing a Standing Order in the way set out?

Mr. Fallon: I appreciate that, Mr. Deputy Speaker; that was the purpose of some of the earlier points of order. I was drawing the attention of the House to the title of the motion—"Vote on Account 2001–02". As Madam Deputy Speaker implied, something is wrong; if we are changing a Standing Order, it cannot be related to a vote on account for a particular year.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It might help the House if we try to clarify the exact status of the rubric—the title of the motion. Surely, the title "Vote on Account 2001–02" is an error. That indicates the Government's intention, which is that the vote is for this year, but the title should simply read "Vote on Account". If the motion were to go to a deferred Division—as is possible—might the offending figures, "2001-02", have been removed by the time the voting paper appears? I believe those figures to be an error.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. That title "Vote on Account 2001-02" is not an error. If he reads the Standing Order that is being changed, he will see that it refers to the "coming financial year".

Mr. Fallon: The House is in some difficulty. The present Standing Order refers to the "coming financial year", but the provision for votes on account for the coming financial year is being translated from the paragraph applying to 6 February to the paragraph applying to 18 March. By changing the Standing Orders, that will apply to every subsequent financial year. Am I not correct, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to say that the change in Standing Orders will apply to every subsequent financial year?

Perhaps that change has to be classified in House of Commons business as a vote on account for 2001–02, but shortly before you took the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the Minister conceded that he will have to change the Standing Order again for the future year, so something else is wrong. Of course the date of 18 March should only apply to the current year. The motion should state 18 March 2001, because the Minister has already made it clear that he will have to change it for the future year.

I hope that you will agree, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that something is wrong; either the rubric is slightly misleading, or the date is incomplete, because the Minister has conceded that he is changing a Standing Order, but only on a temporary basis, and that he will return to the House to change it again the following year.

Mr. Bercow: The possibility of 18 March being a Sunday obviously needs to be adequately addressed.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention is irrelevant.

Mr. Fallon: I had not considered the possibility of 18 March occurring on a Sunday.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I shall, of course, give way if my hon. Friend wants to make a separate point.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way because I was making only the first of two points, and I know that he will be attentive to that fact. Does he not agree that to be told, in effect, that changing the Standing Order involves changing the Standing Order is not only a tautology, but about as useful as Heidegger's "nothing noths"? Does he agree that we need to know—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be very careful if he is attempting to criticise the Chair in any way. It is very ill-advised.

Mr. Fallon: I shall not pursue the phrasing of the motion any longer; I simply leave the House with my suggestion that it would have been better entitled, "Alteration to Standing Orders", rather than, "Vote and

Account 2001-02", and that it might have been more complete if it had included reference to the year after the date in line 2, but I shall not pursue that matter any more.

We have some further difficulties, given what the Minister has said. I now fully understand, although there is no reference to this in the motion, that the change is intended to accommodate the greater change to resource accounting and budgeting. The Minister has not quite explained that to me, and I am further baffled by the reference made by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) to three months because I understand that the change involves approximately 40 days. I do not understand how it somehow allows the House or its Committees a further three months for scrutiny.

Mr. Edward Davey: Under Standing Order No. 55(2), which relates to a date in February—

Mr. Timms: It refers to 6 February.

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the Minister for that comment. Under Standing Order No. 55(2), votes on account were traditionally put before the House in November. That is why the change was suggested, and why it would allow an extra three months to scrutinise the resource accounts, but that has not taken place.

Mr. Fallon: I hesitate to correct my hon. colleague on the Select Committee on the Treasury, but, in effect, the Minister is, as I think I have now said four times, translating the provisions of paragraph (2) to paragraph (3); he is changing the date from 6 February to 18 March, which allows an additional 40 days. Of course the House allows an additional 40 days under Standing Order No. 55(3) in certain circumstances—for votes that relate to defence services, and there may well be good reasons for that; for supplementary estimates, and equally I can understand why there may well be good reasons for that; and for excess votes, but only provided that they have been scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee. In other words, the additional 40 days are allowed and provided for under our Standing Orders, but that is subject to certain safeguards and they are allowed only for a certain category of votes.

In proposing the change, the Financial Secretary is, in effect, classifying all estimates for the subsequent financial year under the category covered by Standing Order No. 55(3). All those estimates will fall under what was previously screened off for three particular categories alone. The change deserves a greater explanation than he has given us tonight.

The Financial Secretary should have explained to my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)—perhaps he will when he responds to the debate—why the change is being made so long after the move to resource and account budgeting was first trailed. He has had a number of years in which to make the change to the Standing Order, and I am slightly puzzled why he is doing it this year.

Mr. Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Fallon: Yes, but I hope that this intervention will be a little more fruitful than the previous one.

Mr. Davey: I shall not rise to that bait. The change could not be made earlier because the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 had to become law before it could be made. Until that happened, this change to Standing Orders could not be put before the House.

Mr. Fallon: I am not particularly satisfied by that explanation, either. As the hon. Gentleman is aware, the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000 has been law for some time.

Mr. Davey: This is a new Session.

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Gentleman says that it is a new Session but, as my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) reminded us, we are not dealing with Sessional Orders. We are dealing with the Standing Orders of the House, and they are not produced or revised every Session at the whim and convenience of the Government. Any change to them is a very serious matter. These Standing Orders were reprinted a month ago, so I am puzzled as to why we are now being asked suddenly to amend them. Why did the Financial Secretary not introduce the change a little earlier in the Session so that we would not now be rushed into making the change after the period beginning in February had already begun?

Once the Act to which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton referred had become law, the Financial Secretary could have come to the House to make the change. He is making it at a very late stage in the proceedings and, in the normal course of events, the estimates that he is trying to translate from Standing Order No. 55(2) to 55(3) would be presented in the next couple of weeks in any event. He could and should have made the change very much earlier in this Session.

Mr. Forth: Is my hon. Friend aware that, between now and March 18—which is a Sunday by the way—only 12 parliamentary days are available. Of them, a number will be taken up by the Budget and the Budget debate. Is he not rather worried by that fact?

Mr. Fallon: I am concerned about that. My right hon. Friend has anticipated my remarks, because I was about to refer to the votes that are currently available in the Vote Office. At the moment, only four have been presented and they are all dated February. The first is for £120 million and is for the central Government supply estimates. The second is a vote for £212 million, which is the vote on account for the House and its running costs. The third—the vote on account for the National Audit Office—is for £46 million. The final vote is the supply estimate for the Electoral Commission, which is £4 million. Only four documents are before the House. My right hon. Friend may well want to explore when the remaining documents will be presented and how we will have sufficient time to conclude our deliberations on them before 18 March because, as the Leader of the House has indicated, there is substantial business to discuss before then.

[Mr. Fallon]

As for what the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton was struggling to say, the purpose of the Standing Order, as I understand it, is to ensure that everyone—including the PAC and the departmental Select Committees—has sufficient time before the beginning of the financial year to subject the estimates to reasonable parliamentary scrutiny. However, if we classify them as matters that do not have to be considered before 6 February, we will weaken the scrutiny of the departmental Select Committees and the control of the PAC.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman has misunderstood. The Treasury and the Procedure Committee decided that we needed three months to consider the first set of resource accounts so that the House would have some knowledge of how they were used and of their structure. As a result, we could then scrutinise the estimates that would be covered by the Standing Order. It is the accounts that are relevant, not the estimates.

Mr. Fallon: The motion refers to the estimates, not the accounts. We are not dealing with them.

Mr. Davey: The Standing Order was changed to enable departmental Select Committees to get used to the new system by studying the first set of resource accounts. That is what the Procedure Committee was told and it is what Her Majesty's Treasury set out in memorandum to justify the change.

Mr. Fallon: I hope that the hon. Gentleman has studied the motion. It refers to the voting of estimates, not of accounts. We are discussing the estimates and asking for the departmental Select Committees and the PAC to be given time to consider them. We have been subjected to a confused procedure. The Financial Secretary has been caught out trying to amend a Standing Order on a temporary and sessional basis. He has been honest enough to concede that he will return to the House—presumably next November or December—to amend the order again so that it does not apply to 2002-03.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): The reciprocal argument is that we should give the Government the power to commit a future Parliament to the provisions of a Standing Order. Surely it is only right that we pass an order that is relevant for the time being. A future Parliament must have the right to change it. The Financial Secretary cannot make that commitment, however good he is, and I respect him greatly.

Mr. Fallon: I hope that my right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon will speak. The whole point of a Standing Order is that it has been considered by the Procedure Committee and is adopted not for a Session, but for the long-term conduct of business.

Mr. Miller: Is it unamendable?

Mr. Fallon: It can be changed at a later date, but it must be distinct from a Sessional Order. There is no point in having orders that can simply be changed by any Government motion.

Mr. Bercow: We all understand the point about parliamentary sovereignty, but does my hon. Friend take the view, in so far as he can interpret Government thinking, that Ministers intend that the change should be subject to automatic expiry and the requirement for representation, or rather that it will continue ad infinitum—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is at it again. We are debating changes in the Standing Orders before the House, not what may or may not happen in future.

Mr. Fallon: That must be right, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Perhaps my hon. Friend has been misled by the already stated intention of the Minister that the motion is not really a change to the Standing Order. It will be replaced by a subsequent change, which may or may not be a Sessional Order, a Standing Order or whatever.

The change weakens the authority of the Public Accounts Committee. It will make it more difficult for the departmental Select Committees to do their work because it completely changes the time scale. It does so at a late stage in the process. After all, we are already between 6 February and 18 March. If the change were to be made, it might not be unreasonable to conclude that it should have been made before we entered the period after 6 February. The House is entitled to a better explanation.

1.31 am

Sir Peter Emery (East Devon): I do not like to find myself in difficulty when dealing with matters of procedure. I have no doubt that the motion, which is to insert

"(aa) votes on account for the coming financial year",

to be "inserted after line 21" on page 35 of the new Standing Orders, would be a permanency. It would apply for this year and every coming year. As I understand it, that is not the Government's desired intention. That was made clear when the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, who has left the Chamber, said that he would introduce an alteration to the new Standing Order that we are being asked to pass.

If the Government had wished the change to apply only to the coming year, it would have been possible to have introduced it by means of a Sessional Order. I am being told that that is impossible, but the new Sessional Orders that we have had since 7 November last year have introduced programme motions, Programming Sub-Committees, a different procedure for amendments and deferred Divisions. Against that background, I cannot believe that it is beyond the wit of the House, if it desired the change to be made only for the year, to introduce a

Sessional Order, which would fall at the end of the Session. Apparently, that is what the Government desired to do.

Mr. Edward Davey: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Sir Peter Emery: Yes, I suppose so.

Mr. Davey: I think that I can help the right hon. Gentleman. As I understand it, the Sessional Orders to which he has referred are not designed to change anything that is currently in the Standing Orders. If a change were made by Sessional Order, there would be a conflict with Standing Orders, and the occupant of the Chair would understandably have difficulty in interpreting the will of the House with respect to Standing Orders.

Sir Peter Emery: If the hon. Gentleman, whom I thank for his intervention, believes that it was not a change to Standing Orders to introduce deferred voting on a Wednesday, thus altering the whole structure of voting, I can only say I do not know what would be.

Mr. Fallon: In the appendix to the Standing Orders, it is made clear—I do not know whether it refers to a Sessional Order or whether, since it is in the appendix, it is a Standing Order—that the order referring to deferred Divisions applies only for the next Session of Parliament. Surely that is the route that the Government should have chosen for this change.

Sir Peter Emery: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That is what a Sessional Order is: it applies only for a specific Session.

The difficulty is that we shall introduce the words on the Order Paper as a permanent part of Standing Orders. There is no doubt about that. The doubt is whether the Government intend that. They have already had to admit that they must introduce an alteration to the motion that they are asking us to carry tonight. That is not the most sensible managerial way in which to deal with Standing Orders. You, Mr. Deputy Speaker, will have to interpret the Standing Orders, and I am sure that you cannot believe that to be the best way in which to proceed.

It should be clear to the House that if the Government insist on carrying the motion, they will have to make an alteration soon to prevent it from applying in the next Session. Perhaps it would be more sensible of them to withdraw the motion and reintroduce it as a Sessional Order. Everyone could then agree to it. The Government would get what they wanted, but in a sensible way as regards Standing Orders and Sessional Orders. That is what I recommend them to do.

1.36 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I, like you, I suspect, Mr. Deputy Speaker, voted consistently against televising the proceedings of this place. However, we have just heard a good reason why televising the House has brought some advantage. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon (Sir P. Emery) was able to observe our proceedings from his office and then come to the Chamber to deliver himself of a lucid speech explaining why the Government have made a mistake in the way in which they have sought to present the motion.

Two issues face us. One concerns the arrangements regarding the motion. The other is the presentation of accounts. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) made clear, the accounts are extremely difficult to follow.

On the motion, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) was helpful in reminding us of how matters stood before resource accounting was introduced. The votes on account would then have come forward in November, giving the Public Accounts Committee and the House plenty of time to consider them in advance of 6 February, the cut-off date by which the votes on account must be presented to the House for consideration.

The Government have been unable to produce those accounts in time for 6 February. Indeed, they have brought them forth tonight, so they are already, in a sense, out of time in respect of Standing Orders. I am happy to give way to the Minister if I am wrong on that, and I hope that he will say something when he winds up. Already, the accounts are out of date, and the Government must therefore amend the Standing Orders, either by Sessional Order or by changing Standing Orders, so that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) said, the arrangements for votes on account for the coming financial year can be moved from paragraph (2) to paragraph (3). However, as my hon. Friend points out, that leaves only 12 working days in which the accounts can be considered by the House, and the clock is ticking.

The Standing Orders before us are brand new. They were printed not last year, but as recently as 23 January. The Government seem to have mismanaged the business. They allowed Standing Orders to be printed a month ago, yet they are now inviting the House to amend Standing Orders.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The date on which the latest edition of Standing Orders was published is not relevant to the changing of the Standing Order before the House this evening.

Mr. Howarth: My point was that as we have so recently re-published the Standing Orders, the Government should have realised that they were due to present accounts to the House by a certain deadline—in the case of votes on account, by 6 February—and that to amend Standing Orders so soon after producing new Standing Orders was nonsensical, or at least a mismanagement of the arrangements. I am not sure how far the Government are responsible for the printing of the Standing Orders; I imagine that the Leader of the House has responsibility for that and must communicate with other Ministers.

I shall not labour the point, but it is worth noting that the documents before us are already out of time. Unless the Government do something quickly to change Standing Orders or by way of a Sessional Order, there is no way that the House can consider the documents that the Government have presented to us. My right hon. Friend the Member for East Devon is right to say that the change should have been made by way of a Sessional Order.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not discussing alternative ways of doing these things. We are discussing

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

the Standing Order which, if the House so decides, will be altered this evening. We are not here to discuss other ways in which we might have dealt with the matter.

Mr. Howarth: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I thought that my right hon. Friend had suggested that that should have been done by means of a Sessional Order. We are being invited to consider a change to Standing Orders, a matter which the House should consider carefully, as Standing Orders are designed to maintain a certain continuity in the House and should not be changed at whim by Governments, willy-nilly.

There should be an element of continuity. The House should be invited to change Standing Orders only when there is a serious reason for doing so. In the Government's view, the introduction of deferred votes was sufficient reason for Standing Orders to be changed. We disagree, but I accept that the Government were entitled to do that. To change the Standing Order in respect of votes on account is wrong.

My second point relates to the accounts themselves and to the clarity thereof. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said that they were not entirely illuminating, and he doubted whether anyone understood exactly what they meant. Without disputing the amounts involved, I invite the Minister to explain the accounts. I do not understand why, for example, when there is in the central Government supply estimates reference to the Postal Services Commission and the Royal Mint, there appears under the heading

"Total forecast net resource requirement at Main Estimate on which provision on account is based"—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that we are not here this evening to discuss the details of the accounts. We are here to discuss the change in the Standing Order before the House, and I should be grateful if he would direct his remarks to that.

Mr. Howarth: I am most grateful for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

One of the reasons advanced by the Government for the change in Standing Orders is resource accounting, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton. We discussed some aspects of the presentation of accounts earlier. The Financial Secretary will have noticed the discrepancy between the £1,000 net resource requirement and the £101,000 cash requirement, which is 100 times that amount, in respect of the Postal Services Commission. Perhaps he can briefly explain that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the Financial Secretary cannot briefly explain that, as it is not in order.

Mr. Howarth: I used the word "briefly", but I accept your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We should all be grateful for the vote on account in respect of hon. Members' salaries. We all at least want to ensure that matters relating to hon. Members' salaries are not out of order, or our bank managers might be very unhappy campers.

The Government have clearly had some difficulty with the application of resource accounting within the timetable that was envisaged for the more generally established cash-accounting mechanisms. Indeed, they have made an error in tabling the motion. I believe that the means by which they have sought to implement the proposal—a change in the Standing Orders—is not appropriate, but I accept that some change must be made. The votes on account are dated 27 February, but it is clear that they should have been presented to the House for consideration before 6 February, so I accept that some action is necessary.

1.47 am

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It has become obvious that the motion is largely about time and timing, so it is also inevitably about Government competence. The crucial times have become clear during the debate. The clock started running as far back as 1998 or 1999, when, as the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) pointed out, resource accounting was launched on an unsuspecting world. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, we all knew what parliamentary—and therefore procedural—response was required in respect of the introduction of resource accounting. That much seems clear and relatively uncontroversial, but then we come to the mystery.

The next crucial dates are 6 February, 27 February and 18 March. We know that existing Standing Orders require that these matters should have been dealt with by 6 February. Presumably, the Government knew that way back in 1998 and 1999. One would have thought that a competent Government would make proper provision and come to the House in plenty of time to give it an opportunity to reflect on the time scales. We should have been allowed to consider what was required, especially as this was a new process that we would all have to get used to. A competent Government would have looked ahead, planned, consulted and then made a proper alteration to Standing Orders or Sessional Orders.

However, none of that happened: 6 February came and went and we now find ourselves on 27 February with this badly drafted motion on the Order Paper. It asks the House not only to approve a change to Standing Orders, but to accept that these important matters, which, as my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) pointed out, involve billions of pounds, must be considered between now and 18 March. My diary tells me that there are 12 parliamentary days between now and 18 March. As that day is a Sunday, it is of no use to us, and neither is 17 March, unless the Government intend to suggest that we start sitting on Saturdays and Sundays to help them out of their mess. However, the situation is worse than that because those 12 parliamentary days also include the day of the Budget and the Budget debate.

So, unless the matter will be tacked on to or subsumed by the Budget debate—I would have thought that that would be procedurally unacceptable—the Government are saying to us, "As at 27 February, we will give the House of Commons a very small amount of leeway and time in which to consider matters that involve billions of pounds of expenditure, covering a wide range of issues." As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said, that includes defence issues, matters relating to the House of Commons itself, a very long list of detailed items of departmental expenditure, and so on.

This is extremely unsatisfactory to say the least, and how we have got ourselves into this position is self-evident: the Government are either incompetent, or, worse—this is a more sinister explanation—they have conspired to bring the matter before the House so late as to give it insufficient time to consider not just the procedural matter but the substantive matter.

Mr. Edward Davey: I cannot agree with the right hon. Gentleman on this point, much as I should like to. I have here a document dated 24 March 1998, which contains the phrase:

"Since parliamentary approval for the vote on account would not then be sought until March 2001".

The House was told more than two years ago that we would not be asked for approval for the vote on account until March 2001. Therefore, I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman's argument seems to fall.

Mr. Forth: I am not sure that it does. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for trying to help me; his expertise in and influence on these matters is beyond doubt. If we knew about the matter all along, why has it been brought before the House on February 27, late at night, in a rush, not allowing the House to give it proper consideration? That is the difficulty in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Letwin: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the genesis of the change is that the Government believe, as, regrettably, Governments have for a long time, that votes on account and, indeed, the whole of the rest of the panoply of the Gladstonian system, are formalities and that we should be asked to vote through £250 billion with hardly a nod or a wink?

Mr. Forth: I fear that my hon. Friend is all too correct in his analysis. Yet again, we have an example—this is a very glaring and expensive one—of the Government genuinely believing that parliamentary scrutiny, whether of financial or any other matter, is so marginal and irrelevant that it can be reduced to the proposed process for both the motion before us and Standing Orders generally. I do not want to get too distracted by the debate—

Mr. Fallon: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I beg to move, That the House sit in private.

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 163 (House to sit in private):—

The House divided: Ayes 1, Noes 62.

Division No. 137] **[1.55 am**

AYES

Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Burgon, Colin
Butler, Mrs Christine
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Davidson, Ian
Dobbin, Jim
Drew, David
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hurst, Alan
Jenkins, Brian
Kilfoyle, Peter
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McNulty, Tony
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mudie, George
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Öpik, Lembit
Pearson, Ian
Pope, Greg
Purchase, Ken
Rendel, David
Roy, Frank
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sawford, Phil
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Ward, Ms Claire
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woolas, Phil

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Graham Allen and
Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Forth: Furthermore—*[Interruption.]* It is very gratifying to address such a lively House at this hour and I trust that that interest will continue for quite some time. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Oh yes, for quite some time. We were discussing Standing Orders. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, 100 Members are required to vote on a closure motion so the Government Deputy Chief Whip would have to magic up another 38 Members if he wanted to try to truncate the debate, which I am sure is far from his mind. We can relax, enjoy a full-length debate with no threat of Government truncation and explore the important matter before us.

We were talking, were we not, about time—which is very appropriate, given what has just happened. In this instance, "time" relates to how the Government can possibly expect the House to be able to give proper consideration to the billions of pounds to which we have referred, in the brief period remaining between today and the date of 18 March that is mentioned in the motion.

As I have said, there are few enough parliamentary days, and many of those will already be committed. How can the Government expect us to do justice to the items in the accounts? They involve detailed matters, and matters requiring considerable debate. My hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset has already indicated their opacity; that would be bad enough, but their length, breadth and depth suggest to me that, in all conscience, we should give them much more time than the motion allows.

This is yet another matter—not the first that we have encountered this evening, and perhaps not the last—that places a substantial question mark over the Government's competence. It certainly places a question mark over their attitude to the House of Commons and the role it has played through the centuries, acting on behalf of the taxpayer in scrutinising accounts and satisfying us that matters are as they should be. It cannot be right for the

[Mr. Forth]

Government seriously to suggest that this pathetically inadequate amount of time can do justice to that job of scrutiny and accountability.

Confusion has featured throughout the debate. There has been procedural confusion; confusion has also been created by the fact that the Minister's version, rulings from the Chair and the text of the motion all seemed to be at odds. The only proper way out, surely, is for the Government to withdraw the motion and table another that reflects accurately what the Minister tells us is his intention and that of the Government. I hope they will do so, because that would contribute in a small way to correcting what all of us who have spoken consider to be a grotesque error on their part.

2.8 am

Mr. Timms: I have rarely felt such pride in the stamina and commitment of my hon. Friends. We have had a thorough discussion, although I am not sure that thoroughness has always been matched by illumination.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for reiterating his party's support for the changes, which might otherwise have been in some doubt, and for his kind remarks. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) for his expert comments—he was able to shed important light on what had been said. I will certainly take up the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for West Dorset about the reconciliations.

As the debate has made clear, it has been said for the past three years that—for reasons I explained earlier—we need to take the vote on the account in March 2001. The procedure we adopted is entirely conventional; changes in Standing Orders are very common. I understand that the motion affects this year only, although it may well be necessary in future to change Standing Orders so that we can handle resource accounting and budgeting expeditiously.

Mr. Fallon: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I will give way once more.

Mr. Fallon: The Minister has honestly and honourably conceded that the motion may apply only for this particular year. Where does it say that in the motion?

Mr. Timms: It is, of course, a matter for the occupant of the Chair if the question is one of order, but my advice is that the form of words that has been adopted is to have effect for this occasion only. However, as I say, a change in Standing Orders in future may be necessary to ensure that the House handles resource accounting and budgeting expeditiously. There was some discussion about when the Standing Orders were most recently printed. The Government are not consulted about when Standing Orders are printed; that is a matter for the House.

The change that we are considering has been referred to repeatedly in discussions of resource accounting and budgeting over the past three years. It was set out again, for example, in the Treasury memorandum of January 2000 to the parliamentary Committees dealing with resource accounting and budgeting. It is in the interests of the House that the motion be agreed. On that basis, I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That paragraph (3) of Standing Order No. 55 (Questions on voting of estimates, &c.) shall apply on a day not later than 18th March as if the words '(aa) votes on account for the coming financial year:' were inserted after line 21.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Motion in the name of Mr. Secretary Straw relating to Data Protection and Freedom of Information shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made,

That—

(1) the matter of the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration.

(2) the Welsh Grand Committee shall meet at the County Hall, Cwmbran, on Monday 12th March at half past Ten o'clock and between Two o'clock and Four o'clock to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the matter of the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)).—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LIAISON COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

Rail Commuters (Castle Point)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Pope.]*

2.12 am

Mrs. Christine Butler (Castle Point): I feel that we have come on a long, wearisome and tedious journey tonight. I take the unusual step of apologising to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State, who has borne it out so well. Although I know that he has visited some of the subject matter of the debate previously this year, I have about 4,500 daily reasons to be here. Those are my travelling constituents, the poor commuters who have to make these journeys daily on the train to get to work and back. My focus will be on the peak hours when commuters have to travel.

Castle Point has one of the highest out-commuting rates that I know of. Practically two thirds of its work force leave the borough daily to go to work. Some of them go just over the border to Basildon or Southend, some go a little further to Chelmsford, some go to parts of north and east London. Many of them work in the City. Approximately 3,000—I am going on bald figures—take the whole journey to Fenchurch Street and back on the train.

Because we have such a large commuting outflow, we are not just engaged with railways. If we look at the patterns, we will see that roads, too, figure largely. I know that the Under-Secretary of State went to Castle Point briefly last year and saw for himself some of the problems of congestion there. In my constituency, we have some traffic hot spots of which he is aware and which I hope he will revisit soon. One of them is the Sadler's Farm roundabout system, which I believe should become a grade-separated junction, especially in view of its strategic location in the south-east Essex economy and in the overall Essex economy.

In my maiden speech, I dealt with another hot spot—Canvey way. I distinctly remember describing in that speech the slowly moving convoys of traffic coming on to and leaving the island in the morning. I do not think that I have left that subject for very long at any time in this Parliament.

Access to Canvey island is perhaps an even more contentious and important issue. I was delighted when Castle Point was included in the Thames Gateway regeneration project, making it a regeneration area. As such, last summer, its name shone out of a Government document stating that the Government wished to examine the potential for improved access to Canvey island.

All that is very relevant. Traditionally, we have been a low-employment area. I am sure that hon. Members will agree that our long-term objective must be to ensure the creation of more quality jobs within the borough to help to mitigate the effects of excessive out-commuting, which has become so necessary in the post-war period as the community of Castle Point has built up.

It is therefore essential that the journeys that people have to make by train should be comfortable, pleasant and reliable. Sadly, that has not been the case. Traditionally—

[Mrs. Christine Butler]

even in the good old days of British Rail—the line between Southend and Fenchurch Street has been known as the misery line.

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): Does my hon. Friend agree that the problems with the service extend throughout the whole length of the line? As a regular commuter and traveller on the line, I can confirm that the trains are drafty, unclean and, frankly, bone-shaking. Recently, I was talking to two county councillors who represent areas surrounding Laindon station, which is a slow train stopping station. They told me that when the trains are being difficult, the fast trains continue to be fast but the slow trains do not stop at all. The result is that there are no trains at all at Laindon station. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a misjudgment by management of how to run a proper service?

Mrs. Butler: Not only I, but very many of my constituents would have some sympathy with that view. In recent months, when they have seen the so-called new rolling stock coming toward the station platform, they have simply groaned because they know that the new trains simply do not work and would cause further delay to their journey. A young man from my constituency works the early shift in one of the cafeterias in Portcullis House and tries to catch a train at 5.30 am. Sometimes, however, he has been two hours late for work. Hon. Members will appreciate how such a difficult situation could impinge not only on people's work, but on their entire life. Although one would think that people welcomed the new trains, they do not.

I hear now that Adtranz is being tasked with putting these matters back in order. I have, however, collected some interesting information from various people, I thought I would give the railway travellers association—of which I am privileged to be honorary president—and C2C, which is the company itself, Railtrack and the Strategic Rail Authority a chance to have a say on the various issues. Among the papers is a curious picture of a train being tested in Czechoslovakia. Although I believe that it was a one-off situation, I hear that there was not scope within the United Kingdom to do justice to the required testing arrangements. In fact it is all very curious. I cannot but think that there is more to it, and that the new company, C2C, could have moved matters along in a more timely fashion. It is a subsidiary of the great National Express group, and I had thought that the company would bring more investment promise to the problem than did the previous franchisee, Prism Rail.

I have been on horrendous journeys on the old slam-door trains. In the middle of winter, one could not close windows that had fallen down. On other occasions, carriages have been locked because of incidents in which they have separated while in motion.

I have asked Railtrack and C2C for their views on breakdowns and similar matters. At this very late hour, I shall not go through all the responses. However, according to C2C, the major problems are to do with overhead signalling and circuits, while Railtrack has admitted that a lot of broken rails remain. It claims that the trend is decreasing: where two or three years ago there were 18 broken rails, this year there were only 11, but I suggest that that is 11 too many.

I have been offered reasons for the problems that my constituents encounter, but I cannot accept that the answers are good enough. The problems have lasted for decades. When the railways were privatised, Conservative Members jumped up and down with glee, saying that everything would be fine tomorrow. It has not been fine. We have had promises, but tomorrow never comes.

The hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) is the Opposition spokesman on transport matters. He is not present, but he has put the problem down to the Government, saying that the people involved are not able to manage a fragmented service. I thought that that was rather amusing. If I may use the expression, I am pleased that the Government are trying to get matters back on track.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is working on the matter, but I hope that he succeeds in getting on to the train manufacturers and in pinning the Strategic Rail Authority down to some specific date after which penalties will be imposed. However, I fear that Adtranz has run out of the penalty area and so cannot be penalised. I hope that the Government will contact the SRA on this issue. It would be a very poor do if that cannot be done.

Moreover, the problem of overcrowding on trains now represents a very sad state of affairs. Excuses have been offered, such as overloading as a result of the Hatfield crash, but that was only temporary. Undercapacity and overcrowding have amounted to a continual nightmare. People should not have to buy full-price tickets for standing all the way to Fenchurch street station. They often return at night, very weary, on dirty and overcrowded trains, when they have to stand all over again.

I hope that the criteria on which the contract with the present company stands might be reconsidered. I understand that that might be difficult, but there is no absolute deadline for improvement and the matter could be dealt with by the SRA. The authority was somewhat hesitant about telling me what was being done to monitor the situation on the line and about setting out its abilities in regard to enforcement. I am worried by the fact that the enforcement powers are limited. I want the authority to get its teeth into the problem and bite on it harder.

2.24 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Mrs. Butler) on securing the debate and providing a further opportunity for the House to discuss C2C rail services. I was grateful for my hon. Friend's apology to me at the beginning of her speech, but let me assure her that there is nowhere else I would rather have been this evening than here, anticipating this debate.

I was grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) for his contribution. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) in her place. I know that she and her constituents share many of the concerns that have been expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point.

As my hon. Friend's comments clearly portrayed, C2C's performance over the past year has been far from satisfactory. The House will know from my comments in two very recent debates that C2C escaped the widespread disruption suffered by other train operators following the

emergency speed restrictions imposed by Railtrack post-Hatfield. However, C2C's performance has been badly affected by problems of its own, notably problems with the introduction of new rolling stock. Unfortunately, owing to problems with software and faulty electrics, only 12 of the 44 new units have been operational at any one time. Considering that these trains should have been in service in November 1999, that is a lamentable and unacceptable record.

The new stock has been withdrawn from service until Adtranz rectifies the problems. I am sure that my hon. Friend welcomes C2C's decision to set Adtranz a benchmark quality target for the new trains. As a result, the trains will not enter into full service until they can clock up 10,000 miles between significant malfunctions or breakdowns.

Understandably, passengers who were looking forward to travelling in comfort on brand-new trains are unhappy about the return of older-style trains. It is clear that the replacement trains do not offer the same levels of comfort and, because of their age, they come with their own reliability problems. Unfortunately, C2C was left with no choice but to replace the faulty new stock until Adtranz could demonstrate its reliability.

A further two new units are now to be procured in this first delivery of new stock, and a second tranche of 26 units must be delivered and in service by 30 June 2002. This will see the complete replacement of C2C's remaining slam-door stock and offer some recompense to passengers for the disruption that they have had to endure.

Let me say a word about fare levels on C2C. The autumn 2000 national passenger survey found that only 33 per cent. of passengers thought that C2C offered value for money. So I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents welcomed the Strategic Rail Authority's decision to cap C2C's regulated fares increases to an average of 0.3 per cent. as a result of the poor performance over the year to July 2000—a fall of 3 per cent. in real terms.

I was pleased that C2C chose to reduce many fares in January. For instance, the cheap day return from Benfleet to Chafford Hundred was reduced by 27 per cent. from £5.40 to £3.90, and the standard return from Benfleet to London was reduced by 90p.

It is easy enough to criticise train operators—as, indeed, I have done in this and the previous two debates on C2C. However, I firmly believe that it is only right that we applaud train operators when they offer initiatives that are firmly in passengers' interests.

I know that my hon. Friend has serious concerns about Benfleet, the only rail station in her Castle Point constituency. Benfleet is classed as one of C2C's core stations, and I am pleased that it has been accredited with secure station status, along with more than 20 of C2C's other stations. The scheme—a joint initiative between my Department, the Strategic Rail Authority and the British Transport police—awards accreditation to stations that reach specified standards in design and management and demonstrate reductions in the crime level and in passengers' perception of crime.

I was also pleased to learn that since C2C—or LTS Rail, as it was previously known—took over the franchise, Benfleet has been fitted with cycle racks, a tactile map for the visually impaired and a disabled toilet with baby changing facilities. Those are all welcome improvements and I hope that the provision of such facilities will be considered at other stations in the network.

My hon. Friend also has concerns about the need for improved rail links to her constituency. Local authorities are responsible for planning transport in their areas. If there is a demand for a new station—for example, a rail link to Canvey island—it will be for Essex county council to approach Railtrack and C2C in the first instance.

We have made additional funds available to the SRA to support non-commercial schemes that are consistent with our integrated transport policy and can represent value for money. Sponsors of schemes can apply to the SRA for rail passenger partnership—RPP—funding; bidding guidance has been sent to all local authorities. The SRA will assess proposals against planning criteria that have been approved by Ministers. A new station or link could possibly qualify for RPP funding if the SRA judged that it met the necessary criteria.

My hon. Friend has concerns about bus services to Benfleet and Pitsea stations. I understand that a number of services are already provided in the Benfleet and Pitsea area, although I accept that there will always be scope for improvements. I hope that some of the initiatives that I have mentioned previously will help to bring any necessary improvements to the services in the area.

More generally, my hon. Friend will recall that I visited her in Canvey island last year, when she emphasised to me, in no uncertain terms, the importance attached by local people to the need for improvements to transport access to the area. We have considered carefully the proposals in the local transport plan for Essex, including two schemes aimed at improving access to Canvey island. One of the proposals was a high-quality bus link to improve transport from Canvey island to rail stations in the surrounding area.

My hon. Friend will also be aware from our earlier contacts on the matter that, at the time of the local transport capital settlement last December, we did not have sufficient information to form a view on both schemes. We are keen, however, to work with Essex county council to assist it in completing the necessary work for the schemes to be evaluated against our criteria, in time for a decision to be made next December.

We hope that the necessary work can be completed by July this year and a revised bid re-submitted, along with the local transport plan annual progress report, for a decision to be possible in the next local transport plan.

In conclusion, I hope that my hon. Friend is encouraged by the plans that lie ahead for rail services in her constituency. Our plans to deliver a high-quality rail network that can play a full part in a truly integrated transport system will require substantial investment and coherent strategic direction over the next 10 years.

In our 10-year transport plan, we announced £60 billion for the railways—the largest rail spending programme for more than a century. We still have some way to go before we can deliver our vision, but we are determined to work with the rail industry and others to turn our vision into reality.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 28 February 2001

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGE FROM THE QUEEN

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

Mr. Graham Allen (Vice-Chamberlain of Her Majesty's Household): I have to inform the House that the address of 10 January, praying that Her Majesty will appoint as electoral commissioners Pamela Joan Gordon for the period of four years; Sir Neil William David McIntosh KBE for the period of four years; Jonathan Glyn Mathias for the period of five years; Sukhminder Karamjit Singh CBE for the period of five years; James Samuel Younger for the period of six years; and Graham John Zellick for the period of five years; and further praying that Her Majesty will appoint James Samuel Younger to be the chairman of the Electoral Commission for the period of six years, was presented to Her Majesty who was graciously pleased to comply with the request.

PRIVATE BUSINESS

ALLIANCE AND LEICESTER GROUP TREASURY PLC (TRANSFER) BILL *[LORDS]*

Read the Third time, and passed.

STANDING ORDERS

Ordered,

That the Amendments to Standing Orders set out in the Schedule be made:—

Ordered,

That the Amendments to Standing Orders set out in the Schedule be made:—

SCHEDULE

Standing Order 1, line 24, leave out 'and Wales'. 1

Standing Order 1, line 30, leave out subsection (*d*) 2

Standing Order 1, line 34, at end insert— 3

'(*f*) the Greater London Authority;'

Standing Order 1, line 34, at end insert— 4

'In Wales

(*a*) the council of a county,

(*b*) the council of a county borough,

(*c*) the council of a community or group of communities or the community meeting of a community which has no separate council;'

Standing Order 1, line 36, leave out from beginning to end of line 38 and insert— 5

'a council for a local government area;'

Standing Order 1, line 108, leave out from beginning to 'for' in line 118. 6

Standing Order 4A, line 18, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 19 and insert— 7

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government areas'.

Standing Order 4A, line 28, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 29 and insert— 8

'(in Wales) the counties or county boroughs or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 4A, line 42, leave out from second 'or' to 'copies' in line 43 and

insert— 9

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 4A, line 47, leave out '(in Scotland) the islands area or district' and

insert— 10

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 5, line 5, after 'and' insert 'the counties or county boroughs in'. 11

Standing Order 6, line 9, leave out from 'England' to 'parish' and insert— 12

'or the county or county borough in Wales and the'.

Standing Order 7, line 6, leave out 'thirty feet' and insert '10 metres'. 13

Standing Order 7, line 6, leave out 'nine feet six inches' and insert '3 metres'. 14

Standing Order 7, line 9, leave out 'ten feet six inches' and insert '3.3 metres'. 15

Standing Order 10, line 14, leave out '(in Scotland) the islands area or district' and

insert— 16

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 10, line 23, leave out from second 'or' to 'in' in line 24 and insert— 17

'(in Wales) the counties or county boroughs or (in Scotland) the local government areas'.

Standing Order 14, line 6, leave out 'thirty feet' and insert '10 metres'. 18

Standing Order 14, line 7, leave out 'nine feet six inches' and insert '3 metres'. 19

Standing Order 14, line 10, leave out 'ten feet six inches' and insert '3.3 metres'. 20

Standing Order 16, line 9, leave out '20 miles' and insert '32 kilometres'. 21

Standing Order 16, line 11, leave out '20 miles' and insert '32 kilometres'. 22

Standing Order 16, line 19, leave out from 'England' to 'parish' in line 20 and insert— 23

', London borough or county or county borough in Wales and the'.

Standing Order 16, line 24, at end add— 24

'(2) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county and the Greater London Authority were the council of the county.'

Standing Order 17, line 10, leave out '300 yards' and insert '275 metres'. 25

Standing Order 20, line 6, leave out '300 yards' and insert '275 metres'. 26

Standing Order 20, line 6, at end add— 27

'unless after reasonable inquiry the identity of any such persons cannot be ascertained'.

Standing Order 25, line 20, leave out from 'borough' to end and add— **28**

', district in England or county or county borough in Wales'.

Standing Order 27, line 12, leave out from second 'or' to 'in' in line 13 and insert— **29**

'(in Wales) of each county or county borough or (in Scotland) of each local government area'.

Standing Order 27, line 23, leave out from 'and' to 'so' in line 24 and insert— **30**

'(in Wales) of each county or county borough or (in Scotland) of each local government area'.

Standing Order 27, line 27, leave out from 'or' to end of line 28 and insert— **31**

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 27, line 45, leave out 'one inch to the mile or of'. **32**

Standing Order 27, line 52, leave out from 'or' to 'and' in line 53 and insert— **33**

'(in Wales) of the county or county borough or (in Scotland) of the local government area'.

Standing Order 27, line 57, leave out '(in Scotland) each islands area or district' and insert— **34**

'(in Wales) each county or county borough or (in Scotland) each local government area'.

Standing Order 27, line 79, leave out 'eleven feet' and insert '3.4 metres'. **35**

Standing Order 27, line 98, at end add— **36**

'(7) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county and the Greater London Authority were the council of the county.'

Standing Order 27A, line 12, leave out from 'bill,' to 'of' in line 16 and insert— **37**

'(i) the information referred to in Part II of Schedule 4 to the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999 (S.I., 1999, No. 293) (referred to below as "Schedule 4"), and so much of the information referred to in Part I of that Schedule as is reasonably required to assess the environmental effect of the works and as the promoters can reasonably be expected to compile; or

(ii) such'.

Standing Order 27A, line 40, leave out from first 'paragraph' to end of line 41 and insert— **38**

'6 of Part I and paragraph 5 of Part II of Schedule 4'.

Standing Order 27A, line 59, leave out '3' and insert '4'. **39**

Standing Order 27A, line 63, leave out from 'Planning' to 'with' in line 64 and insert '(Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999'. **40**

Standing Order 27A, line 65, leave out '3' and insert '4'. **41**

Standing Order 29, line 5, leave out 'six inches to the mile' and insert '1/10,000'. **42**

Standing Order 30, line 3, leave out 'one inch to the mile' and insert '1/50,000'. **43**

Standing Order 30A, line 7, leave out 'one inch to a mile' and insert '1/50,000'. **44**

Standing Order 30A, line 18, leave out 'one inch to a mile' and insert '1/50,000'. **45**

Standing Order 36, line 11, leave out 'and Wales'. **46**

Standing Order 36, line 13, at end insert— **47**

'(aa) any county or county borough in Wales with the proper officer of the county or borough;'.

Standing Order 39, line 30, leave out 'Scottish' and insert 'Scotland'. **48**

Standing Order 39, line 32, leave out 'Welsh' and insert 'Wales'. **49**

Standing Order 47, line 30, leave out from 'England' to end and insert— **50**

', London boroughs and counties and county boroughs in Wales'.

Standing Order 48, line 2, leave out 'four inches to a mile' and insert '1/15,000'. **51**

Standing Order 48, line 19, leave out 'a quarter of an inch to every 100 feet', and insert '1/5,000'. **52**

Standing Order 48, line 21, leave out 'a quarter of an inch to every 100 feet', and insert '1/5,000'. **53**

Standing Order 48, line 32, leave out from 'stated' to end of line 33 and insert 'in kilometres and metres'. **54**

Standing Order 50, line 3, leave out 'miles and furlongs' and insert 'kilometres'. **55**

Standing Order 50, line 6, leave out 'one mile' and insert '1.6 kilometres'. **56**

Standing Order 50, line 13, leave out '800 yards' and insert '750 metres'. **57**

Standing Order 52, line 9, leave out 'thirty feet' and insert '10 metres'. **58**

Standing Order 52, line 13, leave out 'nine feet six inches' and insert '3 metres'. **59**

Standing Order 52, line 16, leave out 'ten feet six inches' and insert '3.3 metres'. **60**

Standing Order 52, line 25, leave out 'miles and furlongs' and insert 'kilometres'. **61**

Standing Order 55, line 3, leave out 'one inch to every 100 feet' and insert '1/1,250'. **62**

Standing Order 55, line 26, leave out 'five feet' and insert '1.5 metres'. **63**

Standing Order 56, line 6, leave out from beginning to end of line and insert 'metres or parts of a metre'. **64**

Standing Order 57, line 7, leave out from 'in' to 'at' in line 8 and insert— **65**

'metres or parts of a metre'.

Standing Order 57, line 30, leave out '800 yards' and insert '750 metres'. **66**

Standing Order 59, line 8, leave out 'one inch to every 330 feet' and insert '1/5,000'. **67**

Standing Order 59, line 9, leave out 'one inch to every 40 feet' and insert '1/500'. **68**

Standing Order 59, line 18, leave out '200 yards' and insert '180 metres'. **69**

Standing Order 61, line 17, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 18 and insert— **70**

'(in Wales) of every county or county borough or (in Scotland) of every local government area'.

Standing Order 61, line 32, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 33 and insert— **71**

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 61, line 49, at end add— **72**

'(4) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county and the Greater London Authority were the council of the county.'.

Standing Order 62, line 15, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 16 and insert— **73**

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 62, line 94, at end insert— **74**

'(3) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county.'

Standing Order 65, line 28, leave out from 'or' to 'in' in line 29 and insert— **75**

'(in Wales) the county or county borough or (in Scotland) the local government area'.

Standing Order 69, line 3, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **76**

Standing Order 81, line 10, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **77**

Standing Order 82, line 2, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **78**

Standing Order 84, line 4, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **79**

Standing Order 86, line 5, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **80**

Standing Order 87, line 6, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **81**

Standing Order 88, line 6, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **82**

Standing Order 89, line 5, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **83**

Standing Order 89, line 7, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **84**

Standing Order 97, line 1, leave out 'and Wales'. **85**

Standing Order 97, line 2, after 'borough' insert 'or county or county borough in Wales'. **86**

Standing Order 97, line 3, leave out 'or borough' and insert ', borough or county'. **87**

Standing Order 98, line 1, after 'county' insert— **88**

'or (in Wales) any county or county borough'.

Standing Order 98, line 2, leave out 'such county' and insert 'its administrative area'. **89**

Standing Order 98, line 5, leave out 'such county' and insert 'that area'. **90**

Standing Order 98, line 8, after 'borough' insert— **91**

'or (in Wales) any county or county borough'.

Standing Order 98, line 14, at end add— **92**

'(3) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county and the Greater London Authority were the council of the county.'.

Standing Order 100, line 1, leave out from 'any' to 'against' in line 2 and insert— **93**

'drainage body within the meaning of the Land Drainage Act 1991 petitions'.

Standing Order 103, line 6, leave out from 'Selection' to '; three' in line 7. **94**

Standing Order 103, line 9, leave out from 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **95**

Standing Order 103, line 9, at end add— **96**

'(2) Unless the Committee of Selection otherwise orders, the members nominated to the committee shall continue to be members of the committee for the remainder of the Parliament.'.

Standing Order 120, line 9, leave out from 'declare,' to 'in' in line 10 and insert— **97**

'that I have no personal or constituency interest'.

Standing Order 123, line 8, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **98**

Standing Order 132, line 5, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **99**

Standing Order 136A, line 30, at end insert— **100**

'(5) This order shall apply to Greater London as if it were a county, the Greater London Authority were the council of the county and the councils of London boroughs were councils of districts in the county.'.

Standing Order 147, line 8, leave out 'Transport' and insert— **101**

'the Environment, Transport and the Regions'.

Standing Order 147, line 10, leave out 'Transport' and insert— **102**

'the Environment, Transport and the Regions'.

Standing Order 152, line 6, leave out 'fifteen inches' and insert '38 centimetres'. **103**

Standing Order 164, line 2, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **104**

Standing Order 164, line 4, leave out 'written' and insert 'clearly set out'. **105**

Standing Order 175, line 3, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **106**

Standing Order 181, line 9, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **107**

Standing Order 182, line 2, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **108**

Standing Order 191A, line 15, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **109**

Standing Order 204A, line 13, leave out 'Mr' and insert 'the'. **110**

Standing Order 209, line 9, at end insert— **111**

'(2) When the time for delivering notices, or making deposits, expires on a Saturday or Sunday, Christmas Day, Good Friday or any bank holiday, the time shall be extended to the next day following which is not such a day'.

Standing Order 235, line 2, leave out 'Scottish' and insert 'Scotland'. **112**

Appendix A: Form referred to in Standing Orders 13 and 61

Page 125, leave out line 5 to line 66 on page 126 and insert— **113**

"Dear Sir or Madam,

[Short title of bill]

We [have applied] [intend to apply] to Parliament [this] [next] session for leave to introduce this bill.

We understand that you have an interest in the property mentioned in the Table set out below and that your interest is as stated in Part[s] I [and II] of that Table. If the bill is passed, the property mentioned in Part I of the Table, or a right to use it, will be liable to be acquired compulsorily under the powers of the resulting Act [and the property mentioned in Part II of the Table will be liable to the imposition of an improvement charge].

A plan [and section] relating to the purposes of the bill, together with a book of reference relating to it, [was] [were] [will be, on or before 20th November] deposited for public inspection with [here insert the officers of the local authorities with whom deposits have been or are to be made in accordance with Standing Order 27].

A copy of so much of the plan [and section] as relates to [here insert the parish or other area in accordance with Standing Order 36] in which the property in which you have an interest is situated, together with a book of reference relating to it, [has been] [will be on or before 20th November] deposited for public inspection with [here insert the officers of the local authorities with whom deposits have been or are to be made in accordance with Standing Order 36].

On that plan the property [is] [will be] designated by the number or numbers in the Table set out below. If that Table contains any error or misdescription, will you please let us know as soon as you can.

Copies of the bill, or the relevant parts of it, [have been] [will be on or before 4th December] deposited for public inspection and for sale at the [here insert the several offices at which deposits have been or are to be made in accordance with Standing Order 4A].

[We intend that the bill shall provide that, notwithstanding section 92 of the Lands Clauses Consolidation Act 1845, you may be required to sell and convey a part only of your property, numbered [here insert number of numbers] on the deposited plan.]

[We intend that the bill shall exclude section 92 of the Lands Clauses Consolidation Act 1845 and shall substitute for it a provision—

(a) restricting the power of acquiring compulsorily a part only of a house or building to cases where the part can be taken without material detriment to the house or building; and

(b) restricting the power of acquiring compulsorily a part only of a park or garden belonging to a house to cases where the part can be taken without seriously affecting the amenity or convenience of the house.]

You may object to the bill by depositing a petition against it. If you wish us to do so, we shall be glad to let you know the latest date on which you may deposit a petition in either House.

For the moment we can let you know that the latest date for depositing a petition against a bill is—

(a) in the first House, [here insert current date] in the case of the House of Lords, and [here insert current date] in the case of the House of Commons; and

(b) in the second House, the tenth day after that on which the bill receives its first reading in that House.

In the case of a late bill, the rule in paragraph (b) above applies to a petition in either House. If the latest date turns out to be a Saturday, a Sunday, Christmas Day, a bank holiday or a day on which the House does not sit, the latest date may be postponed.

We enclose for your use copies of the standing orders of both Houses of Parliament relating to the time and method for presenting petitions in opposition to bills.

If you need any further information, or any help in preparing a petition, you should get in touch with the Private Bill Office in either House (telephone number 020 7219 3231 in the House of Lords and 020 7219 3250 in the House of Commons).

Yours faithfully,"

—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Message to the Lords to acquaint them therewith.

Ordered,

That the following Standing Order be made:—

"*Consents required under the Greater London Authority Act 1999.*

25A.—(1) In the case of a bill promoted by the Greater London Authority, Transport for London or the London Development Agency there shall be deposited in the Private Bill Office on or before 27th November the following documents, as appropriate, namely—

(a) where the relevant consent provision applies to the bill, copies of the pre-deposit consents;

(b) where the relevant consent provision does not apply, a statement to that effect.

(2) The relevant consent provision for the purposes of paragraph (1) above is—

(a) in the case of a bill promoted by the Greater London Authority, paragraph 6 of Schedule 5 to the Greater London Authority Act 1999 ("the 1999 Act");

(b) in the case of a bill promoted by Transport for London, paragraph 5 of Schedule 13 to the 1999 Act;

(c) in the case of a bill promoted by the London Development Agency, paragraph 5 of Schedule 6A to the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998 ("the 1998 Act") (as inserted by Schedule 25 to the 1999 Act).

(3) In the case of a bill promoted by the council of a London borough, Transport for London or the London Development Corporation there shall be deposited in the Private Bill Office on 11th December or as soon as practicable thereafter the following documents, as appropriate, namely—

(a) where the relevant consent provision applies to the bill—

(i) copies of the pre-deposit consents and post-deposit confirmations of consents; or

(ii) if confirmation of consent has not been given, a statement that the relevant withdrawal provision applies; or

(iii) if confirmation of consent is given conditionally on the amendment of the bill, a statement that the relevant amendment provision applies;

(b) where the relevant consent provision does not apply, a statement to that effect.

Paragraph (a)(ii) does not apply to a bill promoted by the council of a London borough. In this paragraph "pre-deposit consent" includes a consent given in accordance with the relevant consent provision after deposit of the bill.

(4) The relevant consent provision for the purposes of paragraph (3) above is—

(a) in the case of a bill promoted by the council of a London borough, section 79(2) of the 1999 Act;

(b) in the case of a bill promoted by Transport for London, section 167(2) of the 1999 Act;

(c) in the case of a bill promoted by the London Development Agency, section 26A(2) of the 1998 Act.

(5) The relevant withdrawal provision for the purposes of paragraph (3) above is—

(a) in the case of a bill promoted by Transport for London, section 167(3) of the 1999 Act;

(b) in the case of a bill promoted by the London Development Agency, section 26A(3) of the 1998 Act.

(6) The relevant amendment provision for the purposes of paragraph (3) above is—

(a) in the case of a bill promoted by the council of a London borough, section 79(4) of the 1999 Act;

(b) in the case of a bill promoted by Transport for London, section 167(4) of the 1999 Act;

(c) in the case of a bill promoted by the London Development Agency, section 26A(4) of the 1998 Act.".—[*The Chairman of Ways and Means.*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Victims of Violence

1. **Mr. Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Hall Green): If he will make a statement about Government programmes to support the victims of violence in Northern Ireland. [149948]

6. **Mr. Martin Salter** (Reading, West): If he will make a statement about Government programmes to support the victims of violence in Northern Ireland. [149953]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr. Adam Ingram): A number of initiatives have been put in place which are in keeping with the recommendations of the Bloomfield report, "We Will Remember Them", including the establishment of the family trauma centre, funding for groups supporting victims and the establishment of the Northern Ireland memorial fund. Last Thursday, I announced another significant funding package of £12 million, including an additional £3 million to the Northern Ireland memorial fund over the next three years.

Mr. McCabe: As my right hon. Friend will be aware, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee is currently conducting an inquiry into the practice whereby paramilitary organisations force people to relocate within Northern Ireland or, indeed, to leave the Province altogether. I do not wish to prejudge the findings of our inquiry, but will my right hon. Friend assure me that he will do all that he can to end such disgraceful behaviour and to ensure that the plight of the victims is properly recognised?

Mr. Ingram: I thank my hon. Friend for that question, because I welcome the Select Committee's investigation of the issue. The practice is one of the blights on the face of Northern Ireland. It represents a denial of the human rights and the civic dignity of every individual who is subject to such practices by paramilitary groups. The practice should stop immediately. Clearly, it is more

easily stopped when all members of the community stand against it, and the report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee will help in understanding the issue. I am sure that report will point helpfully to a solution of the problem.

Mr. Salter: Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the excellent work done by Victim Support (Northern Ireland) in providing help and support to nearly 40,000 victims of crime each and every year?

Mr. Ingram: I unreservedly support that work. I recently announced an extra £1.1 million over the next three years for Victim Support (Northern Ireland). Those who carry out the work on behalf of Victim Support (Northern Ireland) do a very difficult and often thankless job. The additional money will help to provide an even better and more professional service for the victims of crime. I ask all hon. Members from Northern Ireland to encourage any of their constituents who are the victims of crime to avail themselves of the services provided by this worthwhile organisation.

Mr. Ken Maginnis (Fermanagh and South Tyrone): I thank the Minister and welcome the £12 million grant that he has announced. Does he agree that, for far too long, no proper assessment has been made of the rights and needs of the victims of terrorist violence? No amount of money can compensate the innocent for the suffering that they have endured. Will he assure me that, as the facts emerge, the Government will be prepared to reconsider the adequacy of the amount that he has announced?

Mr. Ingram: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question. It was not until recently, with the publication of the Bloomfield report, that a proper assessment was made of the extent and nature of victimhood in Northern Ireland. The problem runs across the community. Thousands of families have been damaged in many different ways over the past 30 years. I also share his view that no amount of money can ever deal with the problem. However, we have made a start, and I thank him for welcoming our initiatives so far. Although he is not standing at the next general election, I look forward to continuing to receive representations from him. I know that he is very active in his own community, where he deals with some serious problems, and I recently talked to him about specific issues. The matter does not rest with what we have done so far.

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): Although I welcome the Minister's statement and the measures that he has taken, including the extra money, will he seriously consider the early victims of violence, who received a tiny amount of compensation? One woman lost her husband, who was a member of the Territorial Army, when he was murdered in South Armagh. She had five sons and the only compensation she received for them was £500 for each boy. There are similar examples throughout the Province. I make a plea—as I have before—that those early victims will be considered.

Mr. Ingram: For so long, the victims have been ignored and have sometimes been used for political advantage. Since we have tackled the issue, there has been a greater awareness of the extent and nature of the problem. The difficulty is knowing where to draw the line and by how much we should assist such people. For that reason, we have given substantial sums—£5 million to date—to the Northern Ireland memorial fund so that it can begin to consider both the depth of the problem and what help can be given to the early victims of the violence. However, it does not matter whether victims are early, intermediate or late; they are still victims of the violence and should be treated sympathetically.

Mr. John M. Taylor (Solihull): When will the Minister do something to help the pre-1982 police widows and their families who face a measly and arbitrary £1,000 for each year of widowhood and an unresolved tax status? They believe that they are forgotten families who are ignored by the Government—and it looks as though they are right. What is he going to do about them?

Mr. Ingram: I shall try to be gentle, but what did the hon. Gentleman's Government do about those victims? Nothing. We inherited a blank sheet from the previous Government. We have advanced the issue sympathetically and constructively. The Patten report referred to the situation pre-1982. We conducted an in-depth study under the chairmanship of John Steele, an eminent ex-civil servant in the Northern Ireland Office, and its recommendations are being considered by the Government. I should have hoped that the Conservatives welcomed that study and the progressive way in which we are dealing with the issue.

Paramilitary Violence

2. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If he will make a statement on the current level of paramilitary violence. [149949]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): I constantly review the level of paramilitary violence in consultation with the Chief Constable and my security advisers.

Mr. Robertson: According to the detailed written answer that the Minister provided me with on 26 February, since the signing of the Good Friday agreement there have been 65 murders, 828 bombings, 836 shootings and 396 assaults—a total of slightly more than 2,000 paramilitary crimes. How many of those can be attributed to the main paramilitary groups, which are supposed to be on ceasefire?

Dr. Reid: I am sure that I speak on behalf of the whole House when I make it plain that one killing, one murder or one bombing is one too many. None of us will, or should, be satisfied until Northern Ireland is free of the use of the gun and the bomb. On the hon. Gentleman's question, shootings, assaults and acts of intimidation are continuing to take place and I utterly condemn them. They are completely incompatible with the society that we are attempting to build in Northern Ireland.

To update the hon. Gentleman's figure, 54 such attacks have taken place so far this year. We estimate that 33 were carried out by loyalist gunmen and 21 by republican gunmen. Whatever organisation those people represent, they are at odds not only with the rule of law that operates in every decent society, but with the

overwhelming desire of the vast majority of the people in Northern Ireland to create a society that is free from violence.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the excellent start that he has made in Northern Ireland, and I wish him well in the very difficult job that he has to do. May I draw his attention to the financial appeal launched by victims and bereaved families in Omagh in pursuit of the civil action that they seek to take against the perpetrators of the bombing in 1998? I will not ask him to commit himself to that course of action, but will he take the opportunity to reaffirm the Government's good will towards the Omagh support group and the bereaved families? Will he reaffirm also the Government's determination to do everything in their power to bring the perpetrators of that atrocity to justice at the earliest possible time?

Dr. Reid: Yes. I very much appreciate the fact that my right hon. Friend is here today. I want to put on record my appreciation and that of the Government for all his work in Northern Ireland. On the specific issue that he raised, I know that shortly after leaving office, he literally put his money where his mouth had been—his pocket had previously been sealed because he was a member of the Cabinet. I very much agree with the sentiments that he expressed, and we are examining ways in which we can further assist and support the victims of that terrible tragedy.

As someone who has only recently come to a position of any authority in Northern Ireland, I think, like others outside the circle of those who are most intimately involved, that one of the most terrible and lasting memories of my time in Parliament was seeing my hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), in his first week as a junior Northern Ireland Minister, visiting the scene of that devastating tragedy. I say to all the parties in Northern Ireland that our aim is precisely to ensure that the possibility of further such tragic events is removed from Northern Ireland once and for all. The prize before us is so great and the consequences of failure are so awful that we must all go the extra mile to make sure that the peace process is carried forward.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new role and wish him every success in what I know will be his sincere efforts. All hon. Members will agree with his sentiments and the hopes that he has expressed for Northern Ireland's future. Sadly, however, those who carry out punishment beatings, whichever side or community they come from, inflict terrible violence on the innocent people of Northern Ireland, and until they decommission weapons and give up violence and the threat of violence, or suffer sanctions for failing to fulfil their agreements within the peace process, that violence will continue.

Dr. Reid: I would not even grace those incidents with the term "punishment beatings", which the hon. Gentleman used, because that implies some legitimacy; they are paramilitary attacks and as such they have no legitimacy whatsoever. I agree that as long as there are threats or the use of violence, whether by individuals or organisations, the price of continuing the renewal of democratic structures in Northern Ireland will be eternal vigilance. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will be vigilant, and I will act on the advice of the Chief Constable and my security advisers.

The hon. Gentleman will accept that if we are to deprive these particular fish of the water in which they seek to swim, the measures being taken as part of the democratisation of Northern Ireland, including the incorporation of human rights, the setting up of the devolved Assembly and the renewal of Northern Ireland's police service, are important parallel steps. They are being put in place. There is no legitimacy for any group or individual from any side in any community that resorts to violence.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): I join other Members in expressing deep gratitude to the new Secretary of State for the detailed attention that he is already giving to all aspects of our serious problems in Northern Ireland. Does he agree that, given the current level of paramilitary violence, there are those engaged in it whose objective is to ensure that there is an absence of law and order on the streets of Northern Ireland, so that they can develop even further their mafia trade, especially in drugs? Every effort must be made to deal with such people because of the damage that they are doing to young people in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Reid: The hon. Gentleman is correct. There are those who seek under the flag of some higher cause to promote their own profit, not only by using violence to produce the product but in the product itself, be it drugs, terrorism or protection rackets. This inflicts even more violence and tragedy on families in Northern Ireland. These people will be defeated because we shall maintain a security level that is commensurate with the threat, and because we shall not be deflected from renewing institutions, democracy and the security apparatus—the police service in Northern Ireland.

The hon. Gentleman has been involved in these matters for about 32 years. He knows more than anyone else that there is nothing inevitable about the progress of the peace process. All of us on all sides must bend our will towards it. It will involve compromise and the moral courage that has previously been shown; it must be continued.

Mr. Robert McCartney (North Down): I welcome the Secretary of State to his new post and wish him every success. I join the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) in encouraging those who have any knowledge of the ghastly atrocity in Omagh to lend their support. Will the Secretary of State confirm that since that atrocity, when we were brought back to put emergency legislation in place to deal with the people involved, no one has been prosecuted under that legislation?

Dr. Reid: I can confirm that. I can confirm also that that is a source of deep regret to me, to everyone in the House and to anyone who witnessed the terrible and tragic events in Omagh. Unlike those who deployed their bombs and guns on that occasion, the bottom line is that we will apply the rule of law. We have to depend on that standard of law and that standard of evidence.

I am convinced that everything possible is being done in regard to Omagh. I take the point that has been made by the hon. and learned Gentleman and by my right

hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson). I appeal to anyone of any tradition on either side of the border who has any information about the terrible act of violence in Omagh, which has left so many people bereft and distraught, to make it available to the appropriate authorities.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that each and every death at the hands of paramilitaries is to be condemned? Will he reflect that since 1994 and the Major ceasefire, literally hundreds of people have been walking about Northern Ireland who would otherwise have died? Given the comments of Brian Keenan over the weekend, does my right hon. Friend agree that the paramilitaries are completely out of step with current thinking and with what is going on in the peace process on the part of all major parties in Northern Ireland, and are entirely irrelevant to the process?

Dr. Reid: I very much agree with that. I, too, shall not be distracted by Brian Keenan's remarks. When faced with the enormity of the problems and the burden of history that is upon those who would seek to change the situation in Northern Ireland, we sometimes underestimate just how much is being achieved. It is encouraging sometimes to look back over the past decade and to recognise that the establishment of the institutions, the participation of all sides of the community in the devolved Executive and the Assembly in Northern Ireland, the introduction of human rights legislation, the start on a new policing service, and the hundreds and thousands of people who are working together across the communities, are all a tribute to the politicians on both sides in Northern Ireland who have had the moral courage to take hard but necessary decisions to create a new Northern Ireland. They should take credit for that.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South) *rose—*
[Interruption.]

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Rev. Martin Smyth: I understand the response of the Secretary of State. Does he share the concern, especially after another murder last evening, that those involved in paramilitary violence and acts of terrorism may be encouraged by the fact that some strands of the Belfast agreement have not been implemented? For example, I understand that after the Cavehill post office raid at Christmas, several people were apprehended, but nothing has happened since, and one of those had been involved in the Wright murder. Is the Secretary of State concerned about a sense of demoralisation among members of the police service as they seek to carry out the tasks assigned to them, but find their efforts undermined?

Dr. Reid: I pay tribute to everyone in the RUC, from the Chief Constable downwards, for the operations that they have been carrying out in extremely difficult circumstances, both politically and as regards the security environment. I very much regret and condemn the murder that took place last night in Lurgan. I do not have full details of the possible motive for that, but we should not underestimate the activity of the RUC. In Larne, for instance, there have been more than 300 additional patrols, and they have been supported by mobile support units. Similarly, in Belfast, there have been a number of successes recently, not least the discovery of the pipe-bomb factory; so I have no hesitation in adding my commendations for the efforts of the Chief Constable and those in the RUC who have to combat the continuing violence perpetrated by individuals and dissident groups.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): On behalf of the Opposition, I warmly welcome the Secretary of State to his new post and wish him well in achieving a lasting peace in Northern Ireland. Does he agree that one way of combating paramilitary violence is to ensure that there is positive recruiting to the RUC? Will he, like me, welcome the Chief Constable's decision to recruit last week? Is the right hon. Gentleman satisfied that those who have influence in the minority community are sufficiently encouraging first-class Catholic recruits to come forward?

Dr. Reid: Yes, indeed. There are various levels at which we must combat the terrorist and the threat of gunmen, from whatever quarter they come. We must try to ensure that there is as little support as possible for groups such as the Real IRA. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the matter with the President of the United States in recent days. Also, we must ensure that we have a police force in Northern Ireland that is effective, as well as representative of and acceptable to both communities.

In the past few days, we have gone ahead with advertising, with a view to recruitment for the police service on a 50:50 basis. I commend the Chief Constable for that, and I am delighted that there has been such an overwhelming response—some 4,000 replies already. I am sure that that is indicative of a recognition in the whole community that we mean business. I urge all the parties to the Good Friday agreement to do what they said they would do. For decades, people have asked for a new police force, representative of the whole community. I urge all parties now, despite their difficulties, to come in and support us on that.

Mr. MacKay: I am grateful for that positive response and I endorse everything that the Secretary of State has just said. May I now press him further on how we also combat paramilitary violence? One aspect of the Belfast agreement has not been implemented at all. There has been absolutely no decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives by any of the so-called paramilitary groups which signed up to the agreement. Not one gun or one ounce of Semtex has been handed in. What further pressure can the right hon. Gentleman put on the paramilitaries so that they fulfil their obligations? If they do not do so, the whole process which we all support will be put at dire risk.

Dr. Reid: The right hon. Gentleman may have noticed that, for a considerable number of weeks, including when my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool was Secretary of State, we have been involved in discussions which are aimed directly at that end. Of course, decommissioning cannot be seen on its own, because we also have the issues of normalisation, policing and the institutions, but it is a fundamental element of the Good Friday agreement, and all the parties to that must show that they are using all their influence to achieve the decommissioning of which he speaks. Of course, we

welcome the confidence-building measures that were taken—the inspection of the two dumps—but we need to go further on that, and that is part and parcel of what we are trying to do at present.

I conclude by responding to one of the right hon. Gentleman's remarks. He wished me well in bringing peace to Northern Ireland. I cannot bring peace to Northern Ireland. For some 800 years, people in my position have crossed the water trying to bring peace. The people who will bring peace to Northern Ireland are represented in the parties here and in the communities they represent. We can only be a vehicle. But of one thing I am sure, and that is that the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland want that peace and demand that their representatives achieve it on their behalf.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [149929] **Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 28 February.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall be having further meetings later today.

I am sure that the House will join me in stating our profound distress at the terrible tragedy at Great Heck earlier this morning. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families, friends and relatives of those who died or were injured. The accident appears to have happened when a Land Rover and trailer slid off the M62 and went down on to the line, but it is simply too early to be certain. The emergency services are at the scene. Once again, I pay fulsome tribute to the work that they are doing. The Deputy Prime Minister will make a statement to the House later tonight following his return from the scene of the accident.

Mr. Leigh: The House will appreciate the demands placed on the Prime Minister and his colleagues by this latest rail tragedy coming on top of the grave crisis in the countryside. On the latter point, will the Prime Minister please respond positively to the voluntary postponement of the countryside march by saying today that he will listen to the voice of the hundreds of thousands who would have taken part in that march on farm incomes, compensation, access, rural infrastructure and hunting, in a manner which is both understanding and tolerant of their point of view?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman puts his point very reasonably. I can well understand the deep feelings of anxiety—indeed, fear—in our farming community today. Coming on top of the problems of BSE and the collapse in some world commodity prices for farm produce, foot and mouth disease is a bitter and unfair blow to the farmers. We will do all that we can to help, first by eradicating the disease as swiftly as possible—that must be our No. 1 priority—and, secondly, by working with the industry, and, through measures such as agrimonetary compensation, helping the industry to get back on its feet again. Anything that we can reasonably do we will.

I pay tribute to the farmers and their representatives in the National Farmers Union, to the wider industry and to the whole country for the way in which they have rallied round at this very difficult time. As for the hon. Gentleman's other points, I shall certainly bear in mind what he has said.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): As well as expressing our hopes for the speedy recovery of the many who were injured in this morning's terrible rail accident and who are currently being treated in six hospitals throughout Yorkshire, will my right hon. Friend also acknowledge the role of the villagers in Great Heck? They were among the first on the scene in the murk and gloom of the early morning, providing what assistance they could. Will he also give an assurance that there will be the fullest possible inquiry into the circumstances of this terrible accident?

The Prime Minister: I can certainly offer that assurance. Of course there must be the fullest possible inquiry into how the accident occurred. As I said, it is too early yet to be absolutely certain, but the cause appears to be the Land Rover and trailer slipping off the motorway and down on to the track. The villagers in my hon. Friend's constituency have behaved in an extraordinary, neighbourly and exemplary way. It is remarkable how local communities in Britain pull together in times of crisis such as this and do their very best for other people.

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): On behalf of the Opposition, may I associate myself completely with the Prime Minister's words? The tragic accident this morning unites the nation once again in deep sorrow, especially in North Yorkshire and the constituency of the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), as well as my own constituency. Our thoughts go out to those who have been injured and to the families of those who have been killed. We will, of course, await the Deputy Prime Minister's statement this evening, but for the moment may I express the Opposition's support for what the Prime Minister has said about a full investigation, and our anxiety that its results will be made known as soon as possible?

The Prime Minister: I do not really have anything more to add. Of course we must have the fullest possible inquiry and, yes, as soon as we have the results of that inquiry, we will make sure that the House is properly informed.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister has already referred to other sombre news this week. Everyone will understand if the usual robustness of our exchanges is somewhat suspended today, because this week our sympathies are also with the rural communities plunged into crisis by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. As this comes on top of the serious losses already endured, it is devastating for many farmers and in some cases could be the final blow. The Opposition support all the measures that the Government have taken to tackle the disease. Given the reports coming to hon. Members today about the

continuing use of footpaths in livestock areas and the difficulties in controlling public access to farm roads, will the Government be ready to take further action to restrict access to areas that are at risk if that proves necessary?

The Prime Minister: Of course, if it proves necessary, we will be prepared to take whatever measures are available to us. We will take whatever additional action is necessary to ensure that we put every possible limit on the spread of the disease. As a result of the measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, controls are available. If they need to be strengthened, we will certainly examine that.

Mr. Hague: The Prime Minister will also know that large supplies of disinfectant are crucial to the attempt to prevent the further spread of the disease. Many farmers are telling us that they cannot obtain such supplies. Will he undertake to consider that matter with the Minister of Agriculture and do everything that he can to ensure that production of the necessary materials is at the highest level possible across the country and that adequate supplies are getting through to abattoirs and farms?

The Prime Minister: On that point, which is obviously very important, my understanding is that sufficient disinfectant is being produced, but that it is not always getting to the places that need it. We are considering what measures we can take to ensure that it gets to them and to provide facilities and a means of communicating with farmers, abattoirs and other people who will need supplies of the disinfectant. We are working on that very hard indeed, both within my right hon. Friend's Department and elsewhere with the industry. I believe that we should be able to sort out the remaining problems within the next few days.

Mr. Hague: I should like to ask two further questions, if I may. The Prime Minister will be aware that although the compensation package is very welcome, it does not include many farmers affected by the ban on livestock movement, such as pig farmers, who might not be eligible for any of the aid so far announced and may soon face catastrophic animal welfare problems. The proposal to allow the limited movement of healthy animals will obviously help, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept in principle that further targeted help might be necessary for farmers who are suffering unrecoverable losses as a result of the ban?

The Prime Minister: Of course we keep under review the proposals in relation to compensation. I should perhaps explain to the House that they fit into two parts at the present time. First, there is the statutory compensation for slaughtered animals, which will apply to pig farmers and, indeed, to any farmers who are affected. Secondly, there is the agrimonetary compensation that has now been drawn down. That is around £150 million. It does not apply to pig farmers, but does apply to other affected farms. That money will have to reimbursed by up to about 80 per cent. from the British taxpayer, but we have done that and that money will be available.

In addition, I think I am right in saying that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture has extended the restructuring scheme for pig farmers as well. As a result of the ability for there to be licensed slaughter, which will come into effect at the end of this week, some of those losses, we hope, will be minimised, but of course we keep the position under constant review.

Mr. Hague: Finally, the Prime Minister will agree that the response to the crisis has been characterised by calmness and restraint both in the farming communities and among the wider public. Nowhere has that been more evident, as my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) has observed, than in this week's decision by the Countryside Alliance, despite its deeply held views, to suspend its planned 18 March rally for liberty and livelihood.

Does the Prime Minister agree that, whatever the views across all parties on the merits of the issue, it would be a proper recognition of the Countryside Alliance's sense of responsibility at least to delay the introduction of the Hunting Bill to the House of Lords until those who want to protest about it are free to do so?

The Prime Minister: The Bill will go through its normal stages and I repeat once again that there is a free vote on the issue on both sides of the House of Commons. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman in respect of those people with concerns about the countryside that such concerns are not surprising with farming in the position that it is today, but it is important to recognise what we can do to help. The truth is that farming in this country has suffered many serious blows in the past few years, going back, I may say, beyond the time at which we came to office, but not limited to that at all.

The problems of BSE have obviously been huge for farmers, and a strong pound has been a particular difficulty. There has been a collapse in certain world commodity prices for the goods that they produce. To have foot and mouth disease come on top of that means that the situation is appalling. For that reason, over the past few years, and for the first time, we have been drawing down that agrimonetary compensation—we have drawn down more than £600 million worth of it.

Fortunately, because the public finances are in a healthy state, we are able to pay compensation. We do not begrudge that at all, or the support that we are giving to the farming industry. I can certainly assure the right hon. Gentleman and the House that we shall carry on working with the farming industry and its representatives to give them every possibility of a secure future and better times than they have enjoyed over the past few years. However, I make this point as well: in so doing, it is very important to recognise that farmers need our support not just as the people who produce the food that we eat, but as custodians of the countryside. I recognise that role absolutely and I am happy to pay tribute to it.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does the Prime Minister agree that effective policing must never be put at risk by political correctness? Does he also agree that effective policing must never be put at risk by biased or prejudiced targeting of particular groups, black or white? Is he aware that in Tower Hamlets, since the introduction of the Macpherson recommendations, the number of those who are stopped and searched and then arrested has increased over the past year by 40 per cent., which represents a victory for the police in their fight against crime?

Will the Prime Minister therefore congratulate Tower Hamlets police on their efforts and urge every Member of the House who genuinely values effective policing as well as the need to safeguard our civil liberties to support the Macpherson recommendations and stop playing politics with race?

The Prime Minister: As my hon. Friend knows, I met the officers in charge of policing in her area when I was in her constituency a few weeks ago, and I certainly pay tribute to the work that they have done because they have shown that it is perfectly possible to make sure that policing takes no account of the race or background of a particular individual while still enforcing the law. Indeed, that is the only way properly to police a local community. The fact that there has been a 40 per cent. increase in the number of people arrested following stop and search is a very good sign indeed.

My hon. Friend will also know that, as I said to members of her local community when I was there, I hope that those people who see such changes come about now feel empowered to join our police force and be part of policing their local communities.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I entirely associate my right hon. and hon. Friends and myself with the expressions of sympathy and condolence enunciated by both the Prime Minister and the leader of the Conservative party in connection with today's terrible train catastrophe.

May I return to an issue that was discussed earlier, and make it clear that the Liberal Democrats strongly support the swift action that the Government have taken over the freezing of the movement of animals within the country? May I also ask a couple of specific questions? How and when does the Prime Minister intend to reintroduce meat supplies from British farmers safely into the domestic food chain, and when will such a scheme be up and running?

The Prime Minister: Details of a scheme for licensed slaughter of animals that will be taken straight from the farms to slaughter will be announced on Friday. The scheme will both significantly improve the situation relating to food supply and give hope to farmers who cannot currently move their animals at all.

Mr. Kennedy: An awful lot of people in the country as a whole, but particularly in the agricultural community, would like details sooner rather than later if that is at all possible. Is the Prime Minister in a position at least to clarify whether he or his Ministers are engaging in discussions with the supermarkets, and ensuring that they in turn engage in discussions with local farmers and suppliers as a whole to make certain that things are back on track as soon as possible?

People out there really care about what is happening. They do not feel that they have the information they need, and this is a good opportunity for the Prime Minister to provide it.

The Prime Minister: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's specific query is yes, of course we have been in touch with the supermarkets. We are also engaging in detailed discussion with farmers and the wider industry.

It is not that we are being coy about announcing the details; it will take us until Friday to put those details together in a way that is worked out and agreed with the industry. It is perfectly right for us not to make an announcement until we are sure of all the details; that will give the greatest confidence not just to the consumer, but to the farming industry. Of course it has taken some time to do this, but I think it is worth taking the time to ensure that it is done properly.

From Friday onwards, we shall be able to license the slaughter of animals. That will allow us to replenish the food chain with British beef, which, as we know, is the safest and best in the world because of the controls we introduced following the BSE problems in our farming industry. More important, it will allow us to do that in a way that will give maximum confidence to farmers themselves.

Mr. Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): May I ask a question about the economy? In Croydon, 4,877 people who were unemployed in 1997 now have jobs, saving the taxpayer £58 million which can be spent on services or tax reductions. Does that not clearly illustrate that the party that generates more jobs is the party that can deliver more investment in services and lower taxes? The history of the Opposition shows that they will never be able to deliver that.

The Prime Minister: It is self-evident that the more stable the economy, the better things are for people's mortgages, living standards and jobs. I am pleased about the number of jobs that have been created. I also think it important for us to maintain programmes such as the new deal, which has helped to cut levels of endemic long-term unemployment, thus reducing the number of benefit claims and allowing us to spend the money on things that people want it to be spent on.

Q2. [149930] **Mr. Michael Fallon** (Sevenoaks): Is the Prime Minister aware of the anomaly whereby nurses in my constituency and other high-cost areas of west Kent will not qualify for the new cost-of-living supplement for London and the south-east, which extends as far as Portsmouth and Swindon? Does the right hon. Gentleman appreciate the demoralising and distorting effect of that? People just a few miles apart are doing the same public service jobs for different rates of pay. Will the right hon. Gentleman look at the position again?

The Prime Minister: I am afraid that if we want to attract people into nursing, teaching and the police in areas where recruitment is particularly difficult because of the buoyancy of the local economy, differential rates of pay will be an inevitable consequence. I should have thought that people like the hon. Gentleman would rather favour a move to a system involving greater pay differentials. I can tell him, however, that we keep the areas covered by the supplement under review. I can also tell him that, irrespective of which part of the country people are in, we as a Government have implemented the pay review board's recommendations in full.

We have also significantly increased the pay of many nurses over the past few years—some pay has increased by as much as 25 per cent. I understand that it is always possible to do more, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to take into account what we have done for all nurses, not simply those affected by the new allowances.

Q3. [149931] **Mr. John Healey** (Wentworth): Is my right hon. Friend aware that this year is the 50th anniversary of the deployment of British service men in the Suez canal zone and that, during that occupation, 60 were killed and 600 wounded by hostile fire? Does he recognise that the Government can be proud of their record in reviewing military matters, whereas previous Governments have ignored long-standing injustices? Will he therefore use his office to ensure that, this year, the Committee for Honours, Medals and Decorations finally gets the chance to consider the case for awarding the general service medal to our troops who served in the Suez from 1951-54?

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend has been raising that issue for some considerable time and I pay tribute to him for that. The recognition for those personnel present in the Suez canal zone was considered at the time and, as he will know, it has been raised on a number of occasions since. I know that the official committee that looks at those matters is aware of that case. I am sure—I will make sure myself—that it will consider very carefully any further representations, including the ones that he has just made.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I know that the Prime Minister is aware of the exhibition in the Upper Waiting Hall that seeks to show all that is good and positive with regard to Northern Ireland. I thank him for agreeing to visit it, but is he aware of the fact that, in Northern Ireland over the past decade, our economy has grown at twice the UK average, that we are experiencing record levels of employment and that the bulk of that employment has been created by small businesses, particularly local small businesses? Will the Prime Minister therefore ensure that, in their fiscal policies, his Government do not add to the burdens that are borne by those local businesses?

May I also remind the Prime Minister that in Northern Ireland farm incomes have fallen more steeply than in any other part of the United Kingdom? In dealing with that part of our economy, which is in serious difficulties, can he bear that in mind, too?

The Prime Minister: On the right hon. Gentleman's last point about the farming industry, of course I understand that farmers' incomes have suffered very considerably in Northern Ireland. They will be subject to the announcements that we made yesterday.

In respect of small businesses, the right hon. Gentleman is, of course, right. It is one of the reasons that we cut the small business corporation tax and why the Chancellor of the Exchequer continues to keep under review fiscal measures that can assist small businesses.

In respect to the Northern Ireland economy, I pay tribute to people such as the right hon. Gentleman, who have also played a part. Were it not for the peace process of the past few years, I do not believe that the Northern Ireland economy would be as buoyant as it is today. Therefore, the courage shown by people such as him has also been a very large part of the resurgence in Northern Ireland.

Q4. [149932] **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): Will my right hon. Friend give us the latest figures on the take-up rate of the working families tax credit? Has he seen reports suggesting that the number of people who are eligible for that tax credit has dropped?

The Prime Minister: I think that 1.1 million families have taken up the working families tax credit, some 300,000 more than took up the old family credit. It has meant lifting the incomes of many families up and down the country out of poverty and it is a huge work incentive as well.

Q5. [149933] **Mr. Paul Burstow** (Sutton and Cheam): Last year, a paedophile used a teenage internet chat room to approach a 12-year-old girl in my constituency. He groomed her online to entice her to an offline meeting for sexual purposes. As many as one in five children who use internet chat rooms are approached by paedophiles in that way. Will the Prime Minister take steps to review the law to ensure that such online grooming is a criminal offence and bring pressure to bear on internet service providers, so that they offer parents chat-free services and all our children can be protected?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. I am informed by the Home Secretary that earlier today he had a meeting on that very subject. We are actively considering doing what the hon. Gentleman has just suggested. Perhaps when our deliberations have finished I can contact him and tell him the result of that.

Q6. [149934] **Gillian Merron** (Lincoln): On the crucial issue of police numbers, is my right hon. Friend aware that because of a combination of additional Government funding and innovative recruitment strategies, Lincolnshire police have confirmed to me that they will be on course next month to achieve the county's highest ever officer strength? Will he confirm that the Government will commit themselves to continue police funding to support Lincolnshire police?

The Prime Minister: I am obviously very pleased to hear that news, and the fact that Lincolnshire police will have the highest ever number of police is obviously very good for local people and for fighting crime in the area.

I know that my hon. Friend will be the first to realise that it is important not only to provide police with additional money for one year, but to provide it year on year on year as sustained investment. That is why it is so important that we are able to put additional money into schools, hospitals and police, but on the basis of a stable economy in which we are keeping inflation low, interest rates low and the public finances healthy.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): May I tell the Prime Minister that I have received more than 1,000 letters from my constituents—parents, teachers and governors—complaining about the unfair funding settlement for schools in the county, and that the

settlement has become worse under this Government? May I also point out to him that every child in every school in his constituency receives £200 more, and that every child in every school in a Birmingham constituency receives £500 more, than every child in my constituency and in Worcestershire? Those sums add hundreds of thousands of pounds to a school's budget. Finally, may I also ask that rather than giving me the pat answers that misrepresent the Conservative party's point of view on education, he treat the question seriously and make urgent representations to the Deputy Prime Minister, so that education, education, education really means something for children in Worcestershire?

The Prime Minister: Of course the hon. Lady knows, as the Green Paper on local government makes clear, that we are reviewing the way in which the standard spending assessment works. She will also be aware—given that for 18 years Conservative Members had the opportunity to do something about it but never did—that people treat with, let us say, a little scepticism claims by people such as her who have been opposed to the finance system.

As for the general issue of education funding, the Government are—this is a fact—putting record investment into education. I also suspect that, in the hon. Lady's own constituency, schools have had capital funding under the new deal that they would never have had under the previous Government. As she and the Conservative party are committed to scrapping the new deal, those schools would also not receive that funding in the future.

I hope that that was not a pat answer. However, I believe it is important that, when we debate education, we remember that, in their last three years in office, the previous Government cut funding per pupil by £30, whereas we have increased it by more than £300.

Q7. [149935] **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): Next Monday, the Minister for School Standards will open the new Chetwynd Road school, in Broxtowe, which has been waiting in temporary first world war huts since 1915—under 22 Conservative, Labour and Liberal Democrat Governments. Does the Prime Minister welcome the genuine pleasure that people in Broxtowe feel about the additional education funding? Further to the previous exchange, will he also accelerate the review of the funding formula, so that in future each child in Britain has a decent chance of education that does not depend on their postcode?

The Prime Minister: As has been said, later this year we shall set out our decisions in a White Paper. However, I tell my hon. Friend that of course we understand the concerns that have been expressed. I think he also again makes the point that it is only that additional investment—I think there has been £14 million in Nottinghamshire alone—that has allowed us to make that commitment to Britain's schools. The truth is that we have under-invested in our public services for a very long time. It will take time to put that right, but the money is coming in. The most important thing, however, is that investing on the back of a stable economy means that the money can be sustained year on year.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I raise with the Prime Minister a matter of practical concern to sheep farmers in my constituency? The lambing season will shortly be upon us, and there is a great need for my farmers to be able to bring their ewes back inside, to protect them from the severe weather and from fox and badger predation. My farmers understand, as I do, the need for the restrictions on the movement of livestock, but the public highway cuts across some farms' land and thus prevents ewes from being brought inside. Will the Prime Minister have a word with the Minister of Agriculture to see if he can find a sensible way to deal with this welfare and economic problem?

The Prime Minister: That is a perfectly reasonable point. There is a serious problem here. Obviously, the first task of the Government and all the authorities must be to eradicate the disease, but we understand the particular problem that the hon. and learned Gentleman raises in relation to sheep farmers. I understand from my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture that the problem is being considered, as is the specific suggestion that the hon. and learned Gentleman has just made. I do not know when we can give him some assurance on the matter, but we will do so as soon as we can.

Q8. [149936] **Ms Sandra Osborne** (Ayr): Given the substantial improvement that the Government have made in employment conditions, will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the actions of the Cathelco group? That firm has manipulated the system to its own advantage, while depriving 16 former employees at the Ailsa-Troon shipyard in my constituency of their redundancy rights. Will he accept that there are flaws in the system when such a thing can happen? Will he ask Ministers to examine the company, with a view to reviewing its trading licence and to ensuring that it does not receive publicly funded contracts?

The Prime Minister: I know that my hon. Friend is very concerned about this matter, about which she has written to me. I recognise the strength of feeling that exists about what happened to the 16 employees at the yard. I know that many people have expressed concern at their treatment. If she will allow me, I will ask a Minister at the Scotland Office to get back to her with a detailed response on the point that she has raised.

Point of Order

3.32 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noted that we got to only Question 2 in Northern Ireland Question Time because the questions, and Ministers' answers, were so long-winded. Can you do anything to ensure that your admonition to the House some weeks ago—that questions and answers should be short—is obeyed, especially by Front-Bench Members? Can you ensure also that Conservative Front-Bench Members do not ask repeat questions?

Mr. Speaker: I am conscious that we reached only Question 2 in Northern Ireland questions, and I will try to speed up the process next time.

Siting of Telecommunications Masts

3.32 pm

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to control the siting and development of telecommunications masts.

I congratulate the Government on their establishment of an independent expert group chaired by Sir William Stewart to look into aspects of the problem of telecommunication masts, and I welcome too the subsequent publication of the Stewart report in May last year. However, serious concerns about the siting of mobile phone masts have been raised in the Chamber on several occasions since then, usually as a direct response to concerns raised by worried constituents.

My Stourbridge constituents are extremely concerned about proposals made by Vodafone to site a new telephone mast near their homes and a short distance from a school and a nursery. Hundreds of my constituents have successfully petitioned Dudley council and, with my support, have vigorously opposed the company's application to build the mast. Dudley council, rightly in my view, turned the application down twice, but its decision was overturned on appeal under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

In his appeal decision, the inspector referred to the Stewart report, concluding that exposure to radio frequency radiation below guideline levels did not cause adverse health effects in the general population. Paragraph 1.18 states:

"There is now scientific evidence, however, which suggests that there may be biological effects occurring at exposures below guidelines."

Paragraph 1.19 states:

"We conclude therefore that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to radio frequency radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects, and that the gaps in the knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach."

Again, paragraph 6.44 says:

"the possibility of harm from exposures insufficient to cause important heating of tissues cannot yet be ruled out with confidence."

These points are, in my view, sufficient to raise serious and legitimate health concerns and they have been interpreted as such by an appeals inspector appointed by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions. The inspector dismissed an appeal by Orange against the decision of the London borough of Harrow to refuse to grant approval for a mobile telecommunications mast. Orange, like Vodafone in my constituency of Stourbridge, had appealed under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. It is my understanding that the appeal decision in Harrow is the first of its kind to include health considerations as reasons for dismissal of an appeal.

Point 6 of the appeal decision cites guidance in the ministerial letter of 29 June 2000. It says that the Government's response to the Stewart report should be "accorded considerable weight". Point 7 of the appeal decision states that the independent expert group on mobile phones came to the view that there could be indirect adverse effects on well-being in some cases. I think that I have shown that the Stewart report has had very mixed outcomes on appeal decisions under section 78 of the 1990 Act.

[Ms Debra Shipley]

People who live near the proposed Vodafone mast site in my constituency were devastated to learn that their views and those of their democratically elected councillors and Member of Parliament could be thrown out by an appeals inspector. I have knocked on the doors of many of the houses near the proposed site. They are the homes of families with young children. Concerned parents have said to me that they do not want risks taken with their children's health. I agree with them wholeheartedly.

Right hon. and hon. Members have repeatedly criticised the lack of local consultation on mobile phone masts. In Stourbridge, the site is 150 m from a school and a day nursery. Yesterday, Vodafone faxed my office to say that it is organising radio frequency calculations and that, in line with the recommendation of the independent expert group, if the maximum radio wave intensity should fall on a school or school grounds, it will consult the school. Vodafone has waited a very long time to make such measurements. I suggest that it is only now, with the prospect of sustained and substantial bad publicity, that such moves are being made. The vast majority of parents of pupils in the school and the nursery do not want that mast sited near their children.

My constituents are not alone. Since my decision to present a Bill to the House on this issue, many colleagues have contacted me and offered support. In addition, I have received representations from across Britain. It is no exaggeration to say that thousands and thousands of people want much stronger legislation regarding mobile phone masts. I know of opposition to them in areas including Luton, Brighton, Forest of Dean, Conwy, Dartford, Hendon, Harrow and many more. Overwhelmingly, people want to know that they will be fully consulted, that their views will be listened to and that local decisions will be valued. They do not want local decisions that are supported by their democratically elected representatives to be overturned.

When the Minister for Public Health, responded to the recent debate on the Phillips inquiry into BSE, she acknowledged that the report stated that the other casualty of the BSE story had been the destruction of the credibility of pronouncements. My hon. Friend said:

"That is extremely serious; it is about not only BSE, but trust in Government across the board and in pronouncements on health and safety."—[*Official Report*, 15 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 554.]

She then specifically mentioned mobile phones. Public opinion about the possible health risks of mobile phones is such that there is urgent need for changes to planning legislation.

I have shown today that the Stewart report was used to dismiss an appeal on health grounds in one part of the country, but that such grounds were not used in my Stourbridge constituency. I have demonstrated that consultation is being driven by the fear of adverse publicity rather than by a genuine commitment to community consultation. I have shown that public opinion is overwhelmingly fearful for children's health; rightly so. In the view of expert opinion, the case for the safety of mobile phone masts in regard to children's health is at best unproven.

I have made the case for an urgent change in legislation to allow for planning controls on mobile phone masts. I make that case on behalf of thousands of parents across Britain. I commend the Bill to the House.

3.40 pm

Mr. Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I was hoping to be able to support the Bill. I, too, have experience of local parents who are concerned about the siting of masts near schools and hospitals. I am also aware of aesthetic arguments against mobile phone masts. Indeed, the comments of the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) largely echo Conservative policy.

The Conservative party calls specifically for the refusal of permission for all new masts on land owned or occupied by councils. School governors are being asked to adopt council policy. Schools are to be urged to ask the Radiocommunications Agency to check emissions from existing masts on school sites. Councils are to be asked to oppose applications for masts on highway land. I can understand those arguments on aesthetic grounds.

I oppose the Bill, however, because the hon. Lady tried to imply that there is a real health danger from mobile phone masts. She referred to extracts from the Stewart report, especially on localised heating of tissues. If the hon. Lady had read the report—as I have—she would see that those points apply specifically to the use of a mobile phone where the antenna is close to the cranium, when there is indeed a possibility of localised heating. In such cases, a health problem may arise—but no one is sure about that.

This morning, I found out from the BBC engineering information department that the Crystal Palace television transmitter gives out 1,000 kW of power—1 MW or 1 million watts—on its analogue television transmissions. In addition, for each of its digital services, it gives off a further 10,000 watts.

Those frequencies are similar to those used by Vodafone and Orange, to which the hon. Lady referred. However, neither at Crystal Palace, where such transmissions have been going on for more than 50 years, nor, indeed, at Sutton Coldfield, which serves my area and where similar power transmissions are used—I repeat that the power is more than 1 million watts—is there any evidence of health problems. There is no clustering of leukaemia; nor are there other carcinogenic dysfunctions in the area.

Does the hon. Lady know the power of an average mobile phone mast? It is not 1 million watts or 1,000 watts—it is between 50 and 100 watts. That is the same power as an average light bulb. The hon. Lady has raised important and interesting points. Unfortunately, I fear that she may have increased the fears—unwitting, unrealised and perhaps unnecessary—of parents. For that reason only, I oppose the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Ms Debra Shipley, Ms Margaret Moran, Mrs. Betty Williams, Barbara Follett, Mrs. Diana Organ, Jackie Ballard, Mr. Simon Burns, Mr. Alan Simpson, Dr. Howard Stoate, Mr. John Bercow, Mr. David Lepper and Mr. Andrew Dismore.

SITING OF TELECOMMUNICATIONS MASTS

Ms Debra Shipley accordingly presented a Bill to control the siting and development of telecommunications masts: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 23 March, and to be printed [Bill 53].

Opposition Day

[6TH ALLOTTED DAY]

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): We are grateful to the Deputy Prime Minister for his commitment to make a statement this evening on the terrible rail accident in Yorkshire. In view of the terrible events on the railway, we do not think it appropriate to debate the first Opposition motion on the Order Paper today on the Government's integrated transport policy.

Foot and Mouth

3.46 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I beg to move,

That this House expresses concern about the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease, sympathy for farmers facing the loss of their livelihoods and for others working in the livestock sector, and appreciation of the work of those fighting to contain the spread of the disease; endorses the action of the Government to restrict the movement of livestock; welcomes its efforts to identify the source of the outbreak; urges, where necessary, a temporary suspension of rights of way across farmland; welcomes the Government's announcement that it will draw down the full amount of agri-monetary compensation available for livestock farmers; and calls on the Government to consider what other help can be given to the industry.

I welcome the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to this debate, which has been brought forward by three and a half hours because of this morning's tragic accident. I should like to say that because the Minister has come here earlier than expected and given the pressure that he is under, we shall understand if he cannot be present throughout the debate.

A week ago, the public became aware that for the first time in 34 years, foot and mouth disease had been identified on the British mainland. Every day in the past seven days, the true horror that that news implied has been brought home. As more outbreaks have been confirmed, we have learned how quickly the disease can spread. As export markets shut down and internal livestock movements are banned, we see the vulnerability of a whole industry to a single disease. As race meetings and rugby fixtures have been cancelled, we have understood how widely the impact of the crisis is being felt. As the freedom of movement of people on foot and by car in rural areas is restricted, we realise how much of ordinary daily social, domestic and business life is coming to a halt. But above all, it is the personal tragedies of the farmers directly concerned that deserve our first sympathy.

More than for most people, the daily work of livestock farmers is a way of life. They are men and women who rise in the dark at 3.30 in the morning to milk their cows. They are men and women whose nights may be interrupted because of calving or lambing. Those men and women have a special relationship with the animals in their care, and when those animals are under threat of slaughter, those men and women face not just the loss of their livelihoods, but the destruction of the whole of their life's work. That is why, at the start of the motion, we invite the House to express sympathy for those farmers. At this time, they truly deserve our sympathy.

The past seven days have also shown the enormity of the task that the country now faces. The detailed process of checking animal movements to and from farms,

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

markets and slaughterhouses has placed a burden on vets, officials and other inspectors, which continues to grow. The need to understand how this dreadful disease came to our shores after a gap of more than a generation is paramount. Only by identifying the original source of the outbreak can we be sure of minimising the risk of a recurrence.

Every family in the land has been talking about the issue. There cannot be a single kitchen table anywhere in the United Kingdom around which worries have not been expressed about the disease, about its spread and about the possible consequences. That is why the Opposition have chosen to debate the subject today. It would be very odd indeed if Parliament did not address these concerns directly.

I hope that the Minister agrees that, even at a time of intense pressure on him and his Ministry, it remains an important part of his duty to keep Parliament informed and to be available on a regular basis to answer questions from hon. Members on both sides of the House—questions that have been put to them by their constituents and that they expect to have a chance to ask.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): My hon. Friend will have observed the enormous interest and understandable support that he is receiving from Conservative Members. Given the claims of Labour Members that they also represent parts of the countryside, can he offer an explanation for their lack of representation in this debate?

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point, which will be apparent to anyone who can see the attendance in the Chamber.

Very unusually for an Opposition day motion, this motion has not been amended by the Government. We have chosen wording that is deliberately supportive not just of farmers and the industry, but of the main actions that the Government have announced in response to the crisis. Indeed, the Opposition have supported every one of the steps that the Government have taken so far. We have suggested more than once—and may continue to do so—that the Government should go further and should do more, but we have not criticised or resisted any of the Government's proposals to tackle the crisis. Because this is an emergency, we will give the Government our full backing in dealing with it. We genuinely wish the Minister and everyone else involved in trying to contain the spread of foot and mouth disease and to identify its source every possible success in their task.

I wish to comment on four subjects briefly. The first is compensation. I welcome unreservedly the announcement yesterday that the Government will draw down £156 million of agrimonetary compensation. That was the right decision, and I am glad that the Government have responded to many requests from Conservative Members and from the industry to take such a decision.

However, the Minister is fully aware that this agrimonetary compensation is designed specifically to compensate farmers for the weakness of the euro. Given the present state of the agriculture industry—an industry which is losing 400 jobs a week, which has lost 40,000 jobs in the past two years and in which the average income of farmers has fallen by three quarters in the past four years—that agrimonetary compensation was sorely needed regardless of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

We and others urged the Government to draw that money down before the outbreak of foot and mouth disease was known about, so I urge the Minister to confirm this afternoon that, in principle, the Government accept that further targeted help may be needed for farmers and others suffering unrecoverable losses as a direct result of foot and mouth disease.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On the question of loss, will my hon. Friend refer specifically to the plight of the livestock producers who are caught by the 30-month rule? They cannot market animals of more than 30 months at the full price because of that rule.

Mr. Yeo: My right hon. and learned Friend draws attention to a point to which I was coming. It is a relevant problem and a number of farmers will face it. The number will grow each week as movement restrictions remain.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my hon. Friend also consider the position of pig producers who, particularly in Norfolk and Suffolk, have already suffered the depredation of classical swine fever? Once again, they have to feed pigs that they cannot send to market. Those who have fattening units will again face empty stalls and no cashflow when they eventually manage to send pigs to market, and they have already faced the problems caused by the terrible swine fever.

Mr. Yeo: I am going to mention pig farmers, who are especially badly hit in both our constituencies. However, on the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), cattle are at the peak of their value when they approach 30 months, after which that value declines substantially and there is no prospect of it recovering. If the restrictions on movement, which have properly been imposed and to which we give our full support, remain in force for any length of time, an increasing number of farmers will face severe difficulty.

It is important to mention cashflow. Nothing gnaws away at a business man's sense of well-being than cashflow problems. People who work in the public sector know that their salary cheque will go into their bank account come what may at the end of each month. They sometimes have no concept of the anxiety and sleepless nights that people suffer if they do not know when they will next receive any money. Such circumstances can lead to the human tragedies that have too often scarred the industry in the past year or two.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): Bearing in mind the cashflow difficulties that my hon. Friend mentions, will he also consider small abattoirs, which are greatly affected by the problem? The only abattoir left in Hampshire is in my constituency. It slaughtered its last animal two days ago. It has no income and substantial outgoings. Can he give my constituent and others any hope that they will receive help?

Mr. Yeo: My hon. Friend has raised that matter with me and is right to say that some small abattoirs will face acute difficulties. The Prime Minister recently seemed to

leave the door ajar to receiving further representations on behalf of people who may be affected in the way that my hon. Friend has described.

As for pig farmers, they have operated without subsidy because they are outside the regime that is covered by agrimonetary compensation. In the past 24 hours, the Minister referred to advancing the available money that was announced last April in the action plan for farming—a total of £65 million over three years. Although the intention was to spend some of that money in the current year, little or none has been spent for the purpose for which it was provided. In addition, the money is available only to people who are going to close down their business. That is not much comfort to people who are worried about the large amount of imported pigmeat that we have to buy. It would be comforting if there was something for pig farmers who want to remain in business.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments. Will he encompass farmers and producers who supply farmers' markets in his remarks? The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food rightly recommended that farmers' markets should not take place for the foreseeable future. Many people completely changed their method and chain of production for those markets and they are especially disadvantaged because they cannot shift any material. I hope that he will agree that that is a problem.

Mr. Yeo: The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to that. It is a problem. The growth of farmers' markets in the past couple of years, which both sides of the House welcome, has been brought to an abrupt halt, and that will cause acute problems. I am sure that the Minister heard the hon. Gentleman.

Will the Minister consider the provision of private storage aid—for example, for sows, for which the export market has been removed? That would give pig farmers some hope that they might obtain a fair price for their animals.

My second point relates directly to compensation. It is possible that some animal movements may be permitted under licence. I appreciate that the Minister will want to be guided by the chief veterinary officer, and no Opposition Member would expect him to take a risk to cut corners. There is a difficult balance to strike between the obvious desirability of allowing as much movement as possible under licence to enable farmers to generate income again and the need to continue the containment measures that are in place. Clearly, however, the need for extra cash help for the industry will be directly reduced if some animal movement can be permitted. I understand from what was said in the House earlier that more information will be given on Friday. We look forward to hearing that. Can the Minister say this afternoon whether he expects the relaxations in the short term to be extensive?

Mr. Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): There must be an adequate supply of disinfectant throughout the country to enable even limited movement of livestock. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is a shortage of disinfectant in mid-Wales and elsewhere? Would he be interested to hear, as I am, what provision the Government might make to supply adequate volumes of disinfectant to the farming community?

Mr. Yeo: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was present earlier, but my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition raised exactly that point with the Prime Minister. That is an acute problem not only in the region of Wales from which the hon. Gentleman comes but in Devon and Cornwall and possibly elsewhere. Given that the availability of disinfectant is crucial to the containment measures, this is a key issue and that is why my right hon. Friend raised it.

The Minister will know that the lambing season is upon us, and in Prime Minister's Question Time, my right hon. Friend pointed out that farmers may want to move their sheep but are unable to do so at present, even across a road that may divide one part of their farm from another. I understand that they are also unable to cross land belonging to a neighbouring farmer, even if the owner has given consent. Clearly, any relaxation that can safely be undertaken would be welcome, but I stress again that we understand that the Minister will want to make decisions on the basis of the advice that he is receiving from the chief vet.

My third point concerns the origin of the outbreak. The British mainland has enjoyed freedom from foot and mouth disease for 34 years, and it is terribly important that we should discover the origin of this outbreak. There are suspicions that it may have resulted from meat imports, whether legal or illegal. We have permitted imports from countries where foot and mouth outbreaks have recently occurred. I am advised that we currently allow imports from five countries where foot and mouth disease has occurred since the start of the year.

The Minister will know of the concern that I expressed in a parliamentary question on 8 January about the risks of imports from South Africa in the light of an outbreak of foot and mouth disease in that country. I hope that in due course an analysis of how much meat has been imported from countries such as South Africa, which are known to have had foot and mouth disease in the very recent past, will be undertaken and published. The problem of illegal imports is also serious, and the Minister and I have debated it on many occasions. I will not go over that ground again, except to say that I believe that the public are also concerned about that, quite apart from any possible link with the outbreak of this disease.

I understand that more information is available about the swill used by the farmer in Northumberland, where the first outbreak occurred. I hope that the Minister will be able to share that information with the House and tell us whether he believes that the current regulations on feeding practices need to be reviewed in light of the advice that he is receiving. The public, as well as farmers, will want to know that reasonable precautions are being taken against the risk that foot and mouth disease could re-enter Britain after the present outbreak has been brought under control.

The reports today that antibodies have been found in sheep exported to Germany may—I stress the word "may"—mean that foot and mouth disease has been present here for longer than was previously thought. It underlines the need to understand precisely how the outbreak has occurred.

[Mr. Yeo]

My fourth and last, brief point concerns access. I welcome the Government's prompt response to calls to close footpaths and rights of way across farmland. I was glad to see a press release from Kent county council today saying that it has already used the emergency powers available to close footpaths, bridleways and byways in that county.

I have heard from other county councils, including Suffolk, that they feel that they do not yet have the information that they need to put their powers into practice. I hope that the Minister will ask the relevant Minister at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to ensure that all local authorities are notified immediately of their powers and of how they can be operated. I hope that he will back that up by urging them to introduce the powers at once.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Is my hon. Friend aware that foot and mouth disease has already been diagnosed at a number of farms in Devon? Given the beauty of the area, many footpaths are still being used, including those over the Dartmoor national park and the heritage coastline. Thousands of ramblers from throughout Europe, including England, continue to walk these paths. Does my hon. Friend agree that Devon county council should be encouraged to close these footpaths and bridleways as a precaution? The foot and mouth farms are within 20 miles of the borders of my constituency. I suggested to the Minister on Monday that matting with disinfectant could be used at all the access points to the peninsula of south Devon, and so eradicate the possibility of foot and mouth disease coming to that peninsula.

Mr. Yeo: Devon is one of the most important livestock farming counties in Britain, and I am sure that the local people would want every possible precaution to be taken, as my hon. Friend has suggested, to minimise the risk of the disease spreading in the county. I believe that county councils would not be criticised if they decided to err on the side of caution in their response, given the powers that are now available to them.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I believe, but I am not yet certain—I shall check during the debate—that the appropriate orders have been made by Devon county council to close the footpaths.

Mr. Yeo: I am sure that the House is grateful for that information. *[Interruption.]* I am not sure what grounds Labour Members have for mirth.

This is a fast-moving situation. It was always likely that more cases would be confirmed after the first one last week. I dare say that we shall not know for a little longer whether the containment measures now in place are succeeding. The country will hope and pray that they do succeed. The Minister has an unenviable task, and we all hope that he succeeds in it. On behalf of the Opposition, I pledge that anything that we can do to assist him will be done. I warmly commend the motion to the House.

4.7 pm

The Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr. Nick Brown): Before dealing with the motion, I want to say that in view of the tragic circumstances of this morning's rail accident, the Opposition were right to change the business in the way that they have. I want to identify Ministers and officials in my Department with the expressions of sorrow, from both sides of the House, about the accident and the victims. I want particularly to add my personal expression of sorrow and that of my right hon. Friend the Minister of State—friends and neighbours may well have been travelling on that train this morning.

I now come to the debate, and I thank the Opposition for their support for the Government's actions as expressed in their motion. There is nothing in the motion with which I disagree. This more bipartisan approach is the right way to respond to the serious situation that confronts us.

I know that the House will want to join me in expressing support and sympathy for all those who are caught up in the outbreak and the control measures that we have had to put in place. There have been a further six confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease today, taking the total to 24. The new cases include two in Powys, one in Herefordshire, one in Devon, one in Leicestershire and one in Lancashire. Yesterday, I confirmed new cases in Anglesey, Lancashire, Northampton and County Durham. Most of those new cases can be linked to previous cases. For the cases confirmed today, investigations into links with other cases are still continuing. All animals in confirmed cases and potentially dangerous contacts are slaughtered. So far, just over 15,000 animals have been slaughtered to control the disease—more than 3,000 cattle, about 11,000 sheep and almost 2,000 pigs.

I know that the House will want to join me in paying tribute to the work of those who are in the front line in combating this disease outbreak. They include farmers and others in the livestock industry, the staff of the state veterinary service, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food animal health offices and regional service centres, local authorities, the Meat Hygiene Service, private veterinarians and the police.

The Government's disease control policy remains as I reported to the House on Monday. I shall summarise the sequence of events. Foot and mouth disease was first confirmed on Tuesday evening last week in pigs at an abattoir and in cattle on a neighbouring farm near Brentwood in Essex. A further case was confirmed at Heddon-on-the-Wall in Northumberland on Friday. Because that case was in another region and because of the suspicion, subsequently confirmed, that it had been present for up to two weeks, the same day the whole of Great Britain was made a controlled area. All livestock movements and markets have been banned, as have country fairs, hunts and hare coursing held on farm land.

The Government have granted a special licence to allow the movement, under strict conditions, of fallen stock to a rendering plant, a knacker's yard, incinerators or hunt kennels. In conjunction with the European Union, we have stopped the export of live animals and products to the EU and beyond so that we do not export the disease.

Mr. Dafydd Wigley (Caernarfon): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I welcome the steps that the Government have taken and give them my party's full support. What will be the position with ewes that need to be moved for lambing purposes, perhaps from one farm

to another owned by the same farmer? Given that there is a derogation for injured animals, is the right hon. Gentleman considering a derogation for ewes?

Mr. Brown: When I said yesterday that the situation was becoming increasingly complex, that was one of the issues that I had in mind. In an earlier exchange, a perfectly proper question was asked about the movement of ewes that are about to give birth to lambs from one farmholding to an adjacent farmholding, across an area where travel is not allowed. Indeed, travel is not allowed from one farmholding to another—but that is only one part of the issue.

As the right hon. Gentleman knows, we are getting to the time of the year when breeding animals move from their winter grazing to the original farmholding where they are expected to give birth. Lambing is a period of intensive activity, which rather conflicts with our desire to impose rigid movement restrictions. I am very aware of the problem. I cannot announce a solution today, except to say that the imposition of movement restrictions to prevent the spread of the disease must be given first priority, but we will have urgent discussions with the industry to see how we should handle the situation in the current circumstances.

Although we have discovered foot and mouth disease in what are called fat lambs—animals that have been fattened for slaughter—we have not yet discovered it in the breeding flock. That is a significant fact for those who have to decide policy. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is familiar with the industry and therefore understands the complexities. I can explain the problem, but I am afraid that I am not in a position today to explain the comprehensive solution. All I can do is assert that priority is being given to the need to exterminate the disease.

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I thank the Minister for giving way and also for his tireless work over the past week. He mentioned two cases in Powys. In fact, they are in my constituency of Brecon and Radnorshire, and the evidence is that they originate from the Devon outbreak, which has been traced back to Northumberland. Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that all the cases so far are linked to the original outbreak?

Mr. Brown: Because of the movements to and from Essex to neighbouring farms, and in view of the similar pattern where other outbreaks have been discovered, it does seem that every outbreak can be traced back to the Heddon-on-the-Wall farm, where the disease has been for longer than anywhere else in this country. That seems to be the position. I cannot be categorical, but it is a fair assumption.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): What is the position of graziers on common land? Having spoken to the Minister's office about this earlier, it seems that MAFF has no powers over graziers on common land. Is that true?

Mr. Brown: The position of common land is one of the other complexities with which we are grappling. While the animals are not moving, there is no danger of them spreading the disease beyond the common land, but the problem that the hon. Gentleman is getting at, of how to sort flock by flock, is an intractable one. He describes it well, and if he has an idea for dealing with it immediately I shall be grateful to him. Perhaps the best way to proceed is exactly as we are doing and not allow animals to move, except for slaughter, and to bear down where the disease is found. That, as the hon. Gentleman knows, means bearing down on the cohorts with all the implications that that has for common land.

Mr. Alasdair Morgan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister referred to the market in lambs, and one particular problem that we have in Scotland, perhaps more than elsewhere, is the trade in overwintered lambs, which should be coming on to the market just now. If they do not come on to the market now, apart from the loss to the farmers the danger is that they will come on later in the year and so destroy the market for new lambs. Will he consider a scheme to take the lambs off the market so that the market later in the year is not destroyed?

Mr. Brown: We are giving consideration to such trade issues. The main thrust of our work is to bear down on the disease, but the hon. Gentleman is right to mention the trade issues. Perhaps now is the appropriate point for me to say to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) that his suggestion, in the context of the pig industry, concerning the use of private storage aid in some circumstances is a useful one, and I promise to keep it under review and at the forefront of my mind in my discussions with the Commission. I would require a derogation—it would be deemed a state aid if it were not in place throughout the Community.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I understand the right hon. Gentleman's necessarily cautious approach and the absolute premium that he attaches to safety. However, given that the issue of the possible grant of special licences has been raised by a number of sheep farmers in my constituency—and, I am sure, in those of a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House—can the Minister at least confirm that he is holding discussions with the national veterinary inspection service on the issue?

Mr. Brown: The veterinary authorities are involved in a range of discussions. I am not in a position to describe them all. In current circumstances, I rely on the advice being summarised by the chief veterinary officer and given to me in terms that assist me in making policy decisions. The main thrust of the hon. Gentleman's question is clearly right, but what I cannot do is describe to the House today how we will devise a solution that will deal with the vexed problem that he accurately describes. Clearly, if a measure is to be found, it will most certainly involve the strictest of controls, if animal movement is to be permitted at all. I ask everyone to bear at the forefront of their minds what I have just said about having discovered foot and mouth disease in the animals being fattened for the market but not yet having discovered it in the breeding flock. However, that does not mean that they are not susceptible to it; they most certainly are.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the Minister return to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir M. Spicer) with

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

regard to common land? That is a particular problem in the New Forest where cattle, a number of pigs and the ponies themselves range widely. That difficulty is compounded by open access, with a number of Forestry Commission car parks, camp sites, and a large number of horse boxes coming in, particularly at weekends. Can any measures be taken through MAFF's own verderer or through the Forestry Commission?

Mr. Brown: The regulatory authorities have the power to shut rights of way and, if they deem it necessary—even on a pretty wide interpretation of the precautionary principle—I am content that that should be a matter for them.

There is a series of different risks, by far the largest of which is that animals that are susceptible to the disease will transmit it to other animals. The hon. Gentleman is quite right—the disease can be carried by vehicles, people, horses and other animals that are not directly susceptible, and it can, of course, be moved by travelling from farm to farm. Simple precautions can be taken that almost certainly reduce the risk of the transmission of an infective dose. Again, I appeal to everybody who enjoys the countryside to stay away from livestock and to take sensible precautions if they have to visit vulnerable premises.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): What guidance is the Minister giving to local authorities on how many footpaths should be closed? I spoke a short time ago to the chief legal officer of Brentwood council, who is obviously very much involved in tackling the disease. Of course, hon. Members who represent neighbouring constituencies are also concerned about the matter. No advice has been received and there is a meeting tonight to decide what footpaths should be closed. Clearly, there is a difference between areas of agricultural land that have not been affected and other locations, but my area is right at the epicentre. What advice has been offered to Brentwood council on the number of footpaths that should be closed?

Mr. Brown: I deliberately left the issue to the discretion of local authorities, on the understanding that they would know best the local circumstances. It is for them to make an assessment of risk. I could divert veterinary resources into conducting a risk assessment of all the rights of way, but I have got them all bearing down on the disease itself and I had hoped that I could leave the matter of footpaths to local authorities. Incidentally, if they want advice from me, I suggest that they act on a precautionary basis. I think that most people would understand that that is a sensible way to proceed.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I have been contacted by a company that collects milk from a number of farms in my constituency. It is anxious, as it has been trying to get in touch with the Ministry at Tolworth but so far has not managed to obtain a satisfactory response. It is concerned about spray suppression equipment, which must be fitted to heavy goods vehicles. The company is saying that the requirement to fit such equipment means that mud is being carried from one farm to another. It would be possible to remove the equipment, but a derogation is needed for that. The company cannot get an answer either from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions or the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Will the Minister consider that as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Brown: I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will get officials in my Department to consider the issue as a matter of urgency and provide him with a definitive answer. It seems to me that there are competing claims about whether such intervention is correct. I urge caution on the dairy industry. We are trying at least to keep the milk routes going, but there are obviously vulnerabilities in doing farm-to-farm visits. Everybody needs to exercise extreme caution to ensure that people and vehicles are not spreading the disease.

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): I know that the Minister is doing his best with regard to public access, but I am afraid that he will have to do a lot more to convince the public that they must be more strong minded in choosing where to go at weekends. He will be interested in the case of my constituent, Mr. Matthews, of Skyborry farm on the Welsh border. I suppose that the farm is situated about 90 miles from Leicester, but at the weekend Mr. Matthews encountered people from Leicester walking in what can only be called intensive sheep country. With the best will in the world, local authorities will be up against it to stop that sort of thing happening. The Minister should say more about the subject, so the public are properly aware of the risk.

Mr. Brown: We have devolved power to local authorities so that they can use it. If they do so, it has the force of law. If people will not obey the law, it is perfectly permissible to call the police. We have not devolved that power because we expect policemen to be standing at the beginning of every right of way. When somebody in authority, whether it is a farmer or a public official, says "Please do not use this footpath during the outbreak", any sensible person will just go away. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that one or two people are quarrelling and asserting their rights, but in those circumstances I urge local authorities to take their names and addresses and prosecute them.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I appreciate the blanket ban that has been put in place, and I understand the nightmare of trying gently to unravel it—of knowing where to start—and the problems of competing pressures. However, will the Minister ensure that officials consider the animal welfare problem that a farmer raised with me today? His cattle, which are wintering in slatted rented accommodation that is unsuitable for calving, need to move back to his farm to calve, but, obviously, the forces of nature mean that there is a time limit. I know that the Minister cannot answer fully now, but will he ensure that the matter is considered?

Mr. Brown: That problem is similar, although not on the same scale, to that of the breeding flock of sheep. We are very conscious of it, but the hon. Gentleman, having described the problem accurately enough, will realise how difficult it is to deal with. Also, he will be familiar with

its scale. Let me repeat that last March more than 1 million lambs were born in the United Kingdom. The dairy industry, by its very nature, involves calving.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): I am extremely grateful to the Minister for the manner in which he is taking these questions. May I ask about a matter that has just been raised in a European Scrutiny Committee? New European Union proposals—a draft directive and a draft regulation, of which I am sure he is aware—deal with health requirements for animal by-products not intended for human consumption. That will bear on the question of transport, as will the manner in which such a massive pile of documents deals with the question of animal by-products and their testing and the extent to which they may be dangerous to the public.

In the context of both present circumstances and the question whether the virus might have been imported—possibly from countries that do not have the high standards that we employ or from other countries, perhaps in Europe—can the Minister give an absolute assurance that these matters will be dealt with expeditiously so that there is no doubt as to the legislative situation and the dangers to animal and human health?

Mr. Brown: I must be the first Labour Minister who has been able to respond to the hon. Gentleman by saying yes, in general terms, I can give him the assurance he seeks. What is more, later on I shall say something further. Given that he has asked a question, perhaps this is an appropriate moment to say that I have just been informed by our veterinary authorities that the German authorities advise that the sheep involved in the earlier containment exercise are not antibody positive. There is a threshold of negative status and work is continuing on a precautionary basis to consider that, but the fact that the sheep are not antibody positive is a hopeful sign.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful to the Minister, who has been incredibly generous in giving way. I am also extremely grateful to him for that announcement, which comes as a great relief to me because I know that the problem was worrying Mr. Cleave at Burdon farm, Highampton.

I am also grateful to a veterinary surgeon in Holsworthy in my constituency for drawing to my attention the point that all the interventions that have been made only emphasise the importance of knowledge and information, for farmers as well as for others. I hope that the Minister will at least consider that. Many farmers are not on the internet, so will he encourage his officials immediately to post information and orders on, for example, the Teletext and Ceefax services, which are available to nearly everybody? They are certainly available to nearly all my constituency farmers.

Mr. Brown: A helpline and other front-line advice is available and I shall write to all Members setting out the arrangements so that they will know where to turn if they are contacted by constituents. The hon. Gentleman's suggestion is a good one and I shall have it examined by my officials. I specifically extend my sympathy to the farmers in his constituency, which is at the centre of this awful outbreak, and to the private veterinary officials who have been so helpful in dealing with it.

Mr. Tom King (Bridgwater): The Minister suggested that he faces a crisis of this scale because it was not possible to identify the problem at Heddon-on-the-Wall early enough without jumping to conclusions. He also said that he believed that the disease had not yet reached the breeding flock. Anyone who has handled sheep and experienced the problems of footrot and orf knows that it is often incredibly difficult to establish whether an animal is suffering from foot and mouth. Will the right hon. Gentleman see what his Ministry can do to ensure that anyone with sheep knows how to look for the symptoms, and knows what action is necessary? The worst possibility is that the disease is incubating in sheep. As we know, it is more visible in cattle and pigs.

Mr. Brown: It is also fair to say that many farmers will not have seen the symptoms before. We therefore plan to write to every farmer with a livestock holding, including some with whom we do not communicate regularly—we had a problem with the pig sector, because it is an unaided regime—enclosing a simple factual leaflet explaining what the condition looks like and what precautionary measures can be taken. The right hon. Gentleman's suggestion is perfectly reasonable, and the Ministry is already on to it.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The issue of information has already been raised. Does the Minister recognise that it is important, and clearly consistent with the tone of the debate, for Members of Parliament to be involved with regard to their constituents? They are likely to hear of any confirmed outbreaks fairly quickly through the bush telegraph. However, will the Minister consider setting up a system whereby Members could be advised—perhaps by means of a pager number—of any outbreaks affecting their constituencies? That would enable them to answer constituents' queries accurately.

Mr. Brown: Obviously, many Members on both sides of the House will, very properly, be anxious for their constituents and will want to do the best they can for them. We all have that in common. I am writing to all Members giving front-line advice, and I will take the hon. Gentleman's suggestion on board because I know how important it is for all of us to be able to provide our constituents with a front-line service in these difficult times.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): Will my right hon. Friend assist Cornwall county council, farmers and the community in my constituency? Owing to the siting of the county's periphery, we have fortunately not had any foot and mouth diagnosed as yet, and we want to keep it that way. Three trunk roads enter the county. The council, local MAFF officials and vets are united in wanting to install disinfectant baths on those three routes. Such baths have already been installed on the minor roads.

Mr. Brown: I am not sure whether that is the right thing to do; I shall take professional advice. Obviously, I do not wish to thwart any disease control measure, so I shall ensure that officials consider my hon. Friend's suggestion and that of the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen), and convey their professional advice to me. I am afraid that I cannot give a fuller response at the moment.

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I am grateful for my right hon. Friend's

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

customary generosity in giving way. Has he considered the position of the national milk record service, which regularly visits every dairy farm? I know that a number of farmers and the National Farmers Union in Wales have expressed concern and have suggested that the service should be suspended until we know that the dairy sector, in particular, is not affected.

Mr. Brown: That is an entirely reasonable point. We are also examining issues relating to the conduct of the census. It may be necessary to postpone activity in that regard, although I am not making an announcement today.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): The Minister is earning the admiration of the whole House by his willingness to give way, and also by the competence that he has displayed in answering a raft of questions.

All of us with rural constituencies share the anxiety and apprehension of the farmers in those constituencies, but other businesses also depend on farming for their existence, not least small and medium-sized haulage businesses. I have received a communication from one such in my constituency, saying that if there are no movements of livestock within the next two or three weeks it will have to close its doors.

Does the Minister understand that when people talk of consequential loss, they have in mind the possibility that the Government will at least consider the fate of businesses of that kind, and give some consideration to compensating them in due course?

Mr. Brown: I understand the point that the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes. The livestock haulage business is a specialist business; it cannot find other markets easily. That is why I am working hard with officials, including the chief vet, to get the industry operating again. It will be able to do so only under licensed conditions—under controlled conditions. I will say something about that later, but it seems that the best way to give hope to the domestic livestock sector and to intermediary industries, including the abattoir and haulage sectors, is to get things working again in a way that does not involve a risk of spreading the disease. As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know, it is possible to devise such arrangements for direct movement from farm to slaughterhouse as long as the animals do not meet other animals that will not be slaughtered.

Mr. Drew: As always, agriculture problems seem to come in multitudes. My right hon. Friend is well aware of the problems with bovine tuberculosis. What effect is the latest problem having on operations in the trial areas? More particularly, will there will be a loss of personnel, which happened with the outbreak of classical swine fever? Action has been somewhat delayed.

Mr. Brown: It is too early to tell what the long-term impact will be, but my hon. Friend is right. All veterinary resources that I have at my disposal at the minute are focused on the elimination of foot and mouth disease. That is not to undermine the importance of the other tasks that we undertake in the Department.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I shall take all interventions because I understand how worrying this matter is to hon. Members and their constituents.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I have been contacted by a Mr. Fattorini, who farms in my constituency. His particular case concerns an auctioneer who goes to a farm to conduct a valuation and who, under current regulations and the ban on movement, is then not allowed to return to the mart for six days because of the foot and mouth outbreak. The question that has been put to me—if the Minister is not able to answer it immediately, perhaps he would be kind enough to write to me—is, who should pay the fees for those six days?

Mr. Brown: The one thing that I can say with some certainty—I know that the hon. Lady will not like the answer—is that it is almost certainly not the Government who should pay. I cannot give her a more comprehensive answer, but I will write to her and see if it is possible to establish a more focused response than that.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Can my right hon. Friend give Mr. Bould, a long-established butcher in Leek, reassurance that movement of livestock to slaughter will soon be licensed, as it was in the 1967 outbreak, so that local butchers can continue to source from local livestock suppliers within Staffordshire, Moorlands and he can continue to provide local produce to customers, rather than having to resort to imports?

Mr. Brown: I can in general terms give my hon. Friend the assurance that she seeks. That is the purpose of the licensing schemes that the Government have announced and intend to introduce on Friday. We have announced them now, so that those in the trade can reflect on what they mean to them. They are at least in part private sector arrangements. I cannot predict the total take-up because everyone will make their own business decisions, but it is the Government's intention to devise schemes that help small and medium-sized businesses and that are not just focused on large farms and large slaughterhouses. That is why we are also considering the idea of holding pens.

Mr. Gummer: The right hon. Gentleman will know that farmers want him, in addressing these movement issues, to put stopping the disease above everything else. He will also know that farmers would be happier if they felt that he was considering very carefully the issue of compensating farmers who are in the pig production chain and depend upon movement in it for their very existence. They—including many of my farmers—are facing a second experience of this type of situation in a very short time, and I believe that they would be better able to hold to addressing the pre-eminent issue—eradicating the disease—if he could say something to give them some confidence that that there may be some help.

Mr. Brown: I can say two things that I hope provide at least partial comfort to the right hon. Gentleman's

constituents, who have been through a tough time with the classical swine fever outbreak. First, I am very conscious of the welfare issues that arise very quickly because of the stratified nature of the pig sector, but can also arise more generally in agricultural production when movement is restricted. I am looking at that issue very hard. The right hon. Gentleman is right to mention the pig sector, but the point also applies to animals that are about to give birth, particularly in the current circumstances, when they are not in the ideal geographical location.

The second thing that I hope will be of some comfort to the right hon. Gentleman's constituents is that I am trying hard, with all the other things that I have to do, to pay particular attention to the problems of the pig industry, which has been through tough times. I am also very conscious that, for reasons that we all understand, the normal European Union routes for helping agriculture do not work for the pig sector. I am considering ideas, including the suggestion by the hon. Member for South Suffolk, about other market intervention that might be of help.

Such matters have to be thought about very carefully, and I cannot announce the introduction of a new scheme today. Please have my assurance, however, that I am not going to overlook the interests of those involved in the pig sector, particularly the right hon. Gentleman's constituents, who have been through such tough times.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): The right hon. Gentleman may want to say a little more about licensing. However, in deciding which arrangements can be licensed, will he bear in mind the situation at the Malton bacon factory, for example, which is probably this country's biggest abattoir? Currently, 2,500 people are laid off, but many pig producers within 25 to 50 miles of Malton could benefit from the type of arrangement that he has suggested, which would allow the transport of animals ready for slaughter directly from farms to the abattoir. The alternative is not only serious damage to our pig production capacity—

Mr. Boswell: What about the welfare issue?

Mr. Greenway: Yes.

Not only could there be damage to production capacity, and further difficulties heaped on the problems of classical swine fever, but domestic product could be replaced by imports. That could not be in the interests of any part of our own meat business or in those of consumers.

Mr. Brown: I will get British product moving again for the purpose of providing for our domestic market. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there is nothing that I could do to help the pig sector more than getting it moving again. However, as he also knows, no farm species is more vulnerable to foot and mouth disease than pigs. Not only does it seem to affect them in a particularly virulent way, but they pump it out more than other animals do.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The right hon. Gentleman is being very helpful. May I bring him back to the question asked by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) about livestock hauliers—many of whom were already in a parlous state before this episode of foot and mouth? The right hon. Gentleman's reply was helpful in that he recognised that that is a specialist haulage sector, for which other markets are not easily available. However, does he also recognise that the specialist drivers who are engaged in that business would be difficult to replace if those companies go out of business in the short term? Will he therefore ensure that either he or one of his colleagues sits round the table with representatives of the livestock hauliers and Ministers from both the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Treasury? Cross-departmental initiatives could and must be taken to preserve the livestock haulage industry, which is desperately important.

Mr. Brown: Meetings are, of course, taking place across Government, and yesterday's ministerial meeting presided over by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was significant among them. I cannot promise direct financial assistance to the sector about which the hon. Gentleman asks, but he is right to emphasise the specialist skills of those drivers. My plan is to get them back to work and make use of their specialist knowledge in ensuring that the effect of the crucial licensing regime, combined with responsible handling of the animals, is maximised. That is especially important when animals are being moved to a holding area rather than to an abattoir.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My right hon. Friend will be aware that foot and mouth disease has been confirmed in my constituency. Does he know what movements of cattle trucks there may have been at the farm involved? Are the vehicles' routes being tracked back? Are the vehicles being checked, and fully and professionally cleaned?

Mr. Brown: I can give my hon. Friend the assurance that he so properly seeks. There is an enormous amount of work to be undertaken by the veterinary authorities, but every vehicle is being checked. All point-of-slaughter records at abattoirs are being checked, as are all market records, and the latter takes an enormous amount of work. Checking is also being conducted on a farm-by-farm basis.

Mrs. Ray Michie (Argyll and Bute): I congratulate the Minister on his extremely helpful response to the debate. Will he confirm that there has been no outbreak of foot and mouth disease in Scotland? Does he agree that farmers and other folk must not be complacent about moving around the Scottish countryside just because there has been no outbreak there?

The Prime Minister touched on the question of the disinfectant supply. He said that disinfectant was being produced but that difficulties were being experienced in getting it to certain areas. I know that the supply has run out in part of Argyll. Has the right hon. Gentleman anything to say about that?

Mr. Brown: In response to her question about disinfectant, I can tell the hon. Lady that we will make an order this afternoon to add 35 disinfectants to the approved list. That administrative act will ensure that supplies of substances that are effective in this context increase dramatically. In general there is sufficient disinfectant, but the problem is that it is not in the right

[Mr. Brown]

place. We have asked the trade to establish a website setting out where disinfectant is located, so that those who need it will be able to order it direct.

The hon. Lady asked about Scotland's present disease-free status. I want that status to be maintained. I am working closely with Ross Finnie, and my veterinary authorities are working closely with their counterparts in Scotland. Our best hope of defeating the disease lies in there being a close working relationship between the devolved Administrations and the United Kingdom Government.

If it is possible to make an early bid for disease-free status for part of the UK—Northern Ireland is probably the strongest candidate—I am willing to grant that status, as long the claim can be substantiated with the European Union. However, the hon. Lady probably knows that there are substantial movements of animals—especially sheep—between Northumberland and Scotland. Although I hope that Scotland remains disease free, it is too early to say with complete assurance that it will. We are doing everything possible to eradicate the disease throughout the United Kingdom, and I am grateful for the help and support that we are getting from the authorities in Scotland.

Mr. Jack: I thank the Minister for his kindness and courtesy in taking so many interventions. Mr. Tom Fare is a very worried pig farmer in my constituency. Like many others, he would be most grateful if the Minister would return to a point that he made earlier and say a little more about the work being done to track down the disease's true origins, rather than simply where it started. A number of rumours are swirling around about whether it was caused by imported meat or swill from airports, schools or goodness knows where. The answer to that question will determine our strategy in defending ourselves from this scourge in the future.

My constituent also asks whether, when the immediate crisis has passed, the Minister will give consideration to launching a national exercise to assess whether we have abattoirs in the right places and in the right numbers.

Mr. Brown: I cannot give the right hon. Gentleman quite the response that he wants about abattoirs. However, he is right that it is essential to understand how this virus—and, indeed, the classical swine fever virus—got into our country. We have been free of it for something like 20 years, and it is absolutely certain that it has not been hibernating here in the United Kingdom. It got into the United Kingdom from somewhere else, and I will have more to say about that later.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I support everything that my right hon. Friend has done, including closing footpaths and stopping people walking on open land, but the effect on the tourist industry in Cumbria could be drastic. We are fortunate in the Lake district that things are quite quiet at present, but if the ban continues over Easter and into the summer, the tourist industry will suffer great devastation. Many of those affected will be farmers who have diversified into tourism. Will my right hon. Friend talk to his colleagues about help for those people?

As for the export of dairy products, a factory in my constituency makes a considerable amount of milk powder. Obviously, because of the heat treatment of the milk powder, there is no threat to anyone, but at present there is a ban. Will the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food give priority to lifting the ban on exports, not only to European Union countries but to other countries where the company sends its products? If the factory cannot continue to manufacture, that will create another problem for our farmers.

Mr. Brown: MAFF officials are having close discussions with EU officials and individual member states about the extent and proportionality of the ban. Although I cannot make any immediate announcement, I can tell my hon. Friend that we are working closely with others on the problems that he highlights. Depending on how circumstances develop, it may be possible to do something that would help his constituents further on. However, much depends on the scale of the problem and on our ability to bear down on it. No countries will allow foot and mouth disease in, to infect their national flocks and herds, and we do not allow it in here either.

My hon. Friend is right about farm diversification. That is why we are taking very tough measures now, in the hope that we can prevent the spread of the disease with the movement restrictions, contain it with quarantine, and then eliminate it with our slaughter policy. In other words, I hope that this will not be a protracted episode; that is what we are trying hard to avoid. However, I cannot make that promise to the House today.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I, like many others, have a farmer in my constituency who has made urgent representations to me about the imminent impact of the 30-month limit on prime beef cattle that he now cannot move to market. Will the right hon. Gentleman say something about that problem?

Mr. Brown: I am trying to put movement arrangements in place so that prime animals can move again, although under strict conditions. That requires a response from the private sector. The best thing that I can do for the hon. Gentleman's constituents is to get the supply chain moving again without spreading the disease. Both are important, and if a priority has to be chosen, it is to prevent the spread of the disease.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: The right hon. Gentleman will have heard my earlier plea about the plight of the small abattoir in my constituency—the only one in Hampshire—and I hope that he will be able to say something about that.

When the right hon. Gentleman is considering the details of his licensing arrangements, will he also take into account the needs of a very new company in my constituency that is doing fantastic work in producing porcine collagen for medical purposes? The company needs 30 or 40 skins a week to satisfy demand, and it has no more supply. If the Minister could take that into account when considering the licensing arrangements, it would be greatly appreciated.

Mr. Brown: We are trying to deal with a number of specialist issues; the hon. Gentleman rightly mentions one of them. I do not want to give him an absolute assurance because my first priority is to ensure that anything I allow to move—even under licence—does not risk spreading the disease. However, subject to that, I will ask MAFF

officials to look into the specific issue that he raises. First, I will write to him setting out the exact circumstances that prevail and why. Secondly, I will see whether we can do anything to help his constituents who are employed in that specialist area of activity.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, I have transferred from MAFF's budget a sum of money to the Department of Health—in essence, to the Meat Hygiene Service—with a view to underpinning the veterinary costs involved in the operation of small abattoirs. It is my intention that the changes in movement patterns that I announced yesterday should be of advantage to small operators as well as large ones. It is slightly harder to arrange that, but it is the Government's intention; we want to help all the people involved to get some movement into their businesses—even if that cannot be in normal trading circumstances.

I have taken many interventions; I know that that is not conventional, even for agriculture debates. I am aware of how many Members on both sides of the House want to make representations on behalf of their constituents and to do the right thing by them in difficult and rapidly changing circumstances. However, I shall now move on to the set piece of my text, as it contains information that I know the House will want to have.

I have urged the public to exercise responsibility and to avoid all unnecessary visits to farms and farmland. However, where such visits are unavoidable, procedures for disinfection should be followed in order to reduce the risk of transmitting the disease from farm to farm. That advice seems simple and straightforward, and I urge everybody to listen carefully and to follow it. I am grateful for the responsible approach that has been taken by farmers, the general public and those responsible for organising sporting events and other large gatherings in the countryside. That includes organisations with which I do not otherwise agree.

Unfortunately, not everyone is following the advice that we have given, so local authorities have been given powers to declare prohibited areas and to close footpaths and rights of way in and around farmland. I understand that Dartmoor and Exmoor national parks have been closed to the public. That is right. I urge local authorities to prosecute people who insist on arguing about those measures. We are beyond argument: the measures are necessary in order to control the disease.

Of course, the most important measure for controlling the disease is the ban on animal movements. On the advice of the chief veterinary officer, we will be extending the controlled area measures, including the ban on livestock movements within Great Britain, for two more weeks from 2 March. We may then need to consider further movement restrictions—I know that that is unwelcome news. At present we just do not know, but if it is necessary, we shall have to do it.

At the same time, we are working up details of the schemes that we have discussed whereby healthy animals can go direct from the farm to an abattoir, under strictly controlled conditions, to supply the food chain. That will go ahead only if the chief veterinary officer advises me that such arrangements are fully compatible with controlling the disease outbreak. Details of the scheme are being worked up in conjunction with representatives of the livestock industry, and I plan to announce further details on Friday.

I am also considering whether it would be safe to have licensed collection centres for animals going for slaughter. However, the Government cannot reopen livestock markets generally at this stage. In that context, I am considering what can be done to help with the range of problems associated with the operation of the over-30-months scheme.

We are liaising closely with the Commission and our European Union partners. The Standing Veterinary Committee extended the export ban on UK livestock and products for a further week to 9 March. The committee will meet again on Tuesday 6 March to take stock of the situation in the United Kingdom and elsewhere in the EU. The Government welcome that approach. I would prefer the necessary control measures to be renewed short period by short period, as that would provide an opportunity at each stage to review them and to respond quickly to emerging and, I hope, improving circumstances.

As the House would expect, the Government's immediate and overriding priority is the control and eradication of the disease. However, epidemiological investigations into the source are continuing. That brings me to the question that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) perfectly properly asked me earlier. There was no known foot and mouth disease in the EU, which suggests that the source was outside the EU. There are strict controls banning imports from areas where foot and mouth disease is endemic. Imports from such a source would be illegal.

There is no special reason to believe that the disease was imported from South Africa. South Africa has in place a ban on exports from infected areas, and in any case, the United Kingdom introduced measures to prohibit South African imports before similar EU measures were introduced.

I can confirm to the House—this goes to the root of the right hon. Gentleman's question—that the earliest outbreak of the disease was that confirmed in pigs at Heddon-on-the-Wall on Friday last week. Veterinary inspection suggests that the disease was present in the pigs for up to two weeks before it was notified by the farmer to MAFF veterinary staff. An investigation is under way and, partly for legal reasons, I am unable to give the House any further details.

When the disease has been brought under control, I shall want to examine carefully the implications that increased world travel, the globalisation of agricultural trade and modern farming methods have on disease control. I have asked for an examination of the current enforcement and control measures.

Farm incomes have been severely depressed for four years. An outbreak of foot and mouth disease means further serious hardship for a very large number of farmers and their families. There are serious impacts on farmers whose animals must be slaughtered and on those whose businesses are disrupted by the movement restrictions necessary to control and isolate the disease.

The Government are doing all we can to help. Farmers whose animals must be slaughtered as a disease control measure are compensated to the full market value of their stock. In addition, I announced yesterday that the Government plan to draw down the full amount of agrimonetary compensation available for livestock farmers. That amounts to a total of about £170 million, of which £16 million is the compulsory element that has

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previously been announced. That brings the total amount of agrimonetary compensation paid under the Government to £786 million since the last election.

To benefit pig farmers, I plan to open a second round of the outgoers element of the pig industry restructuring scheme, bringing forward money already announced and allocated for future financial years. Although I cannot make a further announcement today, I am carefully considering what else might be done to help the pig sector. I promise to consider the suggestion made by the hon. Member for South Suffolk, and I am mindful of the other interventions that I have taken in this debate.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I want to ask the Minister about the pig outgoers scheme and the announcement that he made yesterday. He introduced that scheme to deal with the serious crisis that existed in the pig industry until about a year ago. However, last autumn or late summer, he introduced the pig industry development scheme, which we shall debate in Committee tomorrow. That scheme was aimed at the problems caused to pig farmers caught in the swine fever outbreak who could not move their pigs off the farm. That operation, rather than the outgoers scheme, seems much more analogous to the current position. It is perfectly understandable that the Minister is shopping around his budget and looking for some money to use, but will he explain why he is using the outgoers scheme, not the development scheme, to help the industry?

Mr. Brown: There is a long history to this issue, and I fought to get the scheme in place before the outbreak of classical swine fever in East Anglia occurred. I had the money from the Treasury, but not the approval of the Commission. Both elements were necessary to get the scheme under way, but the other parties tried to attach a whole range of conditions to it.

My immediate purpose is to try to help people who, because of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, are wondering again about their long-term commitment to the industry, and who have not bid for the first round of the outgoers scheme, but who might now like to do so. I am not saying that there are people in those circumstances; I genuinely do not know. However, if there are, they will be among the most worried, and they might suddenly like to find an exit route. It is to help them that I have managed to get permission from my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer to draw some moneys forward.

That does not mean that I have stopped thinking about the rest of the industry. However, as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) knows, although we have gone through the most terrible downturn in trade, with incomes falling below the costs of production—that is not sustainable in the longer term—prospects for the sector are looking up. We have all worked hard to bring that about, and individual farmers making business decisions might not find the scheme an attractive option, or may prefer to wait until they see how the condition—it is not an epidemic—emerges in the national herds and flocks. It may be significant—I say, touching wood—that the latest cases, with all the attendant difficulties, involve cattle and sheep but not pigs.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): The right hon. Gentleman has treated the House in an exemplary manner this afternoon, and that is widely recognised. I hope that he will have sensed that the House wants to help him. Because many of his answers will of necessity be tentative—he cannot be definitive about many issues—will he assure the House that he will keep us regularly informed? Will he give thought to the idea of producing a newsletter perhaps once a week for Members of Parliament, so that we know what is happening and he can keep us updated?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's comments. I accept that I am under an obligation to keep the House regularly informed; all Ministers are accountable to the House. I will consider what more we can do to keep Members of Parliament informed as this rapidly changing situation develops. I intend to write to Members with front-line advice that will help them to deal with individual constituency inquiries, but a bulletin that sets out progress and is available to Members might also help. I will have a hard look at that suggestion and come back to the hon. Gentleman with a definitive answer.

Private storage aid has been mentioned. I have said that we shall consider that, as it might be a way forward. I am raising a range of issues with Commissioner Fischler, who I know will try to help. All sorts of anomalies arise with the administration of the European Union support schemes, and they require the good will of the Commission in these difficult circumstances. However, it is right that I should report to the House that I found nothing but sympathy and good will from Ministers, the presidency and the Commission when I addressed them at the Council meeting late on Monday night.

Those who hold ministerial office realise what a difficult and intractable problem this is. The expressions of good will have been given practical effect by offers from our European Union partners of extra veterinary assistance should the chief veterinary officer need to call on it. He can call not only on the resources of the European Union, but on those of our major trading partners worldwide.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I echo what has been said about the Minister's response today. Will he ask the Commissioner to consider the issues that affect smaller abattoirs with low throughput? The Minister will recall that I have met him with several delegations to discuss the issues that affect smaller abattoirs, and I note that the Minister for the Environment has said today that special help will be given to them in future.

Given the number of smaller abattoirs that have disappeared—to be fair, I must add that that happened under his predecessors rather than while he has been in office—will the Minister consider particularly the issue of locality? It is not just the size of the abattoirs but their location that has caused the problem. The fact that animals have to travel long distances has undoubtedly accentuated the difficulties that we now face. Will he consider that specific issue?

Mr. Brown: Even in this day and age, there are many abattoirs between Northumberland, where the original outbreak started, and Essex. It was necessary for the animals to travel such a long distance because of the specialist nature of the abattoir trade. It is not the last journey that is the most dangerous, because the animals are isolated from other livestock when they go to

slaughter. The virus is breathed out, and animals cease to breathe once they are slaughtered, so the danger of spreading the disease is much reduced, although not entirely removed.

There are other public policy reasons why one might want to support the small abattoir sector. We are addressing those across Departments. The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to what my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has said. In addition, the work that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is doing with the Food Standards Agency and the Meat Hygiene Service is also relevant. My immediate task is to devise a movement scheme that encompasses not just the large operators, but the small and medium-sized sector too, so that they have hope for the future. I promise the hon. Gentleman that I will do everything that I can to achieve that objective.

Mr. Gill: In response to a parliamentary question in November, the Minister of State said:

"we are not aware that animal welfare has been in any way compromised by longer journey times from farm to slaughter."—[*Official Report*, 24 November 2000; Vol. 357, c. 325W.]

Is that still the Government's view?

Mr. Brown: Yes. We carry out inspections, and individual abuses are sometimes found, but journey times and patterns conform with the regulatory regime. The hon. Gentleman knows that I am trying to get that tightened, but it is a matter for European Union law.

We are also in contact with the clearing banks to discuss the issue of cash flow to farm businesses affected by the disease outbreak. The clearing banks are interested in our assessment. I cannot be as certain as I should like to be, but the announced intention to draw down not just the compulsory part of the agrimonetary scheme but a much larger discretionary element will have a significant impact on our discussions. However, I cannot give a commitment on compensation for other losses in the supply chain. I do not want to mislead people by holding out the prospect of another source of financial aid. The best help that I can give is to control and eradicate the disease as soon as possible.

I want to add a caveat: the Government are keeping a close eye on the implications for farm animal welfare. Given the experience of the classical swine fever outbreak last summer, it is clear to everyone involved that an important issue is at stake. I hope that we do not have to reconsider it, but I alert the House to the fact that we may.

The Government's priority is to control and eradicate the disease. The licensing of movement between farms and abattoirs from the end of this week will begin to get the haulage business, the abattoirs and the food processors that use British food products back to work. We all want that to happen.

I am grateful for the tone of the Opposition motion, with which I fully agree. I am also grateful for the measured way in which hon. Members on both sides of the House—who are, of course, worried on behalf of their constituents—have put their questions. This is a serious issue for our country. I hope that we can unite to support the necessary control measures and, by working together, eradicate the disease. Once that is done, we can take a close interest in how the outbreak started and what extra measures are necessary to prevent it from happening again. We need to get our industry back to working normally and to restore our country's high reputation for having an enduring disease-free status.

5.14 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): I, too, welcome the Minister's contribution. I welcome also the constructive opposition evident in the tone and content of the Conservative motion, which has enabled us all to debate the issue.

Almost a fortnight ago hon. Members discussed the aftermath of BSE; I do not think that any of us thought that we would be debating the serious issue of foot and mouth only days later. The BSE crisis led to the Phillips report, which made me think about the lessons that we might have learned from the 1967 epidemic of foot and mouth disease and the single outbreak on the Isle of Wight in 1981. Hon. Members have referred to incidents of the disease in Europe, such as that in Greece only a year ago.

It is inconceivable that, following those incidents, nothing was done and no reports were commissioned to consider the way in which the spread of disease was changing along with the patterns of farming and trading. Indeed, it has come to my attention that the European Commission published an agriculture report entitled "Animal health and related problems in densely populated livestock areas of the Community", which detailed the proceedings of a workshop held in Brussels on 22 November 1994—quite some time ago. I will not quote large chunks of the report, but I hope that officials and others will take the opportunity to re-read it because Phillips taught us that we must look back to see what lessons could have been learned and what measures could have been taken.

There are some telling paragraphs in the report's conclusions and recommendations. Under the heading "The problem", the report says:

"This means that despite the immediate economic advantages, high density areas may prove to be unsustainable in the long term."

It goes on to say:

"Good management has a significant role to play in preventing the entry of infection into units and in avoiding the worst consequences".

It further says:

"The present trade in animals poses great risks to the sanitary situation,"

and suggests ways in which those risks might be reduced.

Perhaps most telling is the paragraph on long-term solutions, which says:

"The environmental pollutions and disease epidemics that are being encountered in dense livestock areas are but symptoms of a more deep-seated structural malaise. This can only be solved in a systems approach that encompasses animal health, environmental and economic components . . . The European Commission is asked to ensure that research is coordinated so that the animal health, economic and environmental aspects are brought together in a comprehensive strategy.

In the long term, the risks posed by dense livestock areas can only be reduced by some measure of restructuring achieved through self-regulation, economic incentives or, in the last resort, by legislation. All these avenues should be explored."

I do not know whether any of those avenues have been explored, but as that workshop was held almost six and a half years ago perhaps someone decided that we ought to examine the issues. One might postulate that if there had

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been some such activity, we might have been able to put preventive measures in place. This island nation could, perhaps, protect itself from disease better than any other part of the European Community.

I do not want those remarks to divert attention from the No. 1 priority, which is to find the source of the outbreak, to contain it and to eradicate it as soon as possible. Like others, I am concerned about whether we have the resources—not financial but human—to deal with the whole problem. Experienced vets have to be in an enormous number of places. If the spread of foot and mouth disease continues, vets will be able to continue for a while but they will be working a tremendous number of hours. I wonder whether we shall have the necessary human resources to undertake all the controls and inspections.

Mr. Nick Brown: The hon. Gentleman asks a fair question. The state veterinary service and private sector vets are working long hours and extraordinarily hard to try to get the epidemic under control—the condition under control. It does not yet have epidemic status.

The question that the hon. Gentleman asks is one that I put daily to the chief vet, Jim Scudamore. I have said to him on behalf of the Government that if he needs extra resources and needs to recruit extra vets, he should do so. He knows that that is the position. At present, he says that he has the resources that he needs, or is getting them. We have had generous offers of help from our European Union partners and from our trading partners more widely.

Mr. Breed: I am extremely grateful for that news. It might be an appropriate moment to congratulate the chief vet on the way in which he is handling the mechanics and logistics and on his openness, honesty and balanced communications through the media, which have significantly reduced panic.

One of the issues is the growth of what might be called dealers. I am talking about farmers and dealers and even abattoirs and dealers, and the way in which animals are moved. Only today, one of the farmers in my constituency, Mr. Martin, who farms near Mount Edgecumbe, told me that he bought a suckler calf in a market about a couple of weeks ago. When he received the paperwork, he was astounded to learn that the calf had been through two farms and three markets in the previous four weeks. That is extraordinary. The calf had travelled a long way before Mr. Martin bought it. He was not aware of that at the time. That highlights the fact that animals are tradeable commodities.

If an animal is going through several markets, it is incurring additional costs, such as transport costs, commission costs and auctioneers' fees. Those charges add cost to the animal, and none of that is coming back to the farmer. It is all being dissipated at a distance from the primary producer. If some of the money were part of the profit on the animal for the farmer, we would not be facing some of the current problems.

I know that, in a way, dealers underpin the market. They sometimes provide fluidity and liquidity, but they have a serious effect that needs to be considered by the Ministry.

Compensation is on many people's minds. They are fearful, and much of that fear relates to the fact that they are losing money every day. The industry has gone through a period of intensification and specialisation. The opportunities for farmers and others—we have heard already about hauliers—to derive income in other ways is much diminished. They are specialist suppliers for a specialist industry. The intensification and specialisation of the industry to achieve economies of scale have driven away multi-providers. That is the significant difference between now and the past, when consequential losses were not considered because there were opportunities to make money elsewhere. Those opportunities no longer exist, and that should focus the Government's mind.

We have talked about the over-30-months scheme. The sooner that we can deal with animals that might be caught up in it, the better.

With regard to consequential loss, I shall quote from a couple of letters, which are heartfelt. The first is from a farmer in South Molton, who writes:

"As a sixth generation Exmoor farmer with a young family, it is extremely hard to describe the terror, worry and sheer anxiety that this foot and mouth outbreak is causing my immediate family. I run both beef and sheep and am not afraid of hard work. Firstly, I live downwind, albeit 35 miles from the Hatherleigh cluster of outbreaks. Secondly, my partner still works in her father's livestock haulage business so we can attempt to have a decent lifestyle. This would have brought her innocently in contact with other livestock."

Those are some of the worries that our constituents are experiencing.

The letter continues:

"If any good is to come out of this potential disaster for family farmers, rural communities and ultimately the whole country, it must be that we, as a nation, need to regain control of our food chain. This means we need to feed ourselves with high quality, local produce. The distance between slaughter, in the case of meat, and consumption needs to be as small as possible. This may take time and encouragement as our level of production has been cut back to such low levels we are now incapable of feeding ourselves."

The second letter is from a haulier, who states:

"As a long established family firm (four generations), this is causing unimaginable financial and mental stress on everybody concerned. We are dedicated livestock hauliers and cannot turn to other work. As an example, we have not got or have time to obtain the necessary certificate to move fertiliser, not that anybody wants a livestock haulier driving around their farm or business at this time."

The letter goes on:

"All our staff cannot be laid off for 90 days, not that we want to . . . With 20 employees our weekly basic wage is in the region of £5000. With no income this obviously cannot continue for any length of time. The state of agriculture was bad enough with bad debts running at record levels, before this current problem. I am concerned that consequential loss compensation is not being considered by government for ancillary trades."

Those letters graphically describe the fears and worries of those who are operating in a specialist area where there is no opportunity for other income to be raised.

Sir Robert Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I was surprised to learn that another group affected are pelagic fishermen, whom most people would not see as immediate victims of the foot and mouth outbreak. At a time when the mackerel fishery is becoming important, the Russian Government have decided to ban the import of fish as a precaution. I hope that MAFF will do all it can to persuade the Russian Government to be a little more rational about food safety.

Mr. Breed: I am grateful for that intervention, and I am sure that the Minister has taken note.

On the situation as it affects pigs, I remind the Minister that we had a successful pig welfare disposal scheme last year, following the swine fever outbreak. Perhaps a similar scheme should be reactivated in the current situation.

Finally, I was surprised to read that the Government may even be considering vaccination—

Mr. Brown: On the basis of professional advice and pleadings from the entire industry, the Government are not considering vaccination, although we have stocks of vaccine, of course. The European Union has enormous stocks of vaccine, to which it would allow us access if necessary, but to compromise permanently our disease-free status by using vaccines would eradicate much of our export business and would have a deleterious effect on the long-term future of the livestock sector, so we will not use vaccines.

Mr. Breed: I am delighted to hear that. If we, as an island nation, with the obvious barrier of the sea, cannot protect ourselves and retain our disease-free status, it would be a bad show. No doubt the suggestion originated from some of our French colleagues, as France is one of the largest producers of the vaccine and they may have seen a ready market.

The Government's message must be clearly stated. We were disease free for many years, and we must return to that situation. Such protections that were in force, and should have been in force, must be reinforced if we are to ensure that, once this terrible outbreak has been conquered, we do not become susceptible to it ever again.

5.30 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): It is appropriate that the House should not today debate transport policy, other than the statement that is to be made later. I am pretty sure that, one way or another, some of my constituents will have been involved in the terrible accident that took place this morning. My thoughts and sympathies are with the injured and the families who have suffered fatalities.

The debate has provided an opportunity for a useful question-and-answer session. During Monday's statement, some doubt was expressed about whether the House could pull together on this serious matter affecting not only the countryside but the whole country. Today's debate, the way in which my right hon. Friend the Minister has given way so generously and hon. Members' serious questions show a change of tone, which I hope we shall be able to sustain. Few who are involved in the issue believe that it will disappear tomorrow, next week, or even next month. If the House is to give the country a lead, we must, wherever possible, avoid unnecessary political division, however difficult that might be.

The Minister is a colleague of mine from Newcastle upon Tyne and I have the highest admiration for the way in which he is leading his team in tackling this terrible disease. Everyone to whom I have spoken in the farming and the urban communities has the highest regard for the dedication and determination with which my right hon. Friend has conducted his business during the past weeks and before.

I do not usually take part in agriculture debates in the House. I was brought up in a part mining, part agricultural community. There was a farm opposite my railway house and I remember the previous outbreak in the 1960s and its impact on the community. However, since then I have tended to wander into industrial and urban landscapes. My constituency on the west and north-west of Newcastle upon Tyne is essentially an urban constituency, with 99 per cent. of the people living an urban or suburban life, but the largest land area in my constituency is farmland.

Many of the farms in my constituency are what I would call nouveau farms—not the typical farm where the farm owner and farm workers live on the farm. That is becoming less typical in many more traditional agricultural areas, but in my constituency many farms are contracting farms where the land is owned by a third party, a farm business in another part of the country, and a contractor manages the farm business. The dangers and difficulties in that become all too obvious in the situation that we now face.

The farm where it is alleged that the outbreak began straddles my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson). Most of the farm buildings are in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and much of the land is in mine.

The second farm that has been infected at Black Callerton is almost entirely in my constituency. The farm owner has just taken over from his father, who died recently. He is a well-known and respected agriculturalist in the community of south Northumberland and north-west Newcastle upon Tyne. It is a tragedy that his farm has been affected by the events of the past week.

Last Sunday evening, there was a big bonfire on Burnside farm, which is a few hundred metres or less from the A69, just outside the urban area of Newcastle. Carcases were piled high and the flames went higher; 70 tonnes of coal were used to attempt to burn away the disease, producing a terribly acrid smell across the surrounding farmland. It was extremely traumatic to witness the event. Its impact on the lives of young people who saw it, whether they came from the farming community, perhaps in Heddon-on-the-Wall, or some of the other traditionally industrial villages in my constituency, such as Throckley, Lemmington and Newburn, will last for ever.

From all those locations, one could see the flames and get the impression of what was happening. It was bad that people had to suffer the event, but there was some benefit. It demonstrated to the local community the seriousness of the situation that we face. As it was well covered on television, it also showed the gravity of the situation to a wider community within the country. That probably helped a lot of people who might otherwise have needed a bit more persuasion to understand what needed to be done. It was unfortunate for my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Hexham that they were nearer the fire and felt more of the impact, but it will none the less raise public consciousness of the seriousness of the disease.

I do not like to be a historian unnecessarily, but I think that there is a need for more public education than has previously been provided. In 1960–61, when a major outbreak lasted six months, it was only seven years after rationing and only 15 years or less since war controls had been in place, so there was public understanding of the need to play by the rules in times of national emergency. I am not so sure that our community is as prepared now. We have a public education duty to explain that the

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current situation is serious and can affect the whole country and beyond. We must explain why it should be tackled with that sense of gravity.

My right hon. Friend the Minister has relieved some of our fears and dealt with some of the genuine points that have been made. I should like as succinctly as possible to outline the themes that should be reinforced as part of the public education that I have described. First, we must continually emphasise the need to tackle the problem as it exists. We must all be prepared to do what is necessary to make our contribution, whether farmers are marooned on their land, businesses cannot conduct their activities as they wish or people cannot travel to the areas that they normally visit for whatever purposes, be they recreational or otherwise. We must take the necessary measures and stress continually that all must play their part if we are to tackle the disease as speedily as possible.

Secondly, people are asking a question that I raised in Question Time on Monday: "How could this possibly have happened in our community? We thought that foot and mouth disease had gone, so what has happened to allow it to recur?" As a political community, in the Government or the House, we must reassure the public that everything has been done to get to the root cause. We must use the best scientific advice and investigatory powers to find out why Burnside farm, on the edge of my constituency, was probably the source. Where did the disease come from? How did it get there?

Lots of rumours are flying about Tyneside: perhaps the swill was not dealt with properly on the farm, or poisoned or infected food may have got into it. There is an international airport nearby. Did the swill come from there? All those questions are being asked by local people and the farming community will be well aware of the need to identify how the disease got to Heddon. If we can find that out, we shall be much better able to trace what happened afterwards and find out how the secondary infection began. We must do so to raise public confidence.

The agriculture industry has suffered in recent times because of unforeseen and previously unexperienced events such as the terrible problem of BSE. Now it has to deal with foot and mouth on top of that. It must try to re-establish its credibility with the public, and we have a responsibility and a duty to help it to do so. For that reason, we must identify the source of the infection, although my right hon. Friend the Minister may face another issue in discussions with the European Union.

Although the outbreak began in the United Kingdom, and even though we have taken unilateral action with the co-operation and support of the EU, we cannot predict what will happen. We do not know the extent of the spread of the infection. We do not know how many EU countries will become involved. We do not know what the extent of that involvement will be or what relationship those countries have with their suppliers in other parts of the world.

The EU will probably become involved farther down the line in the way in which we resolve a number of matters such as how we put in place measures to try to prevent what has happened at Heddon-on-the-Wall and elsewhere from happening again and the eventual relaxation of controls in this country and perhaps in others. It may also become involved in how we consider compensation, who should qualify for it and who should pay for it. We shall probably become more and more involved with the EU when we deal with such issues, unless the outbreak is curtailed quickly. Although we all want it to be curtailed as quickly as possible, I doubt that it will be.

We must be prepared to take action for a sustainable period. A constituent asked me how long that might be, but I do not know and I doubt whether my right hon. Friend the Minister and the scientists know. We should consider the pattern of the major infections of 1960–61 and 1967: it was impossible to predict when we would reach the critical point at which the graph would dip, the extent of the spread would begin to reduce and the measures put in place to counter that spread could be relaxed.

We may not be aware of the critical point until we have passed it, and dealing with such a crisis is like climbing a mountain: we may have reached the first peak, but we will not know how many peaks we have to tackle until we reach the final one—the summit. We may get convincing scientific documentation and opinion that shows that the situation is beginning to improve only after we have passed that critical point, which we cannot predict. My reading about previous major infections suggests that we perhaps have better controls in place, so we should get a grip and control the spread of the disease more quickly. However, we are in the hands of the gods in many ways.

Another priority for the House is a quick return to normality for farmers. Those in Newcastle and in Northumberland will welcome Friday's statement on putting into practice new licensing arrangements to allow, where possible, sound animals to be taken to the marketplace. That represents a first step back to normality; we shall expect others to be taken in due course.

I understand that the current compensation scheme has been in place for many years. It might be useful if the Ministry considered whether it should be reviewed. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) mentioned the effect on the tourist industry in the Lake district. Is there a case for helping that industry? In my area of Northumberland, the wall generates a sizeable tourist industry in summer, and must provide access for many hundreds of thousands of people if it is to remain viable. Clearly that activity will be curtailed if this dreadful infection persists into the spring, with financial consequences for many who are involved.

I think that the public will rally if we can convince them of the seriousness of the situation. The farming community knows how serious it is, but the public have to be convinced. It is important for the House to give them a lead, and we can best do that by backing sensible measures taken by Government. I do not mean to be obsequious to the Government—I assure you that I am not that, Mr. Deputy Speaker; not even to my right hon. Friend the Minister—but I believe that we must give that support. It will involve accountability on the Government's part, however, so that questions can be asked about the way in which the situation is developing, and about progress on investigation and curtailment. Such questions will be asked here on a number of occasions in the coming months.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. With the leave of the House, and given the special circumstances that overhang the debate, I call the Minister to make a short statement.

Mr. Nick Brown: With the leave of the House, I wish to report further cases of foot and mouth disease.

As of 5.30 pm, the total number of cases in the United Kingdom is 26. There are two further cases, in Warwickshire and Chelmsford. We have already traced links with earlier sources: the Warwickshire case is linked by transport to the seventh outbreak, in Devon. The link with the Chelmsford outbreak has not yet been traced, but the farm is contiguous with the site of an earlier case. The Warwickshire outbreak involves 80 sheep and 220 cattle; on the Chelmsford holding, 600 sheep and two pigs are affected.

5.48 pm

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I thank the Minister for his statement. It underlines the gravity of this outbreak and, sadly, the fear that it may continue for some time.

Let me begin by declaring an interest. As the Register of Members' Interests states, I am a non-executive director of two companies that are inevitably involved in the problem: Associated British Foods and Uniq. However, I shall speak mainly on behalf of the agriculture industry and farmers. As the Minister knows, I represent not only a major agricultural area, but one of the country's key pig-farming areas, which was heavily affected by classical swine fever. I am grateful for the Minister's acknowledgement of the plight of the pig sector.

I congratulate the Minister on the manner in which he has approached the debate. As one who knows how difficult it is to deal with these issues, I pay tribute to the comprehensive and understanding way in which he is handling them. He will know that he has the support of the whole House. He certainly has my support in all the measures that he is taking. Before I come to the two main points that I want to make, let me refer to two of those measures briefly—they have already been dealt with at some length.

The first is in relation to disinfectant. I am getting the same reports as everyone else: there is a real worry that disinfectant is still not getting through to where it is needed. Obviously, if there are more outbreaks such as those that the Minister has just announced, that becomes a more important issue. I know that he is paying attention to that matter and I am grateful for his announcement earlier, but it will be a key issue.

The second is in relation to the licensed slaughter scheme, which I understand the Minister intends to announce on Friday. He put the point fairly—I am paraphrasing his words, not quoting—when he said that the issue was to get the supply chain moving without compromising the eradication of the disease. Although I fully understand the desire to get the supply chain moving, as that would deal with many issues, including the demands of the supermarkets, I hope that he will err on the side of caution. From my awareness of some of the issues and complications involved, it may take him more than two days. I would not mind if it did. I am well aware of some of the issues and it could easily go wrong. I am sure that the whole industry would prefer to have an absolutely cast-iron scheme than to move too quickly.

In that context, the Minister said that he had had discussions with representatives of the livestock industry; I know that he has had discussions with the National Farmers Union. My understanding, as of lunchtime today, was that one of the chief executives of a major processing firm and abattoir had not yet been consulted. As he might be exactly the sort of person who will be heavily involved in the practical implementation of the scheme, perhaps the Minister should look at that matter and consider whether to consult more widely.

I can cover my two main points briefly because so much has been said already. In both the points, I aim to strengthen the Minister's hand in what he is trying to do. The first is on compensation. Of course, I welcome the announcements on the agrimonetary compensation payments and on the acceleration of the pig outgoers scheme, but, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) brought out well, in the light of the effects of sterling on the agricultural industry, the agrimonetary compensation payments should have been in place anyway and were designed for a different purpose.

It is helpful that the Minister has been able to get the Treasury to agree to the pig outgoers scheme now. That may not have been possible without the current crisis. Nevertheless, we must remember what the scheme was designed for. It does not help much in these circumstances. As the Minister knows—it may be one of the reasons why he has been able to accelerate the scheme—the take-up has not been great, so not much money has been involved. Therefore, although both those initiatives are helpful, more may need to be done.

As a former Chief Secretary as well as a former Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, I can see the hand of the Treasury in the two announcements that have been made. In both cases, the schemes are very limited: the costs are ring-fenced. There has been great pressure for one of them already; the other is simply an acceleration of a scheme.

I shall make a plea to the Minister—I hope that I am strengthening his hand. In his statement on Monday, he kept saying in relation to any proposals for consequential loss that there was no precedent for such schemes. He is right. I understand the problem for other industries, such as the road haulage industry, but I am talking only about consequential losses for the agriculture industry and farmers.

My response to the point that there is no precedent is that we are now in an unprecedented situation. When the last outbreak occurred in 1967, the industry was not on its knees, so it was able to recover quite quickly. The income position was wholly different. The industry had the resources to recover and the scale of the outbreak turned out to be nothing like what appears to be the scale of the current outbreak. It was confined to three counties, or certainly to two areas. It was not England and Wales wide, as, unhappily, this one is. The scale of the current outbreak appears to be much bigger, but the industry is in a much weaker position. That is the big difference.

Today, as the Minister fully acknowledges, after four extremely difficult years for the farming community, every sector of the industry has been rocked back on its heels in a way that I have never seen during my parliamentary lifetime—indeed, during my lifetime because I cannot remember the 1930s. As we know, incomes are heavily down and cash flow is much affected.

[Mr. John MacGregor]

Cash flow for many sectors, such as the pig industry, has been awful for some considerable time. Many people in the industry are now eating into their capital, if they have capital, and others have borrowed heavily. Thus the industry's finances are much worse than in 1967. That is an important point in relation to precedent.

I am glad that the Minister is keeping an open mind on the matter, as he has said. I hope that he is willing to go to the Treasury again for further support for the agriculture industry alone if the problem continues for much longer.

Mr. Drew: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman agrees that there are difficulties with the precedent argument. I make no apology for returning to the case of bovine TB. Although foot and mouth is on a different scale in that it is a national problem, some of us have had to live with the threat of bovine TB, which also results in the closure of units and a lot of cost. I am sure he agrees that it would be dangerous to set precedents.

Mr. MacGregor: I have already made the point that this looks like an unprecedented situation. It will obviously depend how long the disease continues, but my understanding is that, with the problems of animals stocking up on farms, the cost of feeding and the loss of value when farmers sell, the total cost could amount to £150 million a month. That is the latest assessment that I have been given. I am sure that it is a very rough assessment at this stage, but it puts into context the relief given on the agrimonetary payments. I realise the difficulties of working out a scheme and I know all the problems of going to Brussels, but if this continues, I hope that the Minister will be prepared to look at the matter again.

Another reason why this crisis is different from 1967 is that there is a heavy surplus in the Government's finances. Again, I speak as a former Chief Secretary. The contingency fund is intended for exactly this type of situation. Unlike many schemes and programmes that the Minister is sometimes urged to take up, it is a one-off crisis that would not be repeated in later years. Therefore, in that context, from the Treasury's point of view, it is not a bother.

The contingency fund is intended for exactly that type of purpose. I do not want to raise a politically contentious issue, but most people in the country would regard some use of the fund—even surpluses beyond the fund, if that were necessary—for that purpose as much more worth while than bailing out the dome. The cost of such a scheme, payable in one year only, would be small in relation to the securing of an industry and home supplies.

I with to stress the position in relation to the pig industry. The Minister has been right in everything that he has said. The pig industry has not had many EU support schemes. We know all the issues in relation to the pig industry, which, after classical swine fever, is in a serious position. Most pig farmers simply do not have the resources to cope with a long continuation of the present outbreak, particularly as they have now over-borrowed.

Mr. Gill: Before my right hon. Friend moves off the point, I wonder why he thinks that the consequential losses only of farmers should be covered. Why would he not include hauliers and other people downstream from the farming industry, who have undoubtedly been seriously affected?

Mr. MacGregor: I have not done so because I have not been able to assess the position of those industries. I am aware of the position of many farmers and of the pig industry. I am not sufficiently familiar with the highly specialised road haulage industry, but there are other sources of income for road hauliers. I wish to confine myself simply to that sector. If the Minister succeeds, if it is necessary, in getting further schemes from the Treasury, it will be important that the case is well argued and well confined, so that it does not create other precedents. I realise that such a scheme would be considered by the European Commission as a state aid. However, I should have thought—the Minister seemed to imply it in describing the reaction that he received on Monday—that, given that it is vital to contain the problem Europe-wide, he would swiftly be given approval for a compensation scheme.

At Prime Minister's questions today, the Prime Minister described the farming industry—as so many of us have done over the years—as the custodians of the countryside. That role is another very important element in the issue. We have to ensure that the industry has the resources that it needs to come out of this crisis so that it can fulfil that function.

The other issue that I wanted to raise is that of imports. I have just been reading a book on globalisation, the foreword to which is entitled "The World Began Ten Years Ago". More than 10 years ago, as Agriculture Minister and as Secretary of State for Education, I was making speeches about the speed of technical change around the world, globalisation and heaven knows what else. It is therefore interesting that one of the leading commentators on globalisation should be saying that the world began 10 years ago. Nevertheless, his comments on so many of the industries on which he focuses—such as the financial sector, but also the agriculture industry—reinforce the Minister's brief comments on world trade and technical change, and illustrate the fact that we are now operating in a hugely different world from that in which so many of our original schemes were created.

Not the least of those changes has been the way in which supermarkets operate in formulating new trade relationships. It has to be said, however, that the main beneficiary of that process has been not industry, but consumers. As we are learning now, there may well be a price to pay for that.

The point that I want to stress to the Minister—I am sure from his comments that he is already very well apprised of it—is that both the outbreak of classical swine fever, which could have been started by a ham sandwich imported from goodness knows where, and the current outbreak facing us, which, as he rightly said, must have come from overseas as we have been free of it for so long, demonstrate how, unless worldwide controls are formulated to regulate the current world situation, those controls can pose enormous damage to our own industry.

I therefore fully support the Minister in his view—I understand that Sir John Krebs would take precisely the same view—that we have to double our confidence in international and Government controls; re-examine our systems, and the controls and the resources that we have

to apply them; and examine the origins of products and the controls that apply in third countries. As the current outbreak demonstrates, even one tiny lapse can cause a very serious crisis.

Although we still do not know the source of the disease, I presume that it originated from something brought in from overseas. I therefore believe that that re-examination should apply to controls not only in the food chain itself, but at ports and airports. It is right to re-examine those controls in order to discover the lessons to be learned.

Ever since the outbreak of classical swine fever, I have been reflecting on concerns about the new arrangements that we have made for the right to roam. Various controls are being implemented now to deal with the current crisis, but no controls were in place when someone perhaps threw a sandwich over a fence and the classical swine fever outbreak began. There are big issues to be addressed, but I know that, once the Minister has dealt with the immediate crisis, he will address them. He has our full support in every measure that he is taking now.

6.4 pm

Mr. Nick Ainger (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire): I represent a farming constituency that is well known not only for its dairy and new potatoes but for its beef and sheep, and my constituents are extremely concerned about last week's announcements. However, from my discussions with local farming unions, I know that they fully support all the action that my right hon. Friend has taken so far. The priority for my constituents and the farming unions is that the disease is contained and eradicated. I should like to focus on those two issues.

Some right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned the availability of disinfectant. It seems clear from responses earlier today that the problem with disinfectant is not production, but distribution. I hope that, within the next few days, arrangements will be made so that the more peripheral parts of the United Kingdom—particularly Wales, and especially west Wales, so that I can give a good message to my farmers and industry—have access to that vital product. We need it to take the action necessary to ensure containment.

I am very grateful that the National Assembly for Wales has reacted so quickly to the order on footpaths. Orders have been passed in Wales to ensure that countryside access is limited.

The day before my right hon. Friend implemented the restriction of movement order, I attended the launch of a Greenways scheme, which is a way of encouraging tourists to visit the coastal and rural parts of my constituency by linking footpaths with local railway stations. We took a walk from the local railway station to a local carpark, where we opened a footpath for wheelchair users. It is ironic that, the following day, I issued a press release urging my right hon. Friend and everyone else who uses the countryside not to come to the countryside for fear of spreading foot and mouth.

As my right hon. Friend said, it is essential that anyone who breaches the orders is prosecuted. As we know, the problem is that the disease is so easily spread. Irresponsible people who wander with their dogs or family through the countryside really are acting most irresponsibly.

Yesterday, I had a conversation with one of my farmers, who said that, unfortunately, sometimes not only the public but farmers act irresponsibly. Straying stock is a real issue. Having checked with my local county council, which is enforcing the movement restriction order, I understand that under article 35 of the order farmers who fail to contain their stock can be prosecuted. We have to get that message out very clearly. I was also told yesterday that a neighbouring farmer had collected 50 sheep that had strayed from another farm. That may seem unbelievable, but it is true. We have to repeat the message to farmers that they have clear responsibilities to contain their stock.

The great problem is that the outbreak has occurred when the industry is already having an awful time because of the collapse in farm prices and farm incomes. Therefore, like the farming unions in Wales, I hope that by Friday my right hon. Friend will be able to announce a licensed slaughter scheme, which would at least allow an income stream for farmers and related industries such as the haulage trade. Nevertheless, it goes without saying that the absolute priority must be finding ways of ensuring that the disease does not spread. I think that farmers would understand it if a little more time were taken and a belt-and-braces scheme were developed to ensure that a licensed slaughter scheme allowed no chance whatsoever of the disease spreading.

When the scheme starts to operate, it might confirm what some of us already believe. For whatever reason—perhaps simply because the market sometimes operates peculiarly—abattoirs, certainly in Wales, tend to be located far from the main sources of production. Maps showing how stock has travelled between Northumberland, Essex and Devon appear to suggest that the market has not got right the location of abattoirs around the UK. Perhaps we should be more prescriptive in encouraging abattoirs to be set up closer to areas of production.

The benefits are obvious—jobs would be brought to areas where they are much needed, and the number of animals being transported around the UK would be radically reduced. The risk of disease travelling large distances would also be reduced.

I learned today that supermarkets are clamouring for the establishment of a licensed slaughtering scheme because their customers are demanding British product. That is good news, as it appears that people have not lost confidence in the British product, as many farmers had feared. Customers are asking supermarkets when British product that has run out will reappear on the shelves. It looks likely that we can restore sales of British meat in supermarkets in the future. We must maintain that confidence, however: losing it, as happened after the BSE outbreak, would cause the industry to be plunged into yet another crisis.

I spoke to Malcolm Thomas, the director of NFU Cymru, before the debate, and he asked that a specific issue be dealt with. My right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and other hon. Members have touched on the matter, which has to do with the flexibility of animal movements, especially between holdings.

In my constituency, the Castlemartin range is a large tank range, where thousands of head of sheep off the Preseli hills overwinter. The dozen different owners of those sheep are desperate to move them back to the hills, and the matter is clearly a major animal welfare issue. Farmers want to know whether a common-sense

[Mr. Nick Ainger]

arrangement could be made to tackle problems such as that, while at the same time ensuring that the disease does not travel.

Another matter raised by Malcolm Thomas had to do with a farmer to the north of my constituency who has 800 store lambs in a large field that is virtually bare. The farmer has four fields full of grass less than a mile away, but he cannot move the 800 store lambs at the moment. I am sure that a sensible, common-sense arrangement can be devised to deal with such problems.

Mr. Livsey: Similar problems have arisen in my constituency. Many sheep farmers would expect the last day of February to be the normal day for moving tank sheep. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that some sort of special licence system should be established in such circumstances?

Mr. Ainger: I am sure that there is some way to achieve that, and I saw my right hon. Friend the Minister nod. It is imperative that we do so in the next few days. Genuine animal welfare issues are involved, especially in relation to the 800 sheep that I have mentioned. It has been suggested that sheep should be introduced to silage, but they do not like it and do not eat it. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to come up with the practical arrangement that we need.

When my right hon. Friend the Minister of State winds up the debate, I hope that she will say when agrimonetary compensation will be paid. I recognise that claims are not due to be registered for the European element until 30 April, but farmers will clearly be facing a severe cashflow problem, regardless of what happens over the next few weeks. I hope that the agrimonetary compensation will be distributed as quickly as possible.

I was first elected to the House in 1992, and the difficulty of distributing money to farmers in Wales existed then. Significant investment has since been made in computer technology to resolve the problem, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) knows. However, if the Government are prepared to get money to farmers as quickly as possible, it would be ironic if they were to be let down by the mechanism that they would have to use. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will take up the issue with Carwyn Jones, the Welsh Assembly's Minister for Rural Affairs, to ensure that available money is paid as quickly as possible.

I dealt with one of the largest compensation claims ever dealt with by a constituency Member of Parliament. The claim arose when the Sea Empress ran aground. I listened to the argument presented by the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) about precedent, who said that some people should be targeted, and that others should not. The problem is difficult and complex. In the Sea Empress case, the international oil pollution compensation fund drew red lines on a map, saying that people outside those lines were not affected.

If we go down the road of compensation for consequential loss, I fear that a similar problem will be encountered. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Minister is keeping open the possibility of consequential loss compensation, but he will have to grapple with the problem that I have set out: if the principle is accepted, where does one draw the line? The problem is hugely difficult. The Sea Empress claim amounted to more than £50 million, and I know how hard it is to decide whether a hotel 20 miles from the coast suffered the same losses as did a hotel five miles from the coast.

I have one question that I think the whole industry will have to examine. We seem to expect the public purse to be the first call when it comes to compensation for losses suffered when disaster strikes. Should not we look to the industry and say, "Isn't it about time you started looking after your own? Shouldn't you set up a compensation fund along the lines of the one run by the oil industry?" The international oil pollution compensation fund is now able to pay out up to £120 million on a one-off spill. Should not the farm industry look at establishing a similar fund?

Clearly, premiums would have to be paid, and so on, but I believe such a fund to be an idea for the future. The time will come when a serious situation arises and the Government of the day may not have been as prudent as this one. The necessary resources may not be available, as they are today. Perhaps the industry should start thinking about how it can look after itself.

Finally, my right hon. Friend has handled this debate superbly. I hope that in the next few weeks we will see the containment of this horrendous disease and its eradication. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the progress made so far.

6.20 pm

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I disagree with the hon. Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger) about the urgency of moving ewes off the hills to in-bye land to lamb. All farmers will see that as less of a priority than preventing the spread of the disease. To do as the hon. Gentleman suggests would, I think, increase the risk to an unacceptable level. That should come second to the eradication of the disease.

This has been a very useful debate. I should like to associate myself with the comments of the hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) about the victims of today's train crash between the Newcastle and London trains. The people of Northumberland and the north-east must be wondering what they have done to deserve this. They have had the outbreak of foot and mouth disease—which, sadly, started in my constituency—and today there has been the tragedy of the train crash. They have probably also had some of the worst snowstorms since 1962, and many houses are without power. They have had a hard time, and I sympathise with the problems that the outbreak is causing.

Foot and mouth disease is a personal tragedy. The Williamsons in my constituency, a well-respected Northumbrian farming family, were innocent victims of the outbreak; their stock was simply infected because they were near the source of the outbreak. They had a renowned herd of pedigree beef Limousin. To see those animals being lifted with a JCB and dropped on a pile to be incinerated by the side of the A69 was heart breaking. I am sure that the Williamsons will not mind my saying that MAFF officials have, in these difficult circumstances, treated them with extreme kindness and courtesy and could not have been more helpful. That should go on the record.

Northumberland has two exclusion zones. The county council is struggling with closing footpaths. Some confusion has arisen. I have heard that Kent county

council has simply imposed a blanket ban, but Northumberland county council believes that it will have to put up notices on every right of way to close them. In a county the size of Northumberland, that will be extremely difficult. Local authorities might need further guidance about how they should close rights of way, but it is extremely important that they do so as urgently as possible.

Another problem is that the county has only five animal health inspectors. Once animal health inspectors go to a farm where the disease is confirmed, they are categorised as "dirty" in the trade, and cannot visit another farm for a considerable period. Effectively, they are no longer very much use in this outbreak.

The outbreak has led to schools closing. Some teaching staff live on farms, and a lot of children who live on farms are not attending school. The outbreak has had a profound effect on our lives. If it were not for the snow, I suspect that it would also have a profound effect on tourism. As was mentioned earlier, tourism is an important economic factor in the constituency, and that will be seriously damaged if the outbreak continues.

Burnside farm has been said to be the source of the outbreak, but that is somewhat inaccurate. Burnside farm was split up a long time ago, and all we are talking about is a pig unit consisting of a number of sheds. I know that the Minister and his officials will inquire into the cause of this, but it seems rather a strange story. At this stage, our priority must be to control the disease, but it was something of a surprise to local people to learn that farmers at the farm that is said to be the source of the outbreak had been evicted from previous premises in south Tyneside—East Boldon—in 1995 after a long and protracted legal action by the local authority and English Partnerships, which had some ownership in the land. Once the two brothers had left, English Partnerships and the council were faced with a bill approaching £100,000 to clear up the premises. Shortly afterwards, the brothers popped up again in Heddon-on-the-Wall in Northumberland, with a licence to go back into the pig-fattening business.

The premises were visited on a number of occasions by trading standards officers and MAFF experts. No disease was found, but I believe that the way in which the farm was being kept was criticised. Neighbours had complained regularly about conditions in the sheds, and I hope that in the fulness of time there will be a full explanation. It was obvious that the farm was poorly kept.

Finding the source of the outbreak is vital. There was a rumour that swill had come to the farm from Newcastle airport, but that has been hotly denied by the airport. I am happy to put the record straight. However, there was, and is, an extensive collection of swill to that farm and the neighbouring farm, which has also been affected by the disease. It is important to find out how the infected meat got into the swill chain.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) spoke about globalisation. That is central to the control of disease. With the way in which the world works now, it will be virtually impossible to stop some diseases moving around the world unless there is strict control of the sources of production. In Europe, for instance, we now eat more Brazilian chicken meat than ever before. Brazil is making great efforts to export chicken meat to Europe. It is vital that the way in which chickens are produced in Brazil meets European standards. I believe that even if we put a cordon round a country to check the food that it imports, the volume of food imported into this country makes it virtually impossible to make a check at the point of entry meaningful. Therefore, we have to go to the source of the product. That is a penalty of the global economy, but we must remember that the global economy is also an advantage to us and that our farmers benefit from it.

There has been some talk about abattoirs. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill) is an expert on the subject, and he may wish to catch your eye later, Madam Deputy Speaker. There is a misconception about abattoirs and their purpose, which Liberal Democrat Members have mentioned.

The problem is that abattoirs these days are very large, multi-million pound, highly technical businesses. Wanting to go back to small abattoirs is like closing the supermarkets and opening the corner shops all day. A big, modern, state-of-the-art abattoir has to work 364 or 365 days a year. Lambs in the south-west reach maturity earlier because of the better climate. However, when the supply of lambs runs out, an abattoir cannot simply shut down and pay off all its staff—it has to bring in lambs from further and further afield, which is why animals have to be transported. Nothing that we do will change that. We cannot turn back the clock. Clearly, some small abattoirs are important, but the idea that we can have local abattoirs around the country to shorten journey times is economic nonsense.

Mr. Burnett: The hon. Gentleman makes a very powerful point. Does he agree that the habit or practice of taking animals from the north to the south of England has been going on for years?

Mr. Atkinson: That is true. There has undoubtedly been a change since 1967, as we can see from the map of the outbreak, and there is now much more movement. Abattoirs are not only big businesses; some of them are also specialised. My hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow may talk about the specialised abattoir in his constituency. Such specialisation is why animals are transported around the country. There is little that we can do to change that.

I shall touch briefly on the problems faced in the supply chain—for the hauliers, the auction marts and others involved in the whole process. Like all of us, I am pleased that the Minister is considering the movement of animals under licence. However, I suspect that it will be some time before that begins to solve the problems. I fear that the outbreak will be worse than we anticipated—its growth over the past 24 hours suggests that it is serious.

If the Minister is unable to license movement directly to abattoirs, I urge him to consider some assistance for the supply chain. There are at least two specialist livestock transporters in my constituency—they do nothing else. They have no work at present. They can lay off drivers and staff, but they cannot stop the financial charges on their business. They will experience great difficulty. When the crisis is over, it will be no good if such companies no longer exist.

The movement of stock directly from farm to abattoir raises the question of how to determine the price to be paid. If there is no auction mart, how can the price be assessed? That must be considered when the system is set up.

[Mr. Atkinson]

Insurance was mentioned by the hon. Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire. Today, a farmer in my constituency told me that his foot and mouth insurance runs out at midnight. This morning, the insurance company notified him that it would not renew his insurance—helpful as always. I hope that the farmer is contacting NFU Mutual, which might reinsure him.

Farming is in a crisis. In previous outbreaks of disease, the farming industry could fall back on its own resources to repair some of the damage, but this time the industry is so low—so broke—that it simply cannot sustain further large financial losses if the outbreak continues.

We are all grateful to the Minister and to his staff for what they are doing to try to contain the outbreak. Farmers in Northumberland, in the firing line, will also appreciate that.

6.32 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am pleased to be able to take part in the debate, although I am sure that none of us would have wanted these events to occur. I welcome the Opposition motion. Earlier in the week, there was a slight spat as to whether it was right to hold the debate now and to haul Ministers back from what they were doing. However, the House is always at its best when faced with a great crisis; we can all come together. In his inimitable way, my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has managed to disarm many of the critics who might have tried to pull the rug from under him. I am sure that we all agree that he has done a good job in putting people's minds at rest.

We cannot underestimate the gravity of the situation however. I do not have a specific constituency interest at present—I am extremely grateful that one of the first notifications of a possible outbreak, at Woodchester park in my constituency, turned out to be negative. Obviously, people in the constituencies of other hon. Members have not been so fortunate.

One of the difficulties is that although it is relatively easy to determine that there is an outbreak of the disease on a particular farm or holding, it takes considerably longer to confirm that a holding does not have the disease. There is an incubation period before the animals show signs of the disease and that is a dreadful waiting time for people on the holding or on surrounding farms. That is not, of course, to underestimate the impact on those who actually have to deal with the disease.

The outbreak is national. It seems to be getting worse day by day, although we are looking forward to an upturn. However, we must place animal health and animal welfare in context—I am not sure where we draw the line between the two, but veterinary science defines them separately. Within a relatively short period, this country—indeed, our continent and the world—has seen a number of animal diseases. There was the disaster of BSE and the continuing problems of bovine tuberculosis—I make no apology for mentioning them, although they are on a different scale. In my part of the world, we have been learning to live with bovine TB for some time—it is getting worse and we must find solutions. I shall say more about that later in my speech. In parts of the country, there have been outbreaks of classical swine fever. Now, there is foot and mouth disease.

Anyone who pretends that this outbreak is a one-off event that has come completely out of the blue should look back and think harder about what is happening in animal farming. If we do not learn from that, our successors will rue the day. There is evidence that such outbreaks are becoming more complicated; they are not necessarily longer lasting, but they seem to affect more animals more quickly. That causes us even more concern.

On the plus side, I join in the plaudits to my right hon. Friend the Minister. It is clear from objective measurement of such matters that the Labour Administration have learned from some of the mistakes of the past. By that, I do not mean the previous Conservative Administration—I do not want to make party political points. Since the last serious outbreak—BSE—I am pleased that command and control structures have been quickly put in place. Although a few people thought that some of the measures were rather draconian and could have been seen to be non-libertarian—telling people not to go to the countryside is about as illiberal as we could imagine—nevertheless the speed with which the Administration have acted was right. That has been welcomed not only by the industry, but by all those who have an interest in the countryside.

I am pleased about the drawing down of the agrimonetary compensation; arguably, it is a coincidence, but it could not have come at a better time. I very much support that, although I am sure that my right hon. Friend will realise from comments on both sides of the House that this may not be the end of the story on the compensation that will be needed.

It is pleasing to see the work of the state veterinary service. Some of us have been critical of MAFF's operation in practice, but the SVS has performed at the highest possible standard. It has links with the Meat Hygiene Service and the Food Standards Agency. I make a special plea that we should remember all those who work at the local government end—trading standards or environmental health officers. Those people are sometimes forgotten, but they are very much at the forefront because they have to make the initial visits and give clear recommendations. They always tell me that they are overworked and under-resourced. They tend to see themselves as the Cinderella services in local government. Perhaps we need to examine their work and ensure that they are properly resourced, because they have to deal with a legacy of different issues—which they do with great professionalism. We must never take those people for granted.

The loss of income will have an immediate impact, but we must not try to ignore the on-going problems. The loss of income arises from the inability to sell animals, but inevitably regulations will be involved. The Select Committee on Agriculture is considering the forms used in the integrated control and administration system, and there is a general view that we need to deal with that matter with more of a soft touch. We need to consider how regulation has been geared up post-BSE.

As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), in the debate on the Phillips report, which took place just before last week's recess, we considered not necessarily less but better regulation. The belief that cutting out all regulation is the answer to all the farm industry's problems would cost us dear. There is an underlying problem that leads to a loss of confidence, and it is why people leave the industry. That is

inevitable—people leave, as well as enter, any industry. Not many people want to enter agriculture, for obvious reasons, but we must find out who is leaving, and we always need to invest in younger people so that we can produce food for tomorrow as well as for today.

I shall not go over the ground that other hon. Members have covered in dealing with the food chain. However, we must not fail to realise that we are talking not just about an immediate impact on the raw commodity—the animals—but about the fact that we are currently incapable of exporting them. That will soon affect the whole food processing industry and will have an enormous impact on the United Kingdom.

We may have an agricultural trade deficit because we have always imported more agricultural products than we have exported, even though we could be self-sufficient, as hon. Members know—but that has been made up for by the fact that we are a major exporter of all manner of different foodstuffs. Of course, those foodstuffs will be questioned in other parts of the world. We must be very careful not to talk up that problem, but we must be realistic. The loss of those export markets needs to be carefully scrutinised and we must do all we can to deal with the disease as quickly as possible to ensure that we restore confidence in those markets. All that is known about and understood.

I wish to dwell on some other issues for a few moments, some of which hon. Members have already mentioned. The Select Committee has devoted a great deal of its time to considering the relevance of the globalisation of the food chain. That has been mentioned by Opposition and Labour Members both today and in questions on Monday's statement. I have a clear view that although globalisation may appear inevitable to some people, it would be a disservice if we did not question it. Even if no one else has had reason to question globalisation, there is much evidence that consumers have begun to look carefully at what they buy. They are asking where their food comes from—of course, labelling is relevant—and whether they can buy it locally. They want to know which farm it came from. They want to know about the attractions of organic food, even though it is not necessarily local.

All those matters are important and link with the key food chain issue—the relationship between science and the factors that are always found to be part of the communality of causation. Again, hon. Members have told us what they believe to be the cause. I am not sure that we know the cause; we certainly do not necessarily know who caused the problems. However, there is an interface between science, on which we rely so much to solve our problems, and the difficulties that we seem to cause ourselves, given the number of diseases that develop and how we deal with them.

Vaccination has been mentioned. It is interesting that my right hon. Friend the Minister has ruled out vaccination with every good reason, as most hon. Members would rightly say, because vaccination would take away our status and would seem to be nothing more than a short-term expedient. A comparison can be made with bovine TB. Those who do not like the work undertaken to find the cause and method of transmission of bovine TB call for vaccination. There are difficulties in trying to be consistent in how we deal with animal disease.

Mr. Gill: Has it occurred to the hon. Gentleman that we may have to reconsider vaccination? It is all very well to talk about having a high health status in this country, given that we live on an island. We could keep disease out of these islands if we did not import from other parts of the world. However, we are importing and there is perhaps a great political imperative to continue to do so. Perhaps there is a contradiction in thinking that we can retain the total health integrity of our own animals in this country, while importing products from all over the world. Has it occurred to him that we may have to revisit that territory?

Mr. Drew: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. I am not sure whether he makes an anti-European or an anti-world point, but I would approach the issue from the other direction. We should begin to question some of the global food chains. Instead of using vaccination to make animals more immune to those threats, we should try to remove the threats. I am not in favour of a little Englander approach, by which we eat what we produce. Clearly, that could not be contemplated; it is not what most people would want. However, we must revisit some parts of the food chain and perhaps get more balance back into it. That would encourage localisation, which I have always advocated. I shall not get into the argument about abattoirs. The hon. Gentleman has far more experience and knowledge of such matters than I have. However, we need to address those issues seriously.

Science has brought us successes such as traceability, which has allowed us to check most animals origins. However, we must check what we feed to our animals, and I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider that point during the investigation. Most people would argue—perhaps with limited knowledge—that risks have been taken with animal feed and that we should carefully consider the causes of those risks.

I should like to ask my right hon. Friend some questions about some matters that have already been mentioned, and he might like to investigate and consider their wider implications.

Earlier, hon. Members raised the issue of common land. My hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mrs. Organ) attended a briefing by those who implement the policy; it highlighted the problems of areas such as the Forest of Dean, where sheep graze openly. It would be nice to think that we could contain the animals, but the sheep in the Forest of Dean visit people's gardens as well as the more open areas. Therefore, we need clarity on how we should deal with those animals, because they and their contact with human beings could spread the disease. The issue affects me because of the common land in my constituency.

When I intervened on the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), I asked how we could assist farmers markets and farm shops. The people whose main business is to supply those outlets face a particular difficulty at the moment. I hope that my right hon. Friend will be able to offer them clear advice. At present, it is not to hold the markets and not to open the shops, but the time will come when people's livelihoods will be affected not just because of their inability to farm, but because of their inability to attend the markets.

[Mr. Drew]

We are always told that one of the reasons we cannot offer compensation in the form that some of us might like is that it would fall foul of the state aid rules. At this time of crisis, it would be helpful to know that we could go to the European Union for a dispensation on any help that might be forthcoming.

Regaining access to markets after the crisis is another issue. We must have a systematic approach to that, but it will not be easy. When the disease is eradicated—let us hope that that is soon—there will be a period in which Europe and the rest of the world will want reassurance that we are clear of foot and mouth disease. Regaining access to international markets is an issue, because there is a problem not only with the raw commodity—the animals—but with all the other products that we need to sell.

Whatever our views on the European Union, we must all recognise the importance of the negotiations in which my right hon. Friend the Minister and his colleagues will engage. We need the EU's support at this time. Although we may criticise it on how aspects of policy worked out in the past, we now need to pull together with our partners. I pay tribute to the sterling work that my right hon. Friend has done not just in this country, but in the discussions in Europe. The most important thing is to eradicate the disease, but we need to keep our markets open so that we can access them at the earliest possible opportunity.

6.53 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew). He made a very interesting speech that was based on his great knowledge. His contributions to the debate and his media appearances have added to our understanding of the problem.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the conduct of the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food: it has been exemplary. Despite the pressure that he has been under, it has been noticeable that he has answered interventions thoroughly. Even though I was critical of some of his remarks on Monday, I have nothing but praise for his conduct and performance today.

I am sorry to learn that a further outbreak of foot and mouth disease has been found in Essex. Chelmsford is very close to the abattoir in my constituency where the disease was found. The sight of the smoke that rose over my constituency from a great cauldron on Monday was depressing; I am sure that it will remain with me for a long time. I suspect that I have had a foretaste of what other Members may see. People's livelihoods for many years were literally burned before their eyes.

The Minister was right on Monday to express sympathy for the farmers and abattoirs involved. He said:

"They deserve sympathy and support, not blame. The best thing that the Government can do is to eliminate foot and mouth disease and help return the industry to normal trading as soon as possible."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 604.]

Colleagues in the House have asked me about the abattoir in my constituency. In particular, they are surprised at the enormous distances that animals travel on their way to Brentwood. Inappropriate conclusions have been drawn from that. It is sad that a number of small abattoirs have disappeared, but it is wrong to draw the conclusion that Cheale Meats is responsible for the decline in the number of small abattoirs and the fact that animals have to travel long distances. Cheale Meats is a specialist abattoir that is of enormous strategic importance to the pig industry. More than half the pig carcases exported from the United Kingdom come from Cheale Meats. Without the abattoir and its facilities, the number of live exports would increase dramatically, so it is critical that it gets back into operation as soon as possible.

Ironically, an application to extend the abattoir's facilities for the storage of stock has been before Brentwood council. Had those facilities already been in existence, the transfer of the disease to Old English farm probably would not have occurred. Matters were in hand to deal with the possible threat of foot and mouth disease even before the outbreak. If it were not for the efficiency of the abattoir, the current outbreak of the disease probably would not have been detected as quickly as it was.

Rumours have been flying around about the nature of the business of Cheale Meats. I am grateful to my Friend the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who told me about an anonymous telephone call to his office today suggesting that there was a financial link between the abattoir in Brentwood and the firm in Heddon-on-the-Wall in his constituency—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. Members should please keep their voices down when an hon. Member is speaking.

Mr. Pickles: The telephone call suggested that there was a financial link between the abattoir and the pig farm in my hon. Friend's constituency. I have checked that allegation, and I am pleased to say that there is no financial connection—either direct or indirect—between the two. I have spoken to the directors of Cheale Meats, who have given me that unqualified assurance. We have many problems to deal with in the current outbreak and people—especially those who do not have the courage to make themselves known—spreading malicious falsehoods does not help us to do that. I am happy to put the record straight on that particular point.

It is not easy to telephone a farmer whose stock is being destroyed. However, at the weekend I called my constituent, Mr. Gemill, and was struck by the quiet dignity with which he took the news of the destruction of his life's work. The valuers are examining his stock and he will receive compensation, but he still has to go through the process of replacing those animals in six months' time. Many hon. Members will have to make similar calls, and they, too, will not enjoy them.

Is this a convenient time for me to stop speaking, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: When the hon. Gentleman finishes, we will commence the statement. *[Interruption.]* Does he detect a hint?

Mr. Pickles: I am as good as the advice that I am given. I thank the Whips Office for telling me that I should sit down at 7 pm, which I am happy to do, and then continue after the statement. I do not want to keep

the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions waiting, because the subject of his statement is important.

Mr. Speaker: Once the hon. Gentleman finishes, he cannot be called again.

Mr. Pickles: That is all right.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the hon. Gentleman.

Selby Rail Crash

7.2 pm

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement about the tragic accident at Selby at about 6.20 this morning. I am grateful to the House, in particular to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) for concluding his speech and to the Opposition for giving me the opportunity to speak at this later time, which allowed me to visit the scene and report back to the House.

The latest casualty figure is 13 killed. At this time we believe that that includes two train drivers. There are 75 other casualties, 10 of whom are in a serious or critical condition. I am sure that all hon. Members will wish to join me in expressing our deepest sympathy to the injured and to the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in this tragic and horrific accident.

When I visited the scene, I again saw for myself the tremendous efforts of our emergency services and the many agencies that were involved in dealing with the accident. As always, they showed true professionalism, courage and efficiency in, yet again, the most difficult circumstances.

The House will want to join me in paying tribute to the North Yorkshire police, working in conjunction with the British Transport police and other forces, the local fire brigades and ambulance services, the Royal Air Force air sea rescue helicopters, which attended the scene, and the local hospitals that treated the injured. The Minister for Public Health, is visiting hospitals this evening and will thank hospital staff for their work. I also want to pay tribute to the way in which members of the local community responded so quickly to provide help and comfort to the passengers who were involved in the accident.

Let me turn to the facts of the tragedy in so far as they are known. At approximately 6.20 this morning, a Land Rover was travelling west along the M62 motorway, pulling a trailer that was carrying another car. It left the motorway as it approached a bridge that crosses the east coast main line. The bridge is protected by crash barriers, but the vehicle left the road some 30 m before the beginning of the crash barrier. It then travelled along and down the embankment, behind the safety barrier, before falling down the railway cutting and on to the track. In all, on present information, it is estimated that the vehicle travelled more than 100 m from leaving the main carriageway before reaching the railway line.

The driver got out of the vehicle and phoned the North Yorkshire police. As he was speaking to them, the 4.45 am Great North Eastern Railway Newcastle to London train, carrying more than 100 passengers, collided with the vehicle on the track. The passenger train left the rails as a result of the collision, but remained upright. Almost immediately, it collided with the oncoming freight train. The time between the emergency call and the first collision was 40 seconds, and the two trains crashed within seconds of that.

It is essential that this appalling tragedy is subject to the fullest investigation. A number of agencies are involved—the Health and Safety Executive, its railway

[Mr. John Prescott]

inspectorate, British Transport police, North Yorkshire police and the Highways Agency. All of them will conduct their own investigations. Therefore, I have asked the Health and Safety Executive to provide me with an interim report within the next few days. I shall then make a decision on what further steps may be appropriate. I shall ensure that report is made public.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his statement. I know that he shares our view that it was appropriate to defer today's debate on other transport issues.

The right hon. Gentleman speaks for the whole House when he expresses shock and sympathy for the victims and their families. We join him in sending our condolences to the injured and bereaved. We also join him in paying tribute to the emergency services. The police and the helicopter, ambulance and fire crews distinguished themselves in harrowing circumstances and appalling weather conditions. Doctors, nurses and other national health service staff have been unstinting in their devotion to the injured. We thank not only the public services involved, but—as he did—the villagers of Great Heck, who were first on the scene.

The victims and their families are uppermost in our minds. At this early stage, can the right hon. Gentleman say whether there is any doubt that the casualty figures that he gave are the final totals? Have all the relatives of the dead been contacted?

Faced with yet more scenes of smashed rail carriages on our television screens, and as we hear yet more harrowing first-hand accounts of a disaster, it is hard to know how to express what everyone feels, but nothing should stand in the way of our determination to rebuild confidence in the safety of the railway. I agree with the Deputy Prime Minister that it is too early to draw conclusions from the accident, and I welcome his call for an early interim report from the HSE.

Everyone accepts that accidents happen. However, we need a full and comprehensive assessment before we can judge whether this was an appalling but freak tragedy, or whether the risk of a similar accident recurring is unacceptably high. The accident follows the tragedies of Hatfield and Paddington. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to resist adding to the burden of the Cullen inquiry into those accidents, so that its findings are not delayed further. However, has he considered reviewing the conclusions of the 1987 working party, which examined the risks associated with road/rail crashes at bridges? Will he also consider creating a successor group?

I assure the right hon. Gentleman of our support for the Cullen inquiry recommendations to be implemented as quickly as possible and our support for his response to today's events. Will he join me in expressing support to those people who work on our railways? This accident is another terrible blow for a troubled and unhappy industry that has been desperately trying to restore its self-confidence and services to passengers. For GNER staff, this is the second tragedy in the space of a few months. Does he agree that a safe and reliable railway depends on all those people who have been striving, and will continue to strive, to achieve that objective? Does he also agree that it is vital that we foster the confidence of the industry and those people who are working so hard to address its shortcomings?

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his response. I am most grateful for his full support for the emergency services and their remarkable work, which they are still doing. I am not sure what the final casualty totals are, for obvious reasons. All those people who are known to be alive have been removed from the crash site. When we begin to lift the two trains that collided—one was doing about 125 mph and the other was doing 40 mph—we are not quite sure what we will find. Therefore, I cannot give more accurate information at the moment. Certainly those who were involved have been removed to hotels by GNER and are receiving advice and help in those difficult circumstances. I am not sure whether all the relatives have been informed, but the great majority have been, and that task continues. I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an accurate answer, but I will write to him tomorrow. If I receive more information tonight, I will ensure that he gets it.

The hon. Gentleman's point about wanting a full investigation was well made, and he is right to suggest that we should not adopt the same procedure that we used for Hatfield, when information was passed on to the Cullen inquiry. We do not now want to delay the inquiry's conclusions, and I shall certainly keep that in mind when I receive the interim report from the HSE in the next few days. I shall keep the hon. Gentleman and the House informed on these matters.

Research commissioned by the Highways Agency is currently being conducted on collisions at bridges, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. As soon as that investigation has been completed, I will make that information available.

The hon. Gentleman was right to conclude that we all want a safe railway system, and everyone strives to achieve that. We always need to be guided by the proper regulatory framework, and the question is whether that framework is correct. Lord Cullen is considering whether the management of our railway system and its safety should be improved, and we must await his report. As the hon. Gentleman said, we must remember that GNER crews were involved, and although we are waiting to find out exactly what happened, I believe at least two of them to be dead. They paid the final price in the most difficult circumstances. We should remember that it is often the workers who pay the price, along with the passengers, and that is why I particularly wanted to mention those two people.

The hon. Gentleman can rest assured that we will all strive to secure a safe railway system and that there will be a full investigation. I await the interim report to find out what I should do, but I will report back to him and the House as soon as possible. I appreciate the fact that following our conversations this morning about the difficulty of there being a transport debate today, the Opposition were responsive and agreed to join us in doing what was best so that I could report to the House.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): This is the second time in recent weeks that my right hon. Friend has had to come to Selby in difficult circumstances. The first time, of course, was during the floods. As we sit here tonight on

this bleak Ash Wednesday, many of my constituents are gathering for a service in the local church. Will my right hon. Friend underline the fact that the people of Selby have once again shown great community spirit, resolve and resilience, as they did during the floods? I refer not only to those who were first on the scene this morning, in terrible circumstances, and who did what they could to help, but to those from voluntary organisations and local churches, particularly the vicar of Selby abbey and the vicar of Snape, who have been on the scene all day. Their contribution should be recognised and valued greatly.

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend, as the constituency Member for the area, knows only too well that the same people—the emergency services, voluntary organisations and ordinary members of the public—who were involved in this incident came forward to deal with the terrible floods. The House greatly admires the speed with which people come forward to help. It is a source of comfort in the most difficult circumstances that we can rely on those people who do a wonderful job. I recognise that with the floods and this collision, the people of Selby and the surrounding area have suffered great pressures on them, but one is always amazed by the resilience of people who, when there is a problem, get together and deal with it. That spirit shone through yet again in this tragedy.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement, and I join him and the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) in offering our condolences to the friends and relatives of those who tragically died and our best wishes to those who were injured in the accident. On behalf of the House, I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the praise that he gave to the emergency services and the local people who so rapidly came to the aid of those injured in the tragedy.

I thank the Deputy Prime Minister also for making it absolutely clear that the interim report will be made public as quickly as possible. Will he give us an assurance that the full report that will be published in due course will also be made public? Will he ask for consideration to be given in that report to the length of crash barriers on either side of bridges? As there has been confusion in the reporting of the incident, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm, as I believe he has done, that the Land Rover and trailer were the cause of the accident, and not, as some newspapers have reported, the vehicle that was on the trailer?

I am delighted above all by what the Deputy Prime Minister said about the people who work on the railways. He can be assured of our full support in all his work to try to achieve a safe, reliable railway.

Mr. Prescott: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. Members on both sides of the House have offered support to the emergency workers and the relatives who are suffering at this very moment because of this terrible tragedy.

I shall certainly make the interim report public. I am all for transparency and my general approach is to make reports public where possible. The hon. Gentleman must bear it in mind that although the site is not being investigated as a crime scene at the moment, I cannot give full details until the officials concerned have conducted their investigations and taken statements. I must await their report, but I am committed to making available as much information as possible.

The Transport Research Laboratory has been commissioned to consider the length of crash barriers. It has done some work, and it will now be asked to do more. When that information is published, it will be made available to the House. I hesitate to say exactly what happened, but the visual evidence of the state of the Land Rover and the trailer carrying the car makes it clear that the Land Rover was hit by the train and, judging by its front part, almost completely demolished. It would be unwise of me to enter into any other speculation at the moment—I shall await the report.

Mr. Peter Snape (West Bromwich, East): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that the whole railway community will be shocked and saddened by this latest incident? It appears to merit the description of "accident" more than the other tragedies that have occurred in our railway industry in the past year or so. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, from what we know of the circumstances, no railway safety device in the world could have prevented that accident from happening?

In view of the welcome remarks of the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), would it be appropriate for my right hon. Friend to write to Mr. Christopher Garnett, the chief executive of GNER, to tell him that as far as regular rail travellers are concerned, he and his staff run a fine train operating company? This incident and the Hatfield crash are not the company's responsibility, and we ought to say so.

Mr. Prescott: I agree with my hon. Friend that the railway community will be shocked and saddened. The sequence of events is a remarkable set of coincidences: a car came off a motorway, travelled some distance on to the railway track and was then hit by a passenger train, which came off the track into the path of a freight train, all within seconds. As he said, it certainly seems as if that could be properly called an accident, but I must await the report.

I have talked to Mr. Garnett. Anyone who knows him will know that he certainly cares about the railway system and about GNER. He was very shocked by the incident, as he was by Hatfield, and he was on the scene making sure that everything possible was being done, including having passengers allocated to hotels and ensuring that counselling was available. It was easy to see in his face his shock and concern about the fact that there had been yet another railway tragedy. Considerations of what happened and who is to blame provide no comfort at these moments; one must deal with the circumstances. He was in the thick of it, and I am sure that the House was glad to see a man playing that part.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): As one of North Yorkshire's Members, I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) for their tribute to the North Yorkshire emergency services. We do not have the strength of personnel that other parts of the country have, and the way in which they responded today was absolutely magnificent. This is arguably the worst tragedy that I can recall happening in our county in my 14 years in the House. Many of us have friends and constituents who use that train to travel to London at 6 o'clock every morning, and we are waiting desperately and anxiously for news of who, precisely, the victims are.

[Mr. John Greenway]

The right hon. Gentleman is right when he says that at this juncture our thoughts are with the families of the victims and the injured victims. I endorse what he has said about the emergency services and the staff of GNER. As the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) said, the accident does not appear to be any fault of the railway. I urge the Deputy Prime Minister to try to get the line reopened as quickly as possible. We do not want to suffer the great delays that occurred because of the Hatfield accident.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words of warm support and for giving me the opportunity to thank the North Yorkshire police and the chief constable, who accompanied me when I visited the site of the accident. It is always difficult when politicians visit such sites, because we wonder whether we are getting in the way. However, it is necessary for a representative of the House to attend such sites and to report back. We have great hesitation about doing so, but I received tremendous co-operation from everyone involved, who wanted to say what was going on, and felt that Parliament needed to know. That is why I asked for the statement to be made later in the day.

A hotline has been opened by the company for relatives who may be concerned about anyone who was travelling on the train. No official information will be given about those who may have died until the relatives have been informed. That is the normal custom, and I think that it is what the House would expect.

Of course, we want to see the line reopened. It is the line that I use, and the same route. There was a speed restriction on the line after the Hatfield accident and the evidence of gauge corner cracking. Improvements were made and the speed restriction was removed only last week. A horrible thought is whether it would have been better if the restriction had still been in place, but it is one that really cannot be entertained. It is one of the terrible circumstances that surround the tragedy. However, the service had benefited from an improvement as a result of the lessons that we learned from the Hatfield accident. We were getting back to a normal service, and I think that the company was to launch a campaign next week to encourage people to return to the railways.

These are difficult and terrible circumstances. Everyone wants to see the line reopened as soon as possible, but obviously in a safe manner. Everything must be done that should be done to improve the line.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): I thank my right hon. Friend for the steps that he took, in conjunction with the Opposition, to ensure that we had an early and proper statement. I am aware that he has had the harrowing experience of visiting the site. I join him in his compliments to GNER and its executive director for the work that he has undertaken.

In replying to the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway), my right hon. Friend obviously could not say precisely when we shall see the line reopened. However, can he guess or make a guesstimate of when that might be? As the hon. Gentleman said, there have been great troubles on the line. It is our line, and we all want to see it get back to normal. That includes the travelling public. Given the economic interests of the entire country, it is important that the line should be back in use as soon as possible.

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I join him in complimenting GNER, which is our local rail service. I cannot say with accuracy when the line will be open. When I have received the interim report, I may have a better idea of the extent of the damage. I have seen the state of the line. Wonderful efforts have been made by the maintenance people, who have been working extremely hard since the Hatfield accident, but this is a line to which they must return. I cannot give an accurate date for when that line will be reopened. However, as I have said, I shall be able to give further information when I have received the interim statement. I have no doubt that everyone involved would like to see the line reopened as soon as possible. I am sure that that is the wish of the House.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for both visiting the site today and reporting back to the House this evening. I join him in paying tribute to the emergency services. We especially remember those who lost their lives, those who have been bereaved and those who are seriously and critically injured.

GNER has had a terrible six months, but its standing locally is extremely high. The company is based at York. As the Under-Secretary of State for Social Security, the hon. Member for City of York (Mr. Bayley), knows, as do others on both sides of the House who represent parts of York, the city revolves round the railway. Today, I received a letter from York's economic development department about the damage that was done to the community and local business with the loss of the normal full-speed service, which, as the right hon. Gentleman said, was reinstated only on Monday.

I do not think that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the extent to which weather conditions might have played a part in the accident. I do not know whether the police were able to report on that today. Similarly, I do not know whether that will form part of his investigation, on which I know he will report.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Lady for her compliments to the emergency services, whose work has been remarkable. We have commented on them and supported them. I have commented on GNER services, which are identified with the region and actively supported. I recognise that York has been the centre of our railway system for a long time and that many people will be concerned about disruption to services. I hope that we can reinstate those services as soon as possible.

I looked into the police reports about the weather, and there was concern about how bad it was. The gritters were on the M62. I think that the last gritting took place at about 2 am. A judgment was made later that the freezing frost was not continuing. Anyone who saw the early film on television would be aware that the weather was not the normal sort of pattern that has been seen in certain parts of the country. We must wait for the outcome of the inquiry to give us further information about what caused

the car to leave the motorway. At present, it seems that the weather was not responsible, but I would not want to say that for sure.

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): Although my right hon. Friend will need to await the outcome of the investigation, I ask him at the appropriate time to give consideration to the provision of safety information for train passengers. When boarding an aeroplane, we take it for granted that such information will be made available. Is it not time to consider providing similar information to train passengers, especially about emergency, evacuation procedures, such as those that had to be used today by those caught up in a terrible accident?

Mr. Prescott: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. It is interesting that on this occasion, compared with a previous accident when there was concern about whether hammers were available to enable passengers to get outside, notices enabled passengers to get hammers to break out. It is always difficult to know whether passengers should stay in the train or get out.

We are talking of an electric passenger train, but the freight train carried oil and diesel, and there were fumes. Some passengers were obviously concerned that the fumes would lead to fire, as we saw in another incident. We have asked Lord Cullen and others to consider whether more safety information should be available. To be fair, the train companies have provided more information, but there was some talk earlier about whether the hammers were big enough and whether they could be changed. I think and hope that Lord Cullen will be able to give us further advice. I will follow up the matter with the Health and Safety Executive to ascertain whether there is anything more that we can do while we await reports.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): I endorse what has been said about the management and staff of GNER, who have seen railway colleagues lose their lives in the accident. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree with me that during all the recent emergencies the staff of GNER, at every level, have worked extremely hard to try to restore the quality of service and to support passengers in very difficult situations? As for reopening the line as soon as is reasonably possible, will the right hon. Gentleman bear in mind that because of adverse weather conditions today, both lines to Scotland have been closed?

Mr. Prescott: I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says about GNER staff. I travel on the service for about 20,000 miles a year. I find that the staff have an identity with the company and feel happy about the services that they are providing. I think that that is the experience of us all. The staff want to provide the best service, and that comes across.

The importance of the railways emphasises that we need a good strategic network north and south and east and west. That reminds us how much we are dependent on the railway system. When we have these accidents, we are given the opportunity to think carefully about whether some routes should be compatible. For example, the route via Leeds is not electrified, but many of the trains are. Today's incident is likely to bring such considerations to the fore.

Mr. Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): First, may I associate myself with all the comments from my fellow North Yorkshire Members of Parliament? My right hon. Friend knows that I come from a railway community in every sense of the word, and that I have spent many years in York, working in the railway industry. Can he comment on media speculation that the train set involved in the incident today was the same one that was involved at Hatfield?

Secondly, in my right hon. Friend's initial discussions with the Highways Agency, did the agency express any views about the geometry of the slip road? Having worked for many years on incidents connected with bridges on our railways, I endorse the remarks of the Opposition spokesman about the need for progress on the interface between roads and railways. The Highways Agency bridge authorities throughout the country and Railtrack must try finally to crack the associated safety problems.

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks and for his support for the people who were involved in this terrible tragedy and for the emergency services.

I am extremely sympathetic to my hon. Friend's point about media speculation. I do not suppose that it will make any difference, but I wish that they would not speculate without the facts, as that creates difficulties. From the initial speculation, one would have thought that the vehicle fell immediately on to the track. That is just not true. It careered for 100 m, well ahead of the crash barrier. The gradient of the embankment is 1:3. How the vehicle did not turn over is beyond me. It was a high-sided vehicle and was pulling another vehicle.

Events did not happen as the media speculated from an early stage. From time to time we hear from some so-called transport specialist, who has seen nothing but tells us what should happen and what we should change. That is not helpful. It alarms the relatives, because they get the wrong information. We should find out as much as we can, give the information to the House, and trust the report based on the information available at that time. I hope, although I do not expect that there is any chance of it, that the media will avoid speculating about what happened. It does not help, and my hon. Friend's question gives me an opportunity to say so.

It is true, I believe—I hope the inquiry will look into the matter—that one of the power units that was not damaged was one of those involved in the Hatfield crash. I must await the interim report before I can give a definite response. With regard to the slip road and the need to examine bridge and rail connections, the Highways Agency is looking into that. Research is under way and we will make the information available.

Again, as I said, if one looked at the route that the vehicle took down the side of the road and 100 m to the rail, one would not have thought that that would happen. One would imagine that the vehicle would have stopped well before that, but it did not. As in all tragedies, it is never one incident. It is two or three things together that make for a terrible tragedy. Who was to know that when the vehicle came off the road, a fast passenger train was approaching at 125 mph, as well as a freight coal train carrying a massive weight—thousands of tonnes—and travelling at 40 mph? The impact was phenomenal.

That set of circumstances defies belief. If I had come to the House and reported that such an accident had occurred, most hon. Members would have thought that it

[Mr. Prescott]

was not possible. What one learns about tragedies is that the impossible often happens. That is always the difficulty for us when we try to avoid them.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): As co-chairman of the all-party railways group, with the hon. Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Snape) who spoke a little earlier, may I associate myself with all the expressions of sympathy, the condolences and the tributes that the Deputy Prime Minister has paid? Will he pay tribute not only to rail staff, but to those passengers who, happily, were not too badly injured? From the interviews that have taken place during the day, it is apparent that great courage was shown by those who were still able-bodied after the tragic accident and who helped the more seriously injured to escape. Will the right hon. Gentleman also pay tribute in particular to members of the British Transport police? As he knows, their work is often forgotten, but there is no doubt that as well as GNER staff and the rail crews, British Transport police played a significant part today.

Mr. Prescott: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his endorsement of the expressions of sympathy and support from both sides of the House. I add my support for the work of the British Transport police. I travelled down with the assistant chief constable and discussed the situation with him. With so many agencies present, one tends to think that co-operation will not be possible, but it was not lacking at all.

The various authorities—the transport police, the civilian police, the fire services and so on—have developed a technique for co-operation that is admirable. They arrive within a short time and get on with the job. They understand it and do it, and one cannot but admire such co-operation. If they can do that despite the different bodies that they belong to, we get the best of services to deal with the most difficult circumstances when a terrible tragedy occurs. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman gave me the opportunity to praise the co-operative work of all the agencies involved in the incident.

Mr. Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I thank my right hon. Friend for the statement that he made so promptly this evening, and associate myself with his tribute to all those from the emergency services. Our sympathy goes out to all the bereaved and the injured. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that, notwithstanding the recent spate of accidents and disasters, railways remain the safest mode of transport?

In paying tribute to the emergency services, I emphasise the work done at Pontefract infirmary, where I understand that more than half the victims of the crash were treated. Not long ago, there was debate about the future of the infirmary. A strong case was made that the hospital is close not only to the railway, but to the A1, the M62, five or six working pits and an explosive chemical works in Castleford. Will my right hon. Friend convey my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who said in his statement two weeks ago that new money would be found for Pontefract, and that the accident and emergency service is safe there, 24 hours a day?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for his endorsement of the emergency services and the statements made from both sides of the House. He gives me the opportunity to say yes, rail is a very safe mode of transport, but the big question for us is whether we can make it safer. That is always the question on which the House will concentrate its mind. There will come a time when we will have more and more debates about it, but this is not the moment. I am pleased to say that all the signs are that it was not a failure of a safety system that contributed to the collision today, but I must wait to see what the reports tell us.

It was not only Pontefract hospital, but quite a few hospitals in the Yorkshire area that responded tremendously. That is why the Minister for Public Health is up there, saying thank you on behalf of all of us for what they have done. As to whether Pontefract hospital is under threat, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health is on the Front Bench and will have heard the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Mr. Trickett).

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I am not seeking to allocate blame or asking my right hon. Friend to do that, but I am concerned to learn tonight that at the point where one of the busiest motorways passes over one of the busiest railway routes in the country, the crash barriers intended to protect that very busy railway route seem to have been inadequate and were certainly not long enough. Are those crash barriers the responsibility of Railtrack or of the Highways Agency?

Mr. Prescott: First, as my hon. Friend says, we must wait to see whether any criticisms are made about crash barriers. That investigation is under way. As my hon. Friend rightly says, the M62 is a busy motorway—one of our busiest—and crosses the east coast line. The barriers have not been designed to deal with a Land Rover and a vehicle that career down a bank and go on to the railway line. A balance must be struck. The barriers are not designed to prevent cars from going on to the railways. They are designed to stop lorries running into the bridges over railways, for obvious reasons. Barriers are built where the motorway runs alongside the railway, and crash barriers have then been put in place.

The matter will be investigated, and I assure my hon. Friend that the investigation will be reported to the House. The matter must be kept under constant review. The barriers are largely put in place to protect the bridges. As I reported to the House, the crash barrier is quite a long one. It is longer than is required under the regulations. Yet the vehicle left the road some 30 m before the beginning of the crash barrier and careered down the embankment in a way that surprised all of us. However there will be a thorough investigation and we will report back to the House.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): As I am sure my right hon. Friend will be aware, the freight train involved in this terrible accident came from Immingham in my constituency, and I am sure that he will appreciate that, when the terrible news came through, it sent a shiver of fear through the families of freight drivers there. My right hon. Friend paid tribute to the passengers and drivers, but will he also pay tribute to the freight drivers who do such

tremendous work moving goods around the country, and do all that he can to ensure that Railfreight retains business confidence?

Mr. Prescott: I thank my hon. Friend for her words of support. She is right that there is considerable freight train activity on that line, particularly with the movement of coal to the power stations, which was certainly a contributory factor in the tragedy. Thousands of tonnes of deadweight coal had an effect on the impact. Workers and passengers risk death in such incidents, and the families of railway workers rely on television and radio for the latest information to discover whether their loved ones have been involved in any tragedy. When people speculate on the television and in the press they should bear in mind that there are people who are extremely worried about their loved ones, whether they are rail workers or passengers.

Mr. Ian Stewart (Eccles): I add my condolences to all the families of those injured and killed, and my thoughts go to the workers from all the services involved in this terrible incident. It is clear from what has been said in the Chamber today that the accident was due not to a rail problem but a road problem, and the material used to guard motorways when they travel over roads or rail is of particular importance. In the village of Winton in my constituency there have been three incidents in a couple of years in which three different cars have gone off a motorway in similar circumstances to this tragedy, with resultant deaths. Fortunately, they did not hit the houses below. Will my right hon. Friend investigate whether concrete might be a more appropriate material for barriers in such areas?

Mr. Prescott: There have been a number of incidents over several years where bridges go over roads or rails. Those are always a matter of concern and are fully investigated. Where crash barriers are deemed necessary they are provided. Whether the materials used for the barriers might result in an unsafe road is a matter of concern, but if my hon. Friend cares to write to me with particular examples I shall be happy to follow the matter up with the Highways Agency.

Mr. Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): This was an appalling tragedy and the Secretary of State is right to extend sympathy to those families involved, to praise the emergency services and to institute a quick and thorough inquiry. But will he personally consider the national standards for crash barriers and bridge parapets? They are meant to withstand 30 tonne vehicles travelling at 40 mph. They were clearly not in place where this accident occurred. If the inquiry finds that the national standard must be upgraded, will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that that will happen?

Mr. Prescott: As I have said, barriers are installed largely to influence the path of any lorry or car that collides with them; they will not stop such vehicles, but they might clear them from the bridge itself. However, the standards are being considered and the investigation will cover such matters. We shall take on board any recommendations and bring them to the House.

Deferred Division

Mr. Speaker: I now have to announce the result of a Division deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on Deferred Divisions, the Ayes were 318, the Noes 119, so the motion was agreed to.

[*The Division List is published at the end of today's debates.*]

Foot and Mouth

Question again proposed.

7.45 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): This is an important debate. Unfortunately, my constituency is one of the two within Lancashire where foot and mouth has been confirmed. The other is that of my hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn (Mr. Pope) where that horrible disease has been confirmed at an abattoir in Great Harwell; that is tragic news. My hon. Friend is suffering the same pain as I am, and people are rightly at a loss about what to do next. My hon. Friend is working hard and has been in touch with MAFF requesting help and advice on behalf of his constituents. They could not been represented by a better Member.

On Monday, we heard on the bush telegraph that there was a suspected case of foot and mouth in Chorley. MAFF was informed, and by 11 o'clock the next morning I had a telephone call confirming that foot and mouth had been established in the village of Withnell. To have such a horrible disease confirmed in a constituency such as Chorley, which has hundreds of farmers who are now worried for their future, is the worst news possible.

After I received the telephone call confirming the disease I telephoned the police, but I was told that they had not received confirmation. I was able to tell them that I had had confirmation from MAFF, but that matter requires urgent attention. Clearly, the police and other services involved should be told, and those who answer the telephones on behalf of the Lancashire police should be aware of the situation. The police should set up hotlines so that people who fear, or suspect, that they have foot and mouth on their farms can be dealt with immediately. We have the MAFF and the NFU hotlines, but the police, too, should have such a hotline. My hon. Friend the Member for Hyndburn feels the same. People in Lancashire are worried that they cannot always get though to the right people in the police, so I hope that that problem is addressed quickly. Other constabularies in Britain should also ensure that they, too, have a hotline.

Before hearing the news I had spoken to the leader of the council, Jack Wilson, who had also heard whispers on the bush telegraph. When 11 o'clock came I knew we had to move quickly. I spoke to the local authority, which had already established that refuse vehicles would not enter farms within the constituency, but would stay on the highway and refuse would be brought to them. The local authority had therefore responded quickly.

Lancashire county council was also involved. I spoke to one farmer who rightly got in touch with the county council which, in turn, got in touch with me. Through its good offices, the council has played a major part. It has closed footpaths and is working with the police to ensure that people do not walk across the fields and spread the disease—the worst danger that we all fear.

The problem is that people are in fear and do not know where the disease will strike next. The district council and the county council, including County Councillor Steve Holgate, rightly played their role. I have spoken to local councillors, who share the same views whatever their political persuasions. This is not about politics. Councillor Iris Smith, who represents the Withnell ward, and Councillor Kerry Jones were the first two people to whom I spoke. I mentioned to Councillor David Dickinson of the neighbouring ward that there was a problem just down the road from him. I also spoke to the local farmers on the district council, including Councillors Harold Heaton and Frank Culshaw, to ensure that they were aware of what was happening within the Chorley constituency. Everybody rightly showed great sympathy and worry. The constituency may cover an area of 80 square miles and have hundreds of farms, but it is close-knit, and the message went out.

The anxiety is about where the disease will go next. I feel sorry for farmers; indeed, I always have done, as they have done badly for many years. I know that the Government have tried to address that problem, but now farmers face a new one. I want to ensure that this outbreak is not the final nail in the coffin of agriculture. I know that we all feel the same. Whatever happens and whatever is being said, we all know one thing: we want to ensure that when we have eradicated the disease, there is still a farming industry at the end of it. The House is united on that, and we should move forward. We want to ensure that farming will continue.

The plight of a farmer whose land neighbours an infected farm is a lonely one. He cannot go out and does not have any contact with other people. Farming is lonely at the best of times, but now is the loneliest time for a farmer. He does not know what is going on and has no contact with other people. The Government have tried to address the problems with extra financial resources for farming. However, many farmers may lose out financially because of the over-30-months scheme. I appeal to my right hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that those voices are not lost, and that people who are struggling will be helped and looked after.

The danger of any compensation scheme is that although people will get the money, they never quite know when that will happen. That danger is faced by farmers who have already experienced financial ruin. As they now face the extra problem of the disease and the burden that it brings, I want us not only to make the money available and award the compensation, but to consider making interim payments in cases of need, especially if the process is to be a long one. I would have thought that that was not impossible, so we should consider making interim payments available.

Mr. Nick Brown: I make no firm commitment tonight, but I intend to see what can be done to pull the agrimonetary payments forward to the earliest date on which they can practically be made. I shall be talking to Commissioner Fischler to see whether I can have the Commission's help in achieving what my hon. Friend asks for.

Mr. Hoyle: I thank my right hon. Friend for that comment, which all hon. Members will welcome. I know that he is genuine and means what he says. We all recognise that and we welcome his assurance.

It is sad in itself that the slaughtering has occurred in my constituency. No hon. Members ever want that to happen in their constituencies, but the problem also affects the farms adjoining those where the presence of the disease has been confirmed, which are waiting to see whether there are any signs of the disease. The farmers and their families sit there worrying, and they, too, face a

serious financial plight. They cannot take their animals to the abattoir or use the special rules that we introduce. The welfare of their animals is important. They must be fed and looked after, so there is a running cost.

The clock is ticking away, and we cannot say how long the farms that neighbour those where foot and mouth disease has been confirmed will last. We do not know how long it will be before any cattle can be moved to special abattoirs. It is the plight of those farmers and the worry that they face that I am highlighting. I appeal to my right hon. Friend to consider whether special payments can be made to those adjoining farms. Nobody wants to move anything off them or to have any contact with them. Will my right hon. Friend consider that serious financial problem, which must be addressed?

People will ask why we must eradicate foot and mouth disease. We must do so for the future of farming in this country. It is our utmost aim and our main objective to ensure complete eradication. That is the only way in which we can export in future, especially to the United States, which will not touch a country that has not completely eradicated foot and mouth. It is those markets that we need, and to which we want to return. It is crucial for farming that we get back into the international market. On that basis, can we ensure that we do not import from countries that have foot and mouth disease? Let us be strong and take a firm stance, like the United States, to ensure that we do not receive imports from countries that have the disease and are not dealing with it properly.

I know that my right hon. Friend takes care of the farming industry. I know that that aim is in his heart and that he will continue to work on the industry's behalf. I speak on behalf of the industry, but especially for the Lancashire farmers, and my right hon. Friend came to Chorley to meet some of its hundreds of farmers. It is crucial that we look after them and do not allow our farming industry to bleed to death because it lacks the finances to carry on.

I know that the Government are committed to meeting the needs of those farmers, but these things always come down to time. As my right hon. Friend said, time is essential and we must consider the matter as urgently as possible. I know that MAFF has played a super role and that he has done a super job. MAFF must continue to work with the farming industry and local farmers in the Chorley area, as well as with the National Farmers Union. We would struggle without MAFF, and I cannot praise it and the Minister enough on farmers' behalf, but I look forward to quick help and support to ensure that their livelihood is preserved. Let us get behind the industry and ensure that British farming is put back on the world map, and once again leads the world in quality farming with quality welfare. That is what I want to see.

7.58 pm

Mr. Christopher Gill (Ludlow): Several hon. Members have mentioned the plight of abattoirs. Before I add my comments on that facet of the discussion, I must declare an interest. It is unlikely that there will be an abattoir owner in the next Parliament, although there might be so many redundant owners that many will seek nomination for election to Parliament.

I question whether this Parliament has profited from the presence of an abattoir owner among its Members. I have regularly and persistently tried to flag up the threat to our small abattoirs and the consequences of their closure. Just as regularly and consistently, however, the Government have tried to avoid facing up to the reality. Twelve months ago, I asked the Minister of Agriculture when he would implement the recommendations of the Pooley report. In reply, I received a written answer from the Minister of State, who stated:

"it is our intention that this should be done as speedily as possible."—[*Official Report*, 7 February 2000; Vol. 344, c. 79W.]

I shall not bore the House by quoting from the many, many other questions that I have asked in the intervening 12 months, but I received an answer to a question on the same subject this week. I asked the Secretary of State for Health to make a statement on meat inspection charges for smaller abattoirs. The Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), who had to answer because of a change in duties and responsibilities, said, "I shall let the hon. Member have a reply as soon as possible." Twelve months have passed since the Minister of State said that she intended to act as speedily as possible, but the Under-Secretary is now saying the same thing. Smaller abattoirs, which were seriously worried even before the foot and mouth problem arose, are still living in uncertainty because a new meat inspection charging regime is due to be implemented on 1 April and, as far as I know, they have not yet received from the Ministry a categorical description of what will happen.

Before I pursue that theme, I must say that we heard an excellent, sensible speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), who pointed out that many abattoirs are large and specialist, and that that fact necessitates the movement of large numbers of stock over great distances throughout the United Kingdom. Those abattoirs are so big because their customers are the big supermarket chains, which smaller abattoirs are unable to supply because they cannot guarantee the volume or meet the specifications regularly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) referred to the abattoir in his constituency that specialises in killing sows that are exported to the continent. However, there are two other categories of abattoir. Historically, a large number were associated with meat products factories, where the product of the abattoir was fed into the production of the factory. A few still exist, but my concern is for the future of small abattoirs, and the particular relevance of the small local abattoir in the context of the debate.

The whole House wants the movement ban to be lifted as soon as possible, but hon. Members will appreciate the Minister's difficulty in lifting the ban completely and allowing the mass movement of livestock up and down the country to large specialist abattoirs, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham referred. That would, of course, risk spreading the disease further. It seems to me, and perhaps the Minister agrees, that if the ban is to be lifted, it may have to be lifted incrementally and only within a radius of a few miles of abattoirs.

In that context, smaller abattoirs will perhaps be able to reopen their doors, whereas larger abattoirs, denied the large numbers that they need to make their economics come right, may not be able to open on the same basis until the Minister can lift the ban completely.

Mr. Nick Brown: The hon. Gentleman is very knowledgeable about those matters, but the Government

[Mr. Nick Brown]

are considering direct movement from farm to slaughterhouse, and movement from farm to holding area to slaughterhouse, in part to enable batches of animals to be assembled from different sources, thereby facilitating the workings of the trade. The crucial issue for us is the risk of spreading the disease. I cannot compromise on that. There will be no movements in any form that risk spreading the disease. What matters is not so much the length of a journey as the conditions in which it is undertaken. In particular, on the advice of veterinary authorities, my absolute insistence is that animals that travel directly to a slaughterhouse, or from a holding area to a slaughterhouse, have no chance to mix with other animals that are not going directly to slaughter.

Mr. Gill: Needless to say, I agree entirely that the ban must be lifted only on the basis of animals being consigned directly to an abattoir, so that the risk of spreading the disease is minimised.

I return to my theme, which Ministers know that I have been pursuing for at least two years. I remind the House that in June I initiated a debate in Westminster Hall on rural abattoirs. I used a statistic given by a Labour Minister in the other place. Baroness Hayman said:

"red meat slaughterhouses in this country declined in number from 1,385 in 1975 to 339 last year."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 6 March 2000; Vol. 610, c. 797.]

That is a dramatic reduction, and the casualties were mainly smaller abattoirs. Some of the problems that we are experiencing were, to my mind, entirely foreseeable. I am not saying that we could have foreseen foot and mouth disease, classical swine fever or BSE, but we could have foreseen the consequences of effectively driving the smaller abattoirs out of business. Our common sense alone should have told us that piling bureaucracy and costs on to small abattoir operators would make those abattoirs uneconomic and cause their closure.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar talked about large abattoirs. I accept that they can employ economies of scale, but smaller abattoirs are important in the local community. We have too few already. Labour Members have queried whether we have enough and whether they are strategically situated, and we need assurance from the Government that nothing more will be done to prejudice their future. I say that because a reduction in the number of private butchers and specialist meat producers who supply niche markets is an inevitable result of the demise of small abattoirs.

All parties in the House have flagged up the development of niche markets as one of the great hopes for the future of agricultural industries, not least the livestock industry—but without the smaller, specialist abattoirs, there will be no niche meat markets. Big plant abattoirs are not the least bit interested in dealing with small numbers of animals for specialist outlets, just as no big abattoirs are interested in taking an animal for private kill for home consumption, or slaughtering a perfectly fit animal that has to be disposed of. Only smaller abattoirs have been prepared to continue that service. It would be wrong, but administratively convenient, for Ministers and the Department to deal with a relatively small number of big abattoirs rather than the few hundred in existence, and many in the trade suspect that administrative convenience outweighs all the other considerations.

The situation is certainly serious: there is a prospect of the livestock industry being decimated. I do not think that any Member on either side of the House doubts that the margins on which livestock farmers currently operate are minuscule, and I believe that this will be the last straw for many of them. There will also be a high attrition rate among specialist livestock hauliers. All that is bad news for the livestock industry in general.

It is ironic that in imposing ever stricter standards on the British industry—I refer not just to the livestock industry but to abattoirs and manufacturing industry—we are making our own industry less and less competitive. Yet we are apparently prepared to admit imports from anywhere in the world, provided that they carry a piece of paper stating that the meat was produced in conditions of which we approve.

Ministers will say that they have evidence in their Departments of instances of the law not being complied with in this country. What makes them confident enough to believe that the law in all the countries from which we import is being applied as rigorously as it is here, and that the products that we import meet the standards on which we insist?

Mr. Patrick Nicholls (Teignbridge): Is not the truth of what my hon. Friend says demonstrated by the fact that the infection must have come from abroad? The disease had been eradicated in this country. Whatever else may eventually transpire, it has come here from abroad.

Mr. Gill: Absolutely. The same point was made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), who was once Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. He said—I think I quote him correctly—that the cause of the disease had presumably come from abroad. If we did not have the disease a fortnight ago and we have it now, it must have come from somewhere; therefore it must have come from abroad.

I understand the difficulty in which the present Minister finds himself, and I know that he understands the point that I am making to him, which is: how are we to maintain our high health status while allowing imports from the rest of the universe? Is it fair to bear down on our own industry in so draconian a fashion, making it uncompetitive and putting sections of it out of business, while the product that it used to supply is supplied by foreigners?

I believe in free markets and free competition, but we all face a dilemma that must be resolved. If the recent outbreak of classical swine fever was caused by someone carelessly discarding the proverbial ham sandwich, no amount of trouble that Ministers and Departments go to in order to ensure that our animal health status is maintained will be effective. Sooner or later, Ministers must address the question of food imports in a much more robust fashion, or else accept that the objective of maintaining 100 per cent. animal health status is not feasible.

That was the point of my intervention on the hon. Member for West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire (Mr. Ainger), when I asked whether we would be able to turn our face against vaccination for ever. It is possible to do that for ever and a day, provided that there is a cordon sanitaire around these islands, and provided that we know that no import will destroy our 100 per cent. animal health

status. The question on which the House, and the Government in particular, must now focus is this: where is the present policy leading us?

We all agree that the slaughter policy is correct now, but we are dealing with a situation that is very different from that of 1967. The whole world has moved on, and, as many Members have pointed out, trade has been globalised since then. We must keep an open mind on, for example, whether we can sustain our high health status without vaccination; and we should perhaps reconsider the policy of slaughtering, slaughtering and slaughtering again until the disease has apparently been eradicated. Neither the Minister nor I can estimate how many thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands or even millions of animals may have to be killed before we get to the end of the problem.

I have made this point many times, but I need to make it again. Ministers must understand that if the abattoirs close, there is scant prospect of their reopening. The reason is straightforward. Abattoirs operate on high volumes and low margins; they are now burdened with a huge amount of bureaucracy and inspection, and there are always the environmental pressures imposed on them by neighbours.

As with galvanising works, everyone knows where an abattoir should not be sited, but no one will say where one should be sited—and if an abattoir owner has a site that could be developed for housing or any other purpose, he could hardly be blamed for cashing in his chips and going out of business in the present circumstances. That is regrettable.

What is to be done? Movement must be resumed. We must halt the unnecessary closure of small abattoirs. My hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) referred to the parlous state of the United Kingdom's biggest pig abattoir. The problem does not just affect small or medium-sized abattoirs, or indeed large abattoirs; it affects all abattoirs, including the biggest, which is in Malton in my hon. Friend's constituency. The maintaining of the movement ban threatens the future of all abattoirs, regardless of size.

Let me end by saying something that is self-evidently true: without abattoirs, there can be no livestock industry. The Minister needs to understand the importance of keeping all our abattoirs going, to provide the industry with an essential service and to convert its product into a food that the public will, I am sure, wish to buy. I believe that, given the choice, the vast majority of the British people would prefer to buy meat produced in this country.

8.18 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I should start by declaring a tangential interest. I own five acres in Derbyshire, which are occupied by about 15 sheep. I receive no money or material gain from that. I have asked the young couple who look after them to take precautions, mainly to prevent possible infection from me because I travel a good deal within my constituency and there is a suspected case—although, fortunately, the initial test has proved negative—in Hartshorne in my area. We hope that the outcome will continue to prove negative, but, clearly, that case has caused much concern among the local farming community. The community of south Derbyshire respects its local farmers, although it does not always agree with everything that they do, and regards them as an important part of what is essentially a rural community with strong ties.

Let me touch on the immediate issues. The first relates to a conversation that I had this morning with a farmer who is not from my constituency, but from the neighbouring constituency—that of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin). The farmer raised comparisons with the way in which the crisis had been dealt with in 1967, which shows that some people farming now were farming in 1967 and they have accurate memories, as they see it, of what happened then. From what he had observed from a distance, that farmer felt that animals were being slaughtered and carcases destroyed less speedily than in 1967. I remarked that I thought that one of the difficulties was the different circumstances now; the infection is much more widespread. In 1967, it was concentrated in particular areas and it was easier to marshal resources to destroy animals speedily. Nevertheless, I pass on the remark that he made from his experience.

I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). He probably knows that I agree with much of what he said about abattoirs. When he strayed into references to foreigners, he lost my sympathy somewhat, but I have pursued a long campaign in my time as a Member of Parliament on the competitiveness issue: how we regulate and charge for abattoir services and the effect that that has had, particularly on the small abattoir community.

I think that I have achieved some progress. Initially, the competitiveness issue was not regarded as relevant; it was regarded essentially as a matter for individual Community countries, not a concern of Her Majesty's Government. Then a full survey was conducted of relative charges and charging regimes and, not to everyone's surprise, it was discovered that the regulatory regime that we applied was rather more rigorous in some ways and certainly more expensive.

I strongly support the hon. Gentleman's comments about the slow progress in implementing the recommendations made in the Pooley report. Small abattoirs still await a clear answer on the appropriate charging regime that they should have, which would better secure their future.

The incident in my constituency relates to an abattoir. As I said, I hope that it does not end up being a proven case. This afternoon I spoke to one of the workers at the abattoir. He had been laid off and was, not surprisingly, concerned about what would happen to him in the period in which his workplace was shut. He pointed out that around 90 per cent. of the produce of the abattoir, which is largely a specialist halal operation, is exported to Germany. Thus there are two problems: the constraint on movements that the business would face; and the constraint on exports, which is its main source of income.

I have a lot of sympathy with the arguments about the consequential implications for other parts of the agriculture supply chain at this time of crisis. That business is not large and it appears to have traded in good faith. In those circumstances, the needs of such businesses deserve proper consideration. Obviously, farmers close to that business who have had no part in any matter relating to the crisis so far, but who are nevertheless restricted on their premises, also need some thought, because there are now implications for their cash flow. I believe that yesterday's announcement goes some way towards that, but it does so in a random way—which is inevitable if it is relying largely on agrimonetary compensation. Many of

[Mr. Mark Todd]

those who are not affected will receive some assistance, whereas many of those who are affected with some severity will receive the same assistance. Obviously that will cause difficulties.

I believe that there is scope to examine further the possibility of supporting consequential losses in some manner. I urge the Minister to continue investigating that issue and to use whatever means are available. I know that he has sympathy for those who have been placed in that situation. I also realise that it is a complicated process to satisfy his colleagues in the Government and, potentially, the European Commission that he is doing the right thing. Nevertheless, I urge him to continue with that focus.

The action that my right hon. Friend has announced to try to get the supply chain working again will have the most immediate effect, and it is what most business people would like. They would rather be paid for doing their job than paid something by the Government not to do it. In that light, I very much welcome the announcement and look forward with great interest to seeing the details of how the scheme will work. I am sure that that interest will be shared by many members of the South Derbyshire farming community.

The other gap that I have identified was touched on by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle)—the briefing to local authorities on their role in the matter. I spoke to South Derbyshire district council about refuse collection from farms, but it had already identified the need to respond effectively. I just wonder, however, whether that knowledge is fully shared across the country. In some parts of our country, the linkage between the local authority and the local farming community is perhaps a little less robust. In that respect, there should be a clear brief on what should be expected, and some of the points made by my hon. Friend are certainly relevant. I think that clearer guidance is probably necessary.

As for the medium to long term, I have already addressed the issue—although the hon. Member for Ludlow has done it much better—of clarification of the role of small abattoirs. I am trying to examine whether some of our difficulties—of course not the original infection, but some of our difficulties with migration of the disease across the country—have been caused by unnecessarily long journeys. I certainly accept the knowledgeable comments that have been made about specialisation in the abattoir sector. Although specialisation has made some long journeys inevitable, other long journeys are not inevitable.

We should bear in mind the experience of the 1960s, when outbreaks were concentrated around particular places of infection, partly because the movement of animals across the country was not as intensive as it is now. I think that there is now an opportunity to re-examine that issue and certainly to clarify the charging regime that the abattoir sector now faces.

We also need to examine the supply chain within agriculture. Some well-informed remarks have been made in this debate about the changing way in which the supply chain is working and the increasing specialisation of some sectors, both of which have led to particular types of beasts being taken on long journeys around the country to particular abattoirs. I am not sure how robustly understood that is or how well we understand the risks associated with the way in which supply chains have developed.

Supply chains have developed for entirely understandable market reasons. As those who have listened to my speeches before will know, I am essentially a strong, robust supporter of the marketplace in agriculture. Nevertheless, operation of the market does not always entail proper risk awareness. There needs to be some thought about that issue. Yesterday, I listened to a farmer who was on the television talking about the number of movements that seem to be made. A hon. Member earlier in the debate spoke about the apparent frequency of movements.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman and I have debated this matter in many forums on many occasions, and he will know that I share his general support for the importance of the market. However, I am very concerned about the pernicious effect of supermarkets, for example, in breaking the link between the supplier, the retailer and the consumer. The extension of food-produce supply chains of the type that the hon. Gentleman described is largely the result of the breaking of that link. We need to look for ways to reunite purchasers with the source of the goods that they purchase. Farmers' markets represent one of those ways, but I fear that, sadly, they will be among the victims of this outbreak.

Mr. Todd: I note the hon. Gentleman's comments. He and I have disagreed in the past. I do not think that it is possible to roll back history, but we need to understand what we have done. I am not sure that we do understand that, and I shall return to the point at the end of my remarks.

I want to make three final points. First, we have failed to grasp the consequences of farm diversification. We press on farmers the need to diversify, and it is right that we should: I do it too, but the problem came home to me again yesterday, when I visited a farmer in my constituency. We talked—I should add that the meeting took place outside his premises—about the impact of the outbreak on his business. He told me that he had moved into horses, for which he lets out some buildings. People come in to look after the horses, or to go riding from the farm.

That diversification introduces a further risk that the disease might be spread by the movement of animals. It certainly makes control more complex: the farmer to whom I spoke has had to stop people entering his farm, horses from leaving it, and so on. Such difficulties for farmers are in part the consequence of the thrust to move away from the raw material production on which they had concentrated until recently. We must try to understand the risk implications of diversification rather better.

Secondly, reference has been made to globalisation and the implications associated with imports. It is clear that this outbreak started from something imported but, once again, we cannot roll back the frontiers in that regard. We must try to understand better the risks involved with imports, and to establish more robust controls at our borders. We cannot avert those risks utterly, but we must try to minimise them wherever we can.

We must understand that increasing proportions of our foodstuffs come from abroad because that is what our consumers want. It has been said that our consumers

really want to buy British. I wish that that were true, but all too often consumers either want to buy foodstuffs that are not—and cannot be—produced in this country, or foodstuffs that can be produced here but at a cost that is higher than people are prepared to pay.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to intervene a second time. In case he is worried, I assure him that I shall not attempt to intervene a third time. I believe that, sadly, most consumers have become less discerning. They do not know the origins of the products that they buy. That is part of the break in the link that I described earlier: people do not know where their food—whether it be processed food or all sorts of other foodstuffs—comes from. It is not that they do not want to exercise choice, but in many circumstances choice is now almost impossible to exercise.

Mr. Todd: It was never possible for people to have the totality of knowledge that we might wish for, but we have another opportunity to bring home to consumers the importance of thinking carefully about what to eat. The outbreak almost certainly derives from an import of some sort, and we must recognise that the choices open to consumers carry implications. We cannot stop people making the choices that they want to make, but we can make sure that they are aware of the risks involved.

Finally, we have very little knowledge of the consequences of the intensification of agriculture in Britain. That intensification took place for entirely market-oriented reasons. I subscribe to that motive, and I do not want to roll back the process entirely. However, very often we have intensified agriculture in ignorance, and sometimes with a painful lack of knowledge of the scientific and risk implications.

I say that because, at my suggestion, the Select Committee on Agriculture started an inquiry, prompted by the Phillips report, into research into transmissible spongiform encephalopathy and into the implications of intensive farming. So far, we have had a good deal of evidence on research into TSE, which I expected. There has been a strong emphasis on that important subject. However, there has been virtually nothing on the revolution that has taken place in agriculture over the past 30 years and the possible implications that that may have for animal health, human health and our environment.

It is painful to acknowledge that we seem to be so poor at understanding the revolution that has taken place before our very eyes—certainly in my lifetime, and I have lived in the countryside for most of my life. That process has crept past us without our having any proper understanding of its implications. We have simply accepted incrementally, on the argument of the marketplace, what has come about, without examining thoroughly enough what steps have been taken and whether we have subtly and silently accepted a risk that, frankly, we would not have accepted had we known more about it. What I am suggesting is not an immediate task for the Minister, who has plenty to do, but I would like us to consider whether we need a much stronger research programme into the implications of some of the choices that we have made.

I will say what I have said many times in these debates. I believe that there is a bright future for United Kingdom farming—and this is a strange time to say it. To be honest, the brightness is not shining through the gloom around us. However, there is a tremendous amount of enterprise and a strength of product that could create wealth and jobs in our countryside into the future. That vision is always before me, even when we face a dark subject of this kind, and we should constantly hold it up to our farming communities. They are feeling about as gloomy as one can imagine at the moment.

We are giving our farming communities more support, but I think that we also need to give them greater evidence of our faith in their future. I constantly hear it said that the Government no longer care about farming. As a committed supporter of British farming, I find that terrible. Any lover of the English landscape would find it terrible too. We need to give far stronger evidence of our commitment and faith, particularly at times of crisis such as this.

8.37 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): It is always fascinating to follow the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd), although I do not share his limited optimism about the future of the farming industry in the United Kingdom. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, I and my many constituents who farm find it difficult to imagine that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. However, I hope that he is right. I, too, believe, that we have the science, the farming, the soil, the weather and the history to beat the pants off any other agricultural nation in the world. Sadly, the problems facing the industry are such that I, for one, am not enough of a visionary to see the light at the end of the tunnel. However, like the hon. Gentleman, I hope that it does exist.

I congratulate my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench on calling this vital debate at this time in our farming history. I do not wish to bring any hint of party political bickering into what has thus far been a level-headed and sensible debate, but in the long history of the Government failing to call any debate on farming—I think that there has been one Government debate in the past two or three years and eight or nine called by Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, which strikes me as a strange record—it is particularly unfortunate that in this of all weeks the Conservative party has had to call the debate and force the Government to come to the House to discuss this vital topic. As recently as the day before yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food was decrying the fact that we were wasting his time by calling him to Westminster to answer to the nation for what is going on.

This has been a good debate, and I intend to talk about the crisis that faces the nation. None the less, it is worth registering the fact that the Conservative party cares enough about the crisis to have called the debate, but that the Labour party does not. The Labour Government spent yesterday banning foxhunting. They feel more strongly about a few foxes than the many hundreds of thousands of cattle and sheep that may have to be destroyed. I regret that. I feel passionately about foxhunting and about farming. The history of this week will be noted by people in the countryside and if they were able to be in London on 18 March—unfortunately, they cannot be—the Government would know that.

Mr. Drew: The hon. Gentleman chastises us for not holding a debate. I welcome the fact that we have held a

[Mr. Drew]

measured debate. Before it began, I looked at the history of BSE; it is interesting to note that, during the period when the hon. Gentleman was an adviser to the then Conservative Government, nearly all the debates on BSE were called by the Labour Opposition because the Conservatives did not want to talk about it.

Mr. Gray: I accept the hon. Gentleman's chastisement. It will also have been heard on his side of the House, so the Government will have understood that he is equally unhappy with their record on the matter.

This matter is not one for levity or for party political bickering. I hope that the House will forgive me for introducing a slight element of that, but I wanted to register those points at the beginning of my remarks.

I am deeply concerned because my constituency is primarily a livestock and dairy farming area. One hundred yards across the border with the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), there is a confirmed case of foot and mouth disease in the Bromham abattoir. I understand that a second case has been confirmed today at a farm a short distance from the abattoir.

My constituents include a large number of livestock farmers. I saw many of them last Friday at Chippenham market. Naturally, they are holding their breath as they watch the appalling tragedy that is unfolding across the nation; those of us who are not farmers, who live in towns and have occupations such as that of Member of Parliament cannot understand that. Farms in my constituency tend to be family farms and are generally of 400 or 500 acres, with between 100 and 150 milking cows. The farmers tend to do most of the work themselves nowadays; because of the crisis in agriculture, they have laid off most of their workers.

What an awful prospect those farmers face. Day in and day out, they work with about 150 animals—milking them twice a day, knowing their background and pedigrees. They know their animals as many of us know our families. They face the prospect that, by tomorrow, there may be huge bonfires, such as those we saw in the north of England, and that their yards will be eerily quiet and they will have nothing to do. They will have no means of employment and no income—they have precious little at the moment. What an effect this outbreak will have on those individuals; we have not touched on that matter sufficiently in the debate.

Farming is not only about large farms and abattoirs; it is about family farms such as those throughout the west of England. It is also about people who live, work and breathe farming and livestock. If foot and mouth came to their farm, it would bring a catastrophe that those of us who do not farm can only imagine.

Before I discuss the practical handling of the crisis in my constituency, I express the hope that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has listened carefully to the comments of my hon. Friends about the overwhelming importance in the medium to long term—once this horrible event has passed—of finding out why the outbreak occurred. We know that it came from abroad—the Minister said so during his opening remarks—but we do not know whether it was a sandwich in an airport rubbish bin or illegally imported meat; we do not know where it came from. It cannot have been brought in on the wind; it must have been on some form of transport. It is vital that we know in detail, and publicly, where this terrible tragedy came from.

Having been rather ungracious towards the Minister earlier in my speech, I now add my voice to those that we have heard throughout the debate to point out that he seems to have acted with decisiveness, clarity and urgency. He has taken precisely the right steps to contain the outbreak.

I was at Chippenham market at 1 o'clock last Friday, when the auctioneer made the announcement about the ending of the transportation of livestock to the dairy ring, which was then in use. Hon. Members can imagine the feeling around the ring about the appalling catastrophe facing farmers. I went around speaking to them, and, to a man, they all said, "Thank goodness that is being done. It is a terrible prospect, but it is exactly the right thing to do. We've got to contain the outbreak now, and we must take urgent and dramatic action to do so." The Minister and his officials have done exactly the right thing.

One or two of the farmers in my constituency have been in touch with MAFF officials in the south-west. They were very impressed by how efficient, courteous and, to use a rather new Labour word, caring the officials were; they have been absolutely switched on and first class. Similar comments were made earlier, and I am sure that the Minister will pass our thanks to the south-west office in particular. The people facing the appalling events that may happen on their farms or in their abattoirs are under great stress, but they have been handled extremely well.

I congratulate the people, whom I saw last night, from the Countryside Alliance on acting with equal determination and straightforwardness in cancelling the march that would have taken place on 18 March. They have been working flat out on the project for 18 months. Half a million people were planning to come to London, using a large number of buses and trains. A ship was even chartered in the north-east of England, and four of my constituents who are disabled were planning to attend. It was a huge event to cancel, but it was absolutely right to do so. Irrespective of one's views on hunting, I congratulate the people in the Countryside Alliance on having taken the clear and straightforward decision to cancel the march.

I should like to raise two or three issues on the practicalities of the past few days' events. First, I want to touch on the way in which the livestock industry operates. Of course, I accept the great wisdom of those who, like my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson), rightly think that the meat industry tends to deal in large quantities. It is true that the supermarkets demand 5,000 head of sheep one week and 5,000 head of something else the next. Those animals must be found and transported to the abattoir that the supermarket requires.

Of course meat production tends to involve a large-volume industry, but our experience in the west country is slightly different. We still have a large number of family butchers, purchasing meat from animals killed in local abattoirs. In my constituency, apart from the abattoir affected by foot and mouth disease, the excellent Drury abattoir at Tockenham is still struggling and surviving the crisis in family abattoirs. However, Newman's abattoir at Malmesbury has had to close,

despite the fact that it achieved international notoriety because of the two pigs that were released in Malmesbury a year or two ago. None the less, it has had to close, but Drury is carrying on.

In the west country generally and in my constituency, many family farms still produce livestock that is slaughtered at the abattoir down the road, with the meat being sold at a local retail outlet. Huge movements of animals across the nation, huge abattoirs and cellophane-wrapped meat in Sainbury's may be inevitable, but rather like the inevitability of the closure of village shops, I hope that it does not happen. I will continue to support Drury and the local meat retailer in the hope that we can preserve some localism in the meat industry.

Mr. Nicholls: Bearing in mind that my hon. Friend and I both come from the west country, does he agree that it is heart-rending that, even in the absolute misery of their despair, farmers are saying that if there is compensation in due course—we have all been impressed with what the Minister has said recently—it must be for not just themselves, but their communities? The fact that, when they are in the depths of despair, they are also thinking about the others who have been affected says something about the communities that we represent.

Mr. Gray: My hon. Friend makes a strong point. I hope that his constituency will not be affected, but it may well be because Devon is one of the centres of the outbreak. He is right that those who operate abattoirs or run heavy goods vehicles to transport animals are currently receiving no income at all—they have had to close down. The hon. Member for South Derbyshire told us about the worker from an abattoir in his constituency who has been laid off today. That will happen across the nation. However, those businesses have not been told that they will receive compensation from the Government, but they will seek some means of surviving when the crisis is over.

We should be particularly concerned about two sectors in the livestock industry. First, what are farmers to do with beasts that are just under 30 months old? How long will they have to keep them and what compensation will they receive for the feed that they have to give the animals until they become eligible under the over-30-months scheme? I know that the Minister will give careful thought to that issue.

The second group is finishers. They finish the beasts off, but what will happen if they cannot do anything with them and the animals go beyond the specified date? How can one assess the value that one has lost from such a finished animal? Will the Minister also consider that point?

We know about the restrictions on the movements of animals and the restrictions on walkers, but what will happen if large areas of the countryside are closed off? Chippenham is only a mile or two away from an affected abattoir, and the people there do not know what they should or should not be doing. For example, there has been talk about closing schools, but should the schools remain open? I have set an absolute rule that members of the Conservative party should do no campaigning of any sort in villages or the countryside. We shall continue to campaign in the town, where we should be reasonably all right. However, people do not know what they can and cannot do in the restricted areas.

That point applies even to the Avon Vale hunt that is based a few hundred yards away from the affected abattoir. It was told nothing at all, and it learned only from the news that the neighbouring abattoir had a case of foot and mouth. It was told nothing until it took the trouble to ring MAFF officials in the south-west. It was then treated courteously and was told precisely what it could and could not do. It has been given a special dispensation to bring in fallen stock. Everything is fine now but, initially, the hunt did not know what it could do.

If the tragedy expands across the nation, I hope that the MAFF official responsible—it may be the press officer—will find ways of getting the message across. It should go not only to livestock owners and to farmers—they probably already know what they can do—but to the much wider audience in an area such as mine. People are very worried about the disease, and they do not want to contribute to it spreading. Apart from the obvious point about not walking across farms, they are not clear about what they can do.

Hon. Members have referred to how other organisations, such as the police, should react to the crisis. I have been asked to raise an interesting case with the Minister about the way in which the Wiltshire police reacted to the actions of the farmer at Manor farm, Thorn Hill, Wootton Bassett near Swindon. He lives down a dead-end road that no one, apart from the residents of two or three cottages alongside it, uses. He was determined to stop the disease spreading on to his farm, so he decided to put straw and disinfectant on to the road. That may not be entirely effective in preventing the spread of the disease in all circumstances, but it makes a useful contribution.

Unfortunately, the police told the farmer that he was not allowed to put straw and disinfectant on to the road and that he would be responsible if anyone driving along the road were involved in an accident. They insisted that he should clear the road of the straw and disinfectant. I am told such cases have also occurred in other areas, because the police are unclear about the road traffic regulations and about the risks that straw and disinfectant on small roads, such as this one, and larger roads create.

MAFF officials should talk to other agencies, such as the police and the emergency services, to make it clear to them what farmers can do and what would happen if straw or disinfectant on the road resulted in a tragic accident. Who would be responsible? Is it possible that the farmer might not be held responsible? Will the Minister take the trouble of letting Mr. Tim Bennett of Manor farm know the answer to those questions? The issue has been raised in newspapers and in other areas.

The Minister knows the appalling consequences that livestock farmers face. The debate has been useful. It has given us many opportunities to ensure that he is fully aware of the catastrophe facing farmers, such as those in my constituency. I hope that he will listen carefully to those concerns. Of course there are urgent matters to which he must attend to contain the disease, and that is the priority. However, in 1967 the farming industry was reasonably healthy and could handle a similar crisis. I doubt that areas such as mine, where there are predominantly family farmers, can handle this crisis.

The issue of compensation and rebuilding the industry after the crisis has passed is overwhelmingly important. If the Minister does not pay that due attention and merely

[Mr. Gray]

does the least that he can get away with by providing agrimonetary compensation—which we needed to keep the farming industry alive before the crisis—the farming industry will die. He must find a way to compensate farmers and supporting industries for their losses so that we can look forward, as the hon. Member for South Derbyshire said, to having the same healthy farming industry in 10 or 20 years' time that we used to have. The Minister's heart is in the right place, but I appeal to him to rip it out and show farmers that he cares deeply about the crisis by doing a few things on the ground to preserve the industry.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Many hon. Members are anxious to speak. If contributions are as brief as possible, I hope that not too many people will be disappointed.

8.57 pm

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I shall try to be brief, not least because I was not able to hear the opening speeches in full because of my commitment to sit on a Select Committee. I apologise for that.

On behalf of hon. Members who represent rural constituencies, I thank my right hon. Friend and his Ministers for their hard work and dedication, which Opposition Members also acknowledged. In Staffordshire, we are keeping our fingers crossed that we will escape the disease. I congratulate the Minister on his work, in particular for the information that has been made readily available on the website and for the full transparency surrounding events.

The words "foot and mouth" do strike terror in communities—I remember the 1967 outbreak. My late mother, many years before, had lived through a series of animals being killed and burned. The disease has brought terror to generations of farming communities. That is why it is so important that we do everything that we can to deal with it.

I have misgivings about the scale of agricultural production. I hope that this terrible crisis will mean that we have a debate about how to ensure that we look after the needs of local agricultural production. I agree with the hon. Member for Ludlow (Mr. Gill). I, too, have campaigned in the House for ways to protect smaller abattoirs, not least because of their contribution to the production of organic food.

I shall concentrate not on animal health, but on public health. I note that the Department of Health and the Food Standards Agency have clearly stated that the crisis poses no direct risk to public health. I agree with them.

In any crisis, the first task is to get the emergency services to deal with the situation as it presents itself. Urgent action is being taken to deal with the current situation, but there will be secondary effects. I seek reassurances from my right hon. Friend the Minister that the Government will liaise with others, not least environmental health officers. I declare an interest as vice-president of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. Where it is essential that carcases are burned following slaughter, it is important that there is consultation locally about the most appropriate place to do that. What liaison has there been with the chartered institute, local environmental health officers, water companies and the Environment Agency?

It is crucial that where there are vast pyres of slaughtered animals, none of the remains or the ash gets into water courses and systems. We want to avoid contamination of any kind. Joint action is needed by the Ministry, including its vets, and local authorities, waste agencies, the Environment Agency and environmental health officers. I should be grateful for assurances that liaison is taking place between the right people so that on-going problems can be dealt with.

Those pyres should not be sited close to food producers because we do not want cross-contamination to occur. In view of the work done by the Pennington taskforce on E. coli 0157, what risk assessment has been carried out of the possibility of E. coli 0157 reaching water supplies? What is the risk of fires burning at an insufficiently high temperature, which could mean that there is a danger of remains containing pathogens contaminating the ground and, subsequently, water courses? That is a critical point in view of the high number of private water supplies throughout the country.

What is being done about the risk of salmonella? The speed and temperatures at which the carcases are burned may mean that residue could contaminate the water supply. There is also concern about the destruction of prions. Can my right hon. Friend tell the House how many of the cattle that are being slaughtered, and how many of those that have been burned, are in the high risk, over-30-month category? What precautions are the Government taking? Other public health issues include green-top milk, about which we need assurance. How do all those issues affect the Food Standards Agency?

The Government are rightly concentrating all their efforts on the dangers posed by the outbreak. However, I should be grateful for assurances on the secondary issues about which I am concerned and about the local consultation procedures that will be put in place.

9.5 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I speak for three reasons. First, I have been a beef farmer in my constituency from long before I represented it in this place. Secondly, I am an honorary associate of the British Veterinary Association. Thirdly, by strange co-incidence, I was a young graduate researcher who acted as secretary to the specialist committee of Conservative Members in the affected areas that reported on the outcome of the 1967–68 epidemic. I have some back knowledge of these matters.

I am sure that the slaughter and stamping-out policy is the right one. We all agree that we must leave the vets and the authorities to get on with the job and not get in their way. The debate has not frustrated them in that sense. In my view, anything else must be secondary to that.

In the interests of time, I shall make four brief points about the current situation, and then move on to the medium and longer term. In Northamptonshire, there has been one outbreak just outside my constituency. There is concern about disinfectant, which the Minister has substantially answered. There are some slight concerns about price gouging. Given the 1967 experience, the right

hon. Gentleman needs to be certain that all the disinfectants that he is prepared to license are equally effective against the foot and mouth virus. There were concerns about that in 1967.

Secondly, many colleagues have spoken about compensation. I add the consideration that if foot and mouth disease develops into a full-blown epidemic and there are large-scale slaughterings, there will be a tendency for the prices of replacement stock to drift upwards. The right hon. Gentleman will have to bear that in mind. Thirdly, there is the question of the resources that are available to the Minister. He responded satisfactorily by saying that he would be able to draw in other veterinary assistance, if necessary from the European Union or further afield.

There is also the importance of administration and the Ministry. We had some experience of these matters when the BSE crisis hit us in March 1996. Members, local authorities and other public bodies should be informed of the need to keep everybody up to speed. It is necessary also to plan for possible contingencies. I shall mention two. The first is whether the census will have to be put off; the second is what will happen to the county council elections, let alone one or two other possible elections at that time.

It is important that the Minister has sufficient firepower. It is important also that he should have an extra string to his bow—so he might get one or two bright officials who are not on the job to consider what has happened, to review the 1967 and subsequent experience and, as it were, to think outside the box so that the right hon. Gentleman can be kept up to speed.

Fourthly, I declare a direct interest in the licensed slaughter scheme. It happens that a motorway was built through my farm, and I have stock 400 yd down wind of it. Northamptonshire is criss-crossed by motorways and other major roads. I hope that the Minister will have regard to the importance of local disposal of stock—given the extreme virulence of foot and mouth disease, he should not even inadvertently pave the way for an incubating animal to take a trail of virus throughout the country, as happened to some extent before we knew that that could happen.

Those are my immediate concerns. In the medium term, there is a worry that the Minister and his policy of slaughter and stamping out will come under pressure. We hope that the disease will be contained by the rapid action that the right hon. Gentleman has taken, and we are pleased that he has done that. There is a striking difference from 1967. In contrast to everything that has been said about the intensification of the industry, there has been an intensification of media interest. When we got to the point where hundreds of thousands of animals were slaughtered, there was huge concern and people began to ask whether we were doing the right thing, and whether we would have to move to a vaccination policy, on a selective or a general basis.

We all very much hope that that will not happen. Perhaps, like Queen Victoria, the right hon. Gentleman must not counsel the possibility of defeat, but if he is a wise Minister, he will have that in mind as a long-term contingency, and he would be prepared to consider it if it ever became necessary. As we deal with the situation, it is extremely important that both the short-term tactical considerations, some of which I have advanced, and the rolling concern that I am sure will develop are properly handled.

From my experience at that time, I believe that the then shadow Minister, the late Joe Godber, of whom I was very fond and for whom I worked for a number of years, would have been proud of the speech made by the shadow Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). We emphasise the same sort of approach, but it depends on a degree of reciprocity, which the Minister has shown himself ready to undertake. He must be prepared to receive confidences and representations from all round the House and, if necessary, to share them.

When the pressures that we were experiencing became extreme, Joe Godber asked the then Minister, the late Fred Peart, who was widely respected, whether he could have a briefing from the chief vet. I happened to be the only other person in the room when that briefing was given. It was extremely useful and gave us a detailed and authoritative professional sitrep on where we were and how the epidemic could be contained and eventually stamped out, as I am confident it will be in the present case.

There is one final longer-term consideration for the Minister. I have dismissed from my remarks some of the speculation that properly exists about the origin of the outbreak. No doubt there will be deficiencies in the handling; there always are. There are already queries about information. The Minister should not be ashamed of that, and we should not press him too hard on it.

There will also be longer-term considerations about the structure of the agriculture industry, its intensification, and whether, for example—I mention this only as a possibility—it will be necessary to think in terms of a rest period between a series of moves. That would be very difficult for the commercial trade in agriculture, but it may come to that.

Those are all long-term considerations. In 1968, after the epidemic was contained within a period of six months and at a cost of almost 500,000 head of livestock, it was decided that there should be an authoritative report under a distinguished independent chairman into the entire matter and the lessons that were to be learned.

I suggest to the Minister that there will be serious long-term issues to consider. They need not be party politically contentious, but they will undoubtedly be sensitive areas. The best course may be for him to put them on one side for now. Perhaps we would back him on that, against the promise that when the outbreak is over, he will commission an independent inquiry to look at all the factors. That will help in the way that Lord Phillips did in relation to BSE.

Let us concentrate on the job today. Let us be aware that there are wider implications, which many hon. Members in all parts of the House have rehearsed. Let us hope, above all, that by concentrating on the immediate issue, and by having the right kind of dialogue on how to resolve it and any problems that arise, we can stamp the thing out in good time. Then, it will be the time for a longer look at what needs to be learned.

9.14 pm

Mr. Desmond Browne (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): I am grateful for the opportunity to make a short contribution to this important debate. I do not intend to

[Mr. Desmond Browne]

repeat points that have already been made, but I may inevitably do so, as unfortunately I have not been present for the whole of the debate. I apologise to the House for that. For part of the evening, I was necessarily engaged elsewhere.

I was present for the opening speeches. In this debate, I have no difficulty in supporting the Opposition motion. I am grateful to them for the opportunity to say that.

I join hon. Members in paying tribute to my right hon. Friend the Minister. His contribution to today's debate will be remembered with credit by many of us for a long time. For me—I still consider myself to be a new Member although I have been here for four years—it was a singular honour to hear his contribution.

I have not been present throughout the debate, and, in the interests of brevity, I hope that hon. Members will understand if I abandon references to their contributions; but I cannot allow the contribution from the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) to pass without comment. It is appropriate that I should speak on the subject shortly after him for two reasons.

It is no surprise to me that the hon. Gentleman introduced his remarks with a reference to foxhunting. I have heard his views on that subject before, and we have debated them in the Scottish media. I have also heard his views on whether I should have a view in this place on foxhunting, but we will have to agree to disagree on that. However, we can agree on the importance of agriculture to my constituency, where the hon. Gentleman has his roots. Last year I had the pleasure of hosting him and his mother at the farm where his ancestor made the first Dunlop cheese in the village of Dunlop. It was a beautiful afternoon, as I remember it.

The area within a 35-mile radius of the main town in my constituency, Kilmarnock, supplies between 25 and 30 per cent. of Scotland's milk. The high rainfall which that area experiences is conducive to grass growing, not grain crops. Ayrshire is consequently one of the most intensive livestock areas in Europe. When one adds to that the fact that 15 per cent. of Scotland's over-30-months scheme cattle come to Kilmarnock to be slaughtered, I am sure that the House will appreciate why a collective sigh of relief emanated from Ayrshire farmers when the news came through that the farm in Aberdeen had proved negative. No one in Scotland wants to see the funeral pyres associated with the eradication of this terrible disease. Currently, Scotland is disease free, and, of course, we want to keep it that way.

Although relieved, Scottish farmers are not complacent about that. This evening, there are threats in a parish which abuts my constituency, and I understand that there are checks in Dumfriesshire, the county south of Ayrshire. That is why farmers in Scotland, and particularly in Ayrshire, fully support the Government in their aim to eradicate this dreadful disease. They support all the restrictions that have been placed on the movement of livestock and have issued a collective call to the public in full support of the Government's advice to keep out of the countryside until foot and mouth can be contained and eradicated. During the past decade, the collapse in the milk price has put enormous pressures on their industry. A serious outbreak could deal it a blow from which it could never recover.

I spoke today to Willie Campbell of Low Holehouse farm in Galston. Despite his address being in my constituency, his farm is not in my constituency. He is the chairman of the Ayrshire NFU, a respected commentator on the industry and currently the Scottish representative on the Milk Development Council. Coincidentally, that council was due to meet in London tomorrow, but, responsibly, he is preparing his contribution with a view to making it by telephone.

Willie Campbell made the same point to me as that made by the hon. Member for North Wiltshire. This crisis is not only a business tragedy, but a deeply personal tragedy for farmers in Ayrshire. There is no agribusiness there, but there are hundreds of family farms. He conveyed to me a depressing picture of what he and his colleagues and their families are facing. The level of anxiety among his fellow farmers is immense. He described to me the terror that he saw etched on the faces of other farmers whom he met recently. He was reassured by the news that the Government intend to draw down their full entitlement to agrimonetary compensation. He said that while that money will not solve the financial pressures that the dairy industry faces, it is welcome news and will make a contribution to easing the pressure.

Willie Campbell also welcomed the proposed licensed movement scheme. In Ayrshire, there are significant numbers of upland sheep that need to be brought home to the lowland fields for lambing. He hopes that the animal welfare considerations implicit in such circumstances will mean that that scheme will allow their movement. It is imperative that it does as some of his ewes are due to lamb tomorrow.

The dairy industry cannot survive unless there is movement of milk. That must be done in a manner that ensures that milk tankers cannot carry the infection. For that they depend on disinfectant. Farmers in Ayrshire today telephoned four suppliers but could manage to secure only 5 litres of disinfectant. They are reassured to some extent by my right hon. Friend's announcement that he intends to place an order today increasing by 35 the types of disinfectant that can be used, but it is the availability of that disinfectant that concerns them. However, it is not only disinfectant that is in short supply in Ayrshire, but the necessary spraying equipment. When it is available, it comes at a cost that some farmers cannot meet.

The farmers of Scotland go to bed tonight praying and hoping that Scotland, which accounts for 20 per cent. of the United Kingdom's agricultural production, will remain disease free and will be allowed to come back on stream in the not-too-distant future. However, they send a strong message to the House that if it cannot do that, they will join in partnership with farmers, politicians and the Government in trying to eradicate the disease.

Finally, I am reassured that MAFF and the Scottish Executive are working well in partnership. The test of the devolution settlement is how it performs in a crisis, and in this one it is performing well.

9.20 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I should like to begin by thanking the Minister for his response to my intervention. He promised to keep the House closely informed not only by being in attendance with his colleague the Minister of State, but also by perhaps

introducing a bulletin or something similar. Those remarks are deeply appreciated. He has done a great deal today to unite the House. The tone of the debate was brilliantly set by my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) and the Minister responded in an exemplary manner. We are all grateful to him and we want to help him.

I should like to make one point, as that is all that I have time to do. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) made an extremely perceptive and powerful speech that was based on much experience. He told the Minister that he should not worry too much about the phrase "creating a precedent", as we have an unprecedented situation. I remember well the outbreak of foot and mouth disease in 1967, about which my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) spoke so eloquently a few moments ago. That was contained within parts of England and Wales, but the current outbreak is going all over the place. Like the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), I pray that it will not go north of the border, but it is in Wales already and many parts of England. Of course, the time is coming when agriculture will be on its knees in a way that did not happen in 1967.

Agriculture is not only the basic industry of this country and the most important of all our indigenous industries, but is responsible for the countryside that we all love and cherish. The consequential effects of a devastating and desolating epidemic would be felt not only by those who practise agriculture, but by the tourism industry, those who are anxious to bring people to this country and all who have helped to make its wealth in that manner. Thus, although the provision of compensation to enable farming to survive may have elements of the unprecedented, it should be considered further. I know that the Minister is keen to do all that he can to help, and when he is considering compensation, he should, of course, think primarily of those who are directly affected. However, will he consider all the other farmers who are affected, and also the other industries? Whatever he can do will not only help our great industry of farming to survive, but aid the survival of the countryside as we know and love it.

It is crucial for every hon. Member to remember that, as we all have a responsibility. Although very few people work on the land, there is not a single family that does not depend upon those who work on the land and what is produced from it. Every home in this country is affected directly or indirectly by the state of agriculture, and every family will be affected in some way by the extent of the epidemic. It is absolutely right that the Minister should use every weapon in his armoury to try to contain and then defeat the disease. He should have unqualified support from all hon. Members and all parts of the country in what he seeks to do.

We should not be diverted by other matters. If it is necessary to postpone a census or a county council election, it must be postponed.

As for the general election, the Government have a massive majority, an unfinished programme in other spheres and 15 months of their term left. In my view, it would be far better to answer to the electorate when the full five-year term has been completed. It is crucial that nothing should divert our attention from fighting this appalling disease or from ensuring that British agriculture emerges from it with the optimism that the hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) wants it to have.

9.25 pm

Mr. Richard Livsey (Brecon and Radnorshire): I shall be brief. I say amen to what the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) said, or 95 per cent. of it anyway, which was very sound indeed. I offer my sympathy to my constituents, Robin Lloyd and family and David Thomas and family, who have had their outbreaks confirmed today. The situations of several other farmers in my constituency are under close examination.

I am pleased to report that Powys county council has made the whole of Powys a prohibition area. The county holds a quarter of a million acres of common land and about 1 million sheep, and the situation is serious because outbreaks have occurred on the boundary of mountain land. I hate to think what would happen if the disease spread to that.

I want to make a few brief points. In 1967, when I was working in Northumberland, I was involved on the periphery of the outbreak and what I saw was appalling. I have been a farmer, managing 1,500 acres, and I was brought up on a farm. I commend the remarks of the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who gave the Minister some sound advice. The methods of disposal being used now are the same as those used in 1967. Huge heat has to be generated to get rid of the disease, but I wonder why the incineration process involves a delay. It could start a lot earlier and there could be graduated burning.

Access is a problem. On Sunday, 100 people from Ross-on-Wye appeared in my constituency even though the Ministry of Defence has banned people from entering its 32,000 acre estate. My hon. Friend the Member for Hereford (Mr. Keetch) realises the importance of that matter. On protection, there is no doubt that lorries need to be sprayed when they enter certain areas and that disinfection pads need to be put in place. The situation at Burnside farm buildings—I know where it is and that is what I prefer to call it—is very serious. If the disease was present for two weeks, an education and training problem clearly needs to be resolved as quickly as possible.

Imports from third countries are a problem and I alert the Minister to the fact that a person cannot enter New Zealand with even a sandwich in his pocket—it would be incinerated. We must be that particular in respect of the situation in Britain and food brought in at airports and ferry ports should be burned on sight and destroyed. Also, I urge the Minister to consider banning pig swill. Cutbacks have affected Ministry vets and veterinary investigation centres have been closed. That loss must be examined as well.

We must consider consequential loss compensation not only for farmers, but for organisations such as Farmers Ferry, which operates out of my constituency and has exported 1 million lambs in the past 12 months. It will find it hard to continue. We must consider that fact, because we need the infrastructure to continue after the crisis is over. We must be eternally vigilant and must show no complacency in attacking the disease, which, as we know, is highly infectious. I congratulate the Minister and his Department on what they have done so far.

Keeping the food chain going is vital for the future of the industry and the movement of livestock direct to abattoirs is one of the most important points that has been referred to this evening. I agree with the right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) about the

[Mr. Richard Livsey]

need for support for the industry: it is vital at this time. I believe that the nation, and those who are present here now, want the contingency fund to be used. I think that the current outbreak could prove more serious than that of 1967, and that it needs to be tackled head on in terms of protection and, indeed, compensation.

The industry needs a future, and if we are not careful it will not have one. However, following the Minister's statements this evening I am confident that he will ensure somehow that it survives and, eventually, prospers.

9.30 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): We have heard from many Members on both sides of the House with direct constituency involvement in this tragic crisis. Sadly, the number of Members with such involvement has increased day by day—an increase that we all hope will cease.

We have heard in particular from my hon. Friends the Members for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles), both of whom are directly involved, and both of whom made excellent points. I especially appreciated the courtesy of my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who cut his speech off in its prime to allow time for the statement about the rail crash.

My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) demonstrated his experience as a farmer, a Minister and a political adviser, recalled the last major outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and—as others have said—presented a number of sensible proposals.

Last week, while using the opportunity of a parliamentary recess to take a few days off, I received a phone call saying that there had been an outbreak of foot and mouth. Like other Members, I am sure, I asked myself how much more British farming would have to take at this dreadful time. That thought was immediately followed by a comment to my wife: "Poor old Nick must wonder what he did in a previous life to deserve this." He may tell us—or perhaps the Minister of State will tell us.

I have to say that my sympathy evaporated rapidly on Monday, when I heard the Minister's outburst over this debate. He has regained his composure, however, and, as many Members have said this evening, he has redeemed himself totally by his manner—by the way in which he has addressed the issues, and by the courtesies he has shown both on the Floor of the House and privately to me.

We have heard many speeches and interventions, which shows that this subject is of real interest to many Members. I hope the Minister now accepts that it was right to hold the debate—a debate that has taken place against the background of an industry in crisis. The industry is losing 400 jobs a week, and experiencing year-on-year financial losses. Net farm incomes are lower than living expenses, and there are no reserves on which to rely. Upland livestock incomes are about £2,500 a year, while lowland livestock incomes are about £1,500.

I too remember the 1967 outbreak. It happened just after I started work in farming. It lasted about five months, and I pray, as others must do, that this outbreak is dealt with more quickly and does not last as long. It has horrendous implications for animals as well as human beings. For obvious reasons we have talked about farm animals today, but we should not overlook the threat posed to animals in zoos, including many rare species of antelope and other cloven-hooved animals. The unique wild cattle of Chillingham are threatened, as is wildlife, including our deer population. But of course it is even worse for farmers, many of whom are seeing their life's work being wiped out. My hon. Friend the Member for Hexham also made some tremendously potent remarks about the human factor in the context of, for instance, schools.

Many people who do not understand agriculture may find it perverse that farmers who breed and rear stock simply so that it can be killed and eaten should, at the same time, care passionately for that stock and its welfare. As my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham pointed out, however, many of those farmers have spent decades breeding pedigree stock to a high level—stock that now goes to the flames in the same way as the humblest mongrel bullock.

The tragedy was brought home to me the other night when I saw one of my oldest friends being interviewed on television as his stock were being slaughtered in the background behind him. I understood and empathised with him and with many other farmers as that happened.

I join in the tributes that have been paid to Ministry officials, to the vets and to all the others not directly employed who have been and are closely involved in the crisis. I strongly welcome the Minister's robust rejection of the idea of vaccination, a line for which he will have our support.

Farmers are affected in two different ways. There are those whose herds are compulsorily slaughtered and who receive full compensation equivalent to the value of the stock. However—the Minister has not mentioned it, but I presume that this is true—they will not be allowed to restock for some six months, as was the case in 1967. Therefore, they will have no income on which to live. They will have to live off the capital that comes from that compensation—not a situation that we would wish to encourage.

Then there is the group of farmers—a much larger group, I am thankful to say—who are not slaughtered out, but who are hit by the movement restrictions and the other problems that will increase as the crisis lasts. I welcome the Minister's comments about a licensing scheme. Obviously, we all look forward to hearing the details, such as how it might help smaller producers, those who produce for farmers' markets, those who have cattle coming up to 30 months old, and those who have lambs rising to the end of their lambhood with the potential eruption of their second teeth, the carcases of which need to be split. The scheme will be welcomed by many abattoir workers, including those in my constituency who have contacted me, anxious about the future of their jobs.

I understand that there are derogations for injured animals and casualties, but I am told that those are somewhat complicated. I ask the Minister to find out whether they can be simplified. I do not know whether he is in a position to say what the position is regarding TB reactors. Rightly, we have heard from the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) about the TB situation. Obviously, reactors should not be held on farms longer than is necessary.

There are other movement issues. The Minister showed that he recognised those. There is the issue of moving sheep into buildings or near to land for lambing. There are sheep on agistment, or tack as it is sometimes called—a feature that often expires today, 28 February, when they would be expected to go back to their upland farms. That is an issue not only for the sheep farmer, but for the dairy farmer, on whose grass they are currently grazing. The Minister obviously understands that.

If we can regain some of the supply trade through the licensing arrangement that the Minister proposes, the issue of prices will still remain. I appreciate that getting the trade going is the first priority. I welcome his comments with regard to the proposals of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on private storage for sows. I hope that he will also consider introducing such a scheme for sheepmeat because that product, too, relied on an export market, which for the moment is denied us. That must hit trade particularly.

We welcome the agrimonetary compensation. I congratulate the Minister on the fact that he is already having discussions with the clearing banks, but I emphasise the need for further help in the form of compensation. The need for help will increase the longer the outbreak lasts. This is a national emergency, and Conservative Members believe that that justifies a call on the contingency fund.

Mr. Nicholls: I agree with what my hon. Friend has said about the Minister and the way in which he has conducted himself in this debate, which has been exemplary, but does not the country's ability to face up to the consequences of what has happened depend largely on the success of the economy? For all sorts of reasons, the economy is doing extremely well. Although it would be unreasonable to ask the Minister to give an open-ended commitment to compensate everyone for everything, the situation is vastly different from that in 1967. We hope that he will be able to say that he will at least consider a slightly wider band of compensation than he perhaps has so far been able to consider.

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend makes an important point in support of my case. It is not entirely true that there is no precedent for further compensation. My attention has been drawn to remarks made in 1996 by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) in which he mentioned moving towards compensation for consequential loss. Additionally, the over-30-months scheme itself is a form of compensation for loss.

Mr. Nick Brown *indicated assent.*

Mr. Paice: I am grateful that the Minister acknowledges that. Consequential compensation could save money if it shortens the crisis. If agisted sheep, which I mentioned earlier, cannot return to their original farms, it might be cheaper, however horrendous that may be, to kill them out and provide compensation than it would be to succumb to the temptation to weaken the restriction orders.

I should like to mention some of the organisations that deal with the impact on farmers—including the rural stress information network, the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and the Samaritans, which have reported a tenfold increase in calls in the past few days. Last year, the Government provided more money for the rural stress information network. Although it was a tiny sum for the Government, it was not a small sum for the organisation. I hope that the Minister will consider whether it needs more help.

The Opposition strongly support both the legal and the voluntary measures to restrict movement. I hope that the Minister will confirm that all Government agencies—not only the obvious ones such as the Health and Safety Executive and farm assurance, but even the Inland Revenue, Customs and Excise and the countless others that are involved in these matters—have been told to cease farm visits.

I hope that the Minister will also do as he suggested in reply to an earlier intervention from me and examine whether the pig development scheme could be extended to cover the position of pig farmers which, as he rightly acknowledged, is somewhat different from that of sheep and cattle farmers.

Earlier, I also mentioned wild deer. Since 1967, the United Kingdom's wild deer population has exploded. Although that is very welcome for many reasons, will the Minister comment on what should be done about wild deer in areas where there are outbreaks? It would be disastrous if the disease were to infect the wild deer population. I do not want one, but is a localised culling of deer necessary to stamp out the disease?

Today is not the time for recrimination, or even for detailed examination of the background to or the causes of the crisis. As the Minister said, we must now concentrate on controlling and eradicating the disease and on helping farmers to get through the crisis. However, the day will come when we have to examine the cause, how it has been handled, and whether it was caused by illegally imported pigmeat.

On that issue, it is now five months since Ministry veterinarians said that the swine fever outbreak was caused by illegally imported pigmeat. To my knowledge, despite several requests from the Opposition, the Government have not yet made a further statement about the origins of that outbreak. I therefore hope that the Government will be considering additional import controls—about which, as I am sure the Minister will acknowledge, we have repeatedly expressed our concerns. Such measures are not protectionist controls, as he has sometimes chided us, but controls for protection. *[Interruption.]*

Other import and export issues have to be examined. They may seem far-fetched now, but—*[Interruption.]* The Parliamentary Secretary is rabbiting away on the Treasury Bench. The whole of this debate has been conducted in polite appreciation of one another's points of view. I am sorry that he seems to want to alter that at this late stage.

We have to examine, for example, whether the virus is coming from countries where foot and mouth is endemic, but from which we do not import meat. Could it be carried on the surface of fruit, for example? That may seem far-fetched, but it is an issue related to the globalisation of trade that has to be examined.

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Livsey) talked about what might be called domestic imports, when people bring in items such as sandwiches and other food in their luggage. Another issue is whether

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the virus can be carried in semen or embryos, both of which are important export markets for the United Kingdom that have now been closed.

As other hon. Members have said, we shall also have to examine the issue of abattoir closures. My assessment of the way in which the crisis has been unfolding is that, although there are many reasons to lament the closure of abattoirs, and although the initial outbreak in Essex was at an abattoir, most of the cases that we have heard about seem to be related more to livestock markets than to abattoirs. It appears that the very innocent purchase by Mr. Cleave of stock in Northumberland has been the primary cause of the spread of the disease. I feel immensely sorry for him, given the responsibility with which he—unwittingly and innocently—finds himself burdened.

Circulation of livestock is not a new phenomenon. I can remember as a child seeing trainloads of Irish cattle coming into this country to be fattened. That circulation has been going on for decades, and it is not the new development that other hon. Members have suggested.

Foot and mouth is a horrendous disease. It has implications for animals, wildlife, farmers and hauliers, and for the countryside. Some farmers may decide not to restock, and that will have implications for the landscape. Nothing must be left undone in dealing with the outbreak, and I hope that the Minister understands that clearly.

It is very rare to wind up an Opposition day debate without partisan rancour, but I am happy to do so today on an issue that has brought all sides of the House together. I wish the Minister and his staff the best of luck in the challenge that lies before them. Most of all, however, my thoughts are with the farmers and their families, who despair for their future.

9.46 pm

The Minister of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Ms Joyce Quin): Before I respond to the debate, may I briefly associate myself with the sorrow expressed by the whole House at the rail crash earlier today? Many hon. Members who have spoken in this debate are, like me, regular users of the east coast main line. Many will have constituents among the passengers or crew, or the relatives of those people. The House has certainly been united in sorrow at that incident.

The House has also been united in this debate on the crisis caused by the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, and on its effects on farmers, agriculture and the countryside. The length of the debate allowed many issues to be addressed, and I welcome that. It allowed my right hon. Friend the Minister, who is always generous in giving way, to deal with an enormous number of interventions and direct questions from hon. Members of all parties. However, many other issues have been raised in the course of the debate. That reinforces the point made by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) and others about the importance of the Government keeping the House informed at every stage about developments with the disease and its effects.

The participant in the debate for whom I have most sympathy is the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). He responded in a very public-spirited way to the House's desire to listen to the statement by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. However, he thereby sacrificed a large amount of time to which I feel that he would have been entitled, given the importance of events that took place in his constituency.

The hon. Gentleman has been very active in pursuit of the interests of his farming constituents and of those employed at the Cheale abattoir. He and my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) came to see me at an earlier stage to discuss their concerns about the abattoir's ability to attract business under the over-30-months scheme. I therefore know that the hon. Gentleman's interest is of long standing, and that it does not arise solely out of the tragic circumstances of the past week.

The hon. Gentleman addressed some questions to me, one of which was when the abattoir in his constituency might reopen. He will understand that the Ministry must be totally certain that the virus has been totally eradicated first. There are national and European Union rules about the time that must elapse before the various checks and tests can be carried out. I shall let the hon. Gentleman know if we have further information on that point.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned checks on wild deer, an issue referred to also by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice). The state veterinary service is carrying out a rapid risk assessment and we hope to share the results of that as soon as possible.

My right hon. Friend the Minister gave the House an update of the situation and told us about the number of confirmed cases, which stands at 26. As is usual, and as has happened in recent days, a number of cases are still under investigation, of which two or three at least seem highly suspicious.

Miss Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. It is essential to stop the spread of this awful disease. In my constituency there are a number of caravan parks surrounding farms. I am very concerned that this weekend the caravan parks will be open to tourists, many of whom will come from east Lancashire and the Chorley area and could carry the disease. What measures can local authorities take to stop these people coming to caravan parks? What can they do to ensure that at least the lanes are properly disinfected with straw put across them? They say that they have no powers to put straw and disinfectant across the lanes.

Ms Quin: The local authority can contact its local animal health office and work in conjunction with MAFF, and it should do so if it is concerned, because there are powers that can be taken. I am familiar with the site that my hon. Friend mentions—in fact, I once visited it. The Caravan Club has issued recommendations to all its members not to travel at this time of year and to respect a number of restrictions, as well as fully respecting the measures that the Government have put in place.

There are now at least 26 confirmed cases as well as a number of cases under investigation. That figure includes what appears to be the first case in Northern Ireland, in sheep which were sourced from Carlisle market. There is very little consolation, if any, in this situation, but it is worth saying that so far there seems to have been no significant lateral wind-borne spread of disease. As my right hon. Friend said earlier, it has been possible to make

the link between the Devon case, which, in turn, links back to Northumberland, or between Northumberland and the Cheale abattoir. That has been the pattern so far.

As right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House have pointed out, there is no doubt that the considerable movement of animals throughout the country means that the situation is very serious. The number of right hon. and hon. Members from virtually all regions of the country who have spoken about their experience of the plight of their farming constituents as a result of the outbreak has borne dramatic testimony to that.

I think that all areas were mentioned. The south-west is a very important agricultural area. It was pointed out that East Anglia has already had tremendous difficulties, particularly with the recent outbreak of classical swine fever. Wales was mentioned, as was the north-east where, like the hon. Member for Hexham (Mr. Atkinson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, North (Mr. Henderson) I, too, saw the gruesome and distressing sight last weekend of animals piled up near the main road, very visible to everyone passing. I was talking to farmers in that area when the case in Devon was confirmed. People in Northumberland told me of the links between the markets in Northumberland and the particular farm, or farms, in Devon which were then affected.

I very much welcome the warm tribute paid by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) to the chief vet, Jim Scudamore, and his excellent staff. The hon. Gentleman's comments were echoed by a large number of Members, but he chose especially apt words to describe the work of the chief vet and his staff. I also welcome the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) and others about the helpfulness of Ministry staff, not only at head office but throughout the regions. Indeed, one Northumberland NFU member asked me to mention how sensitively the Ministry staff at Carlisle dealt with the distress and concern that was obviously experienced by so many farmers in that region.

I strongly welcome the support expressed on both sides of the House for the measures taken by the Government. We welcome the terms of the Opposition motion. That is an unusual experience, as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire pointed out. I cannot remember a similar occurrence, but we are dealing with exceptional and unprecedented circumstances—a point that was strongly made.

Although obviously we look back to the 1967 outbreak, which many hon. Members recalled when they spoke, we should not make false comparisons. There are many differences, especially in relation to the difficulties—indeed the crisis—that the agriculture sector has undergone. For that reason, we are being extremely sensitive not only in ensuring that the measures that we have already taken to help farmers are effective, but in considering what else we can do.

Mr. Ainger: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Ms Quin: If my hon. Friend will forgive me, I shall not give way. I have only three minutes for the rest of my remarks. He expressed concern about the irresponsible movement of stock by farmers—although most farmers have been entirely responsible, as hon. Members have pointed out. However, we are certainly prepared to take up with the Home Office and the police any failure to implement the rules that have been clearly put in place. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend.

There was much mention of consequential losses and so on. Those are difficult matters. We are open to consideration of ways in which we can help, although I appreciate the point made by hon. Members on both sides of the House that the implications could be extremely far reaching; they could even stretch to the tourist industry, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew). The issue is not easy, but we shall definitely look into it.

The debate has been impressive, with Members showing a powerful empathy with the plight of farming constituents, their families and communities. We shall keep the House fully informed about the cases and outbreaks of foot and mouth disease, the measures for tackling it and the ways in which we can help the agriculture and food industries to recover. However, as everyone has agreed, combating and eradicating the disease has to be and will remain our foremost aim and priority.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House expresses concern about the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease, sympathy for farmers facing the loss of their livelihoods and for others working in the livestock sector, and appreciation of the work of those fighting to contain the spread of the disease; endorses the action of the Government to restrict the movement of livestock; welcomes its efforts to identify the source of the outbreak; urges, where necessary, a temporary suspension of rights of way across farmland; welcomes the Government's announcement that it will draw down the full amount of agri-monetary compensation available for livestock farmers; and calls on the Government to consider what other help can be given to the industry.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Straw relating to the Electoral Commission shall be treated as if they related to instruments subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) in respect of which notice has been given that the instruments be approved.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): This is an important motion, covering extremely important material. It refers at some length and in some detail, and with an element of retrospection, to the detailed salary provisions for the Electoral Commission. Those salaries are very substantial indeed and the commission's work is very important, so the matter will require lengthy and detailed consideration by the House, especially as it has a bearing on political parties, election matters and, of course, referendums. So we should start by considering the motion in considerable detail—

It being Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

LIAISON COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.

( ) The committee shall have power to report from time to time the minutes of evidence taken before the sub-committee.

( ) The quorum of the sub-committee shall be three.'.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT COMMITTEES)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 50, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.

Line 52, at the end insert the words:—

'(4A) notwithstanding paragraphs (2) and (4) above, where more than two committees or sub-committees appointed under this order meet concurrently in accordance with paragraph (4)(e) above, the quorum of each such committee or sub-committee shall be two.'—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

Drink Driving

10 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I rise to present a petition on behalf of my constituent, Mrs. Vivien Sumner of Pulborough. It relates to the tragic death of one person and the severe injury of another arising from a drunken driving incident. The drunken driver was sentenced to seven years in jail, with a five-year suspension to run concurrently. It seems nonsense to have concurrency for the suspension of licences and prison sentences because it results in a less effective ban on driving.

The petition states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urge the Secretary of State for the Home Department to bring forward measures which will ensure that any driving ban imposed on persons convicted of drink driving does not begin until their full sentence at conviction is spent irrespective of any shortened sentence.

To lie upon the Table.

NHS (East Kent)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Betts.]*

10.1 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am very grateful for this opportunity to draw attention to the state of the national health service in east Kent. I asked for this debate for a very simple reason. I have had the great privilege to be the Member of Parliament for Folkestone and Hythe for nearly 18 years. In all that time, I have never received anything like as many complaints from my constituents about the NHS as I have in the past few months. Most of the complaints I have received relate to the William Harvey hospital, but before I come to the hospital, I want to make two other points.

The first relates to the reorganisation of primary care. I was not enthusiastic about the replacement of general practitioner fundholding by primary care groups, but the Shepway primary care group, covering an area almost exactly coterminous with Shepway district council and my constituency, has done well. It has built strong local links and developed a strong local identity. Now, barely two years from its formation, it is to be reorganised, and a possible form of reorganisation would involve a merger with Ashford primary care group. I hope that that merger will not take place. Local links are of great importance in the delivery of primary care. They should be maintained and strengthened, rather than diluted. They would be diluted if this merger were to go ahead.

My second point relates to one particular and specific respect in which health care in east Kent has deteriorated during the past four years. Heart disease is not trivial. Those who are suffering from it should be examined and treated as soon as possible. I am sure that everyone would agree with that. It is therefore worth examining how those who are suffering from heart disease are treated by the NHS now as compared with March 1997, immediately before the general election.

In March 1993, 63 people in east Kent were waiting more than 13 weeks for admission to hospital for cardiovascular surgery. By October 2000, the number had doubled to 124. The number of those waiting more than 13 weeks to see a cardiologist had increased from 40, in March 1997, to 220 at the end of last year. Those figures, alas, speak for themselves and the tale they tell is very bad news for my constituents.

I want to devote most of the time available to me to the state of hospitals in east Kent and, in particular, to William Harvey hospital, which is situated at Willesborough in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green), but which serves most of my constituents.

The remarks that I am about to make are not directed at the staff of the hospital. For the most part, they are striving heroically in the most difficult of circumstances to give their patients the care that they deserve. However, in far too many cases, the patients are not receiving that care.

I have, of necessity, had to make a selection from the many complaints that I have received. Time does not permit me to refer to anything like all of them. I shall begin with the case of Mr. Duff, whose wife came to see me at one of my regular advice centres. This is what I was told by Mrs. Duff, as set out in a letter that I wrote to the chief executive of East Kent Hospitals NHS trust on 27 November. I wrote:

"Mrs. Duff's husband has a bone marrow problem which requires frequent blood transfusions. In the past these have taken place with no difficulty at all and Mrs. Duff is pleased with the way in which her husband has previously been treated at the William Harvey Hospital. More recently, however, Mr. Duff has had to put up with quite unacceptable conditions. On August 25 he had to wait in the Accident and Emergency Department for 27 hours. On October 2 he had to wait for 30 hours. Last week when Mrs. Duff phoned the hospital on Wednesday, she was told that no bed would be available for her husband until Monday or Tuesday of this week.

I am sure that you would agree that this is a completely unacceptable state of affairs."

The chief executive of the trust replied on 28 December. He said that

"the dates you have given for Mr. Duff's admission do not accord with our own records, nevertheless he would have experienced long waits in the period that you describe as did a number of other patients. As you know we are doing all that we can to improve the situation because it is unacceptable."

My constituents, Mr. and Mrs. Horton, wrote to me on 20 November. This is what they said:

"We have a 43 year old son who is blind, mentally handicapped, spastic and confined to a wheelchair. He has to have everything done for him. At the end of last week he was taken ill. The local doctor said he should go to hospital. He was taken to the William Harvey at Ashford."

With considerable restraint, my constituent continues:

"I am going to moan . . . With all of his ailments he had to wait 4 hours in Accident and Emergency at the William Harvey before he was seen by a doctor. He was then sent to a ward where he was looked after O.K. put on a drip with antibiotics plus his tablets.

I'm not moaning at the treatment he received, it is the 4 hour wait. The waiting time to be seen at any hospital is disgusting."

She adds:

"So much for T. Blair and Co."

On 24 January, my constituent was sent an apology by the chief executive.

On 26 November, my constituent, Mrs. Anita Law, wrote to me, and this is part of what she said in her letter:

"My husband has recently died at the William Harvey Hospital from in particular, abominable sepsis and infection from MRSA.

He went into the hospital for the reversal of a colostomy following an operation for bowel cancer the previous year. He was clear of the cancer and was informed that the operation would involve a week's stay in hospital. At no time was he counselled as to the risks of any post-operative infection or given any facts that would have given him any reason to refuse the operation at that time.

He entered hospital on July 13th and eventually died on the 20th September 2000.

I am writing to you following the recent press and TV coverage of the problem in our Hospitals. As a trainer and assessor within the Hospitality Industry, during the daily visits I made to the William Harvey I was dismayed at its dirty conditions and standards and practices of cleaning and nursing staff. Standards which would not be acceptable to the Catering and Hotel Industry but are deemed perfectly OK for our sick, both young and old. . . My daughter, whose husband is in the Army, was recently in hospital in Germany following a miscarriage after the death of her father. I visited her there and was extremely impressed at the hospital's standards of cleanliness. It was built just after the end of World War II, probably by us! If our continental neighbours can do it, why not the UK?"

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): As my right hon. and learned Friend says, the William Harvey hospital is in my constituency, and I echo his remarks about the

[Mr. Damian Green]

conscientiousness of its staff. However, my experience reflects his. When I last visited the hospital, people had been waiting on trolleys in the accident and emergency department for 24 hours. I have received a constant stream of letters and telephone calls from people complaining not about the standard of care, but about the standard of cleanliness and, in particular, of food, which is so important for convalescence. In the years that I have been associated with Ashford, I have never known the health service in a more parlous state.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for confirming what I am saying.

I shall quote from one more letter. As I have not been able to contact my constituent to obtain her permission to do that, I shall not mention her name. She made an official complaint on 8 August about what she rightly described as the appalling treatment that she received after the delivery of her baby at the William Harvey hospital on 26 June. He was born at two minutes to 5 in the morning. My constituent and her husband expressed concerns about him a number of times during the day. It was not until 10.30 pm that an auxiliary nurse took the baby to the special care unit—an act that might have saved his life.

My constituent's letter of complaint then deals with what happened in the following 24 hours. She was told that her baby might be suffering from Down's syndrome, but that it was not necessary to telephone her husband. Despite her earlier requests, a telephone was not brought to her until 6 am.

When her husband arrived at the hospital, he had trouble getting into the maternity ward. No one seemed to be expecting him and he was told that his wife was on the delivery ward. He asked for a wheelchair to take her to the special care unit, but was told that she had to have breakfast and a shower before she could see her baby. Eventually, after a confrontation between her husband and the staff, she was allowed into the unit and the doctors, who were doing their rounds, were able to explain the situation to her.

It was suggested that she should be moved to a separate room where a video link would be set up so that she could see her baby in the incubator, but when she returned to the ward she was told that the room was not ready because workmen were in it. She was subsequently told that it did not have a working video link anyway. By late afternoon, she was moved to another side room.

Lack of cleanliness is a common theme of the complaints that I have received. My constituent found the toilet in the side room so unclean that she had to put baby wipes on her feet and clean the floor. Her bed sheets were not changed for three days. She eventually changed them herself.

My constituent needed to have her breast milk expressed every few hours so that her baby could be fed down a tube in his nose. To do that, she needed a breast pump. Although she asked several times for it to be sterilised, she often had to wait more than an hour for that to be done. Some of the staff did not know how to sterilise the pump. In the end, she and her husband asked to be shown how to operate it and did the sterilising themselves.

I have not mentioned all the complaints listed by my constituent. She made her official complaint on 8 August last year. Not having received a substantive response, she wrote to me on 21 December. She said that her baby son was suffering from atopic eczema and rubbed his face raw at night. The waiting list to see a skin specialist was 30 weeks, so she and her husband paid for a private consultation. In her letter, she said:

"The National Health Service has failed my family."

Who could disagree?

I wrote to the chief executive of East Kent Hospitals NHS trust about her complaint on 2 January. On 9 January, he sent my constituent a letter informing her that a letter responding to her complaints had been prepared and that it would be signed and sent to her shortly. The chief executive wrote to me on 23 January saying that he had asked for a letter to be sent to my constituent as a matter of urgency. On 5 February, she still had not received the letter. I wrote to the trust again. The letter was not sent until 7 February. Her complaints were upheld.

It gives me no pleasure to recite that litany of abundantly justified grievances. I want my constituents and, for that matter, my family, who have used the accident and emergency department at the William Harvey hospital, to receive decent medical care from the NHS.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): My right hon. and learned Friend is making a compelling case. Is he aware that a meeting of 81 consultants—almost half of those in east Kent—passed a unanimous motion saying that a lack of capacity is preventing them from delivering quality health care? Is it not ironic that in the face of those problems, East Kent health authority is still committed to a £100 million reorganisation that, at best, will leave capacity unaltered and may even reduce it?

Mr. Howard: There is no doubt that the consultants' view gives rise to a great deal of concern. I do not pretend that the national health service in east Kent was perfect until four years ago, but I know that it has deteriorated during the past four years. I have never before received complaints of the kind, on the scale and in the number that I am receiving now.

Yesterday, I received a document entitled "Moving Forward: A strategic outline case for modernising hospital services in East Kent". It contained the following sentence:

"The NHS plan gives East Kent the opportunity to maintain the current bed baseline at 1,975, although there may be some realignment between the number of acute and intermediate beds within the health economy as a whole."

That will give no comfort to my constituents who spent such lengthy periods in the accident and emergency department because no bed was available for them in a ward. It will give no comfort to all my constituents who fear that at any time they may find themselves in that position.

In the light of that sentence, I hope that the Minister, in responding to the debate, will not spin us fantasies about what may or may not happen in the far-off future. The condition of the NHS in east Kent today is unacceptable. My constituents and I want to know how and why that situation has come about and what the Government propose to do about it now. I look forward to the Minister's response.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on securing this debate. He wants high-quality health services for his constituents, and I can assure him that the Government want that too. That is why we are undertaking a major programme of long-term investment and reform in the NHS. The investment will bring more staff, more beds, more new hospitals and reform in the way in which health care is delivered. Patients will be treated in modern, high-quality facilities with the latest equipment and the best-trained staff. Reliability will be improved and waiting times will be cut. Of course, that will take time to deliver, but the NHS today is the fastest-growing health service of any major country in Europe.

Mr. Howard: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Stuart: I will give way, even though I am only one minute into my speech. If the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants me to answer certain questions, he might like to give me time to do so.

Mr. Howard: I am very sorry to intervene so soon, but the investment to which the Minister referred will not lead to more beds. The document that I received yesterday made it clear that an increase in bed numbers is not intended in east Kent.

Ms Stuart: I would be grateful if the right hon. and learned Gentleman would listen so that I can outline not only what we are doing now, but the overall direction of our policies and how they will improve matters. I remind him that the situation that he and the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) described did not suddenly occur on 1 May 1997. Opposition Members might reflect for a moment on the causes of that situation.

I turn now to an outline of our policies and how we are improving matters not only in the William Harvey hospital but in the whole of Kent. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is most concerned about how the reforms and investment will affect his constituents, and that is right and proper. East Kent health authority will receive £469.6 million in 2001–02. That is a real-terms increase of 6.2 per cent. on the previous year and around 40 per cent. on the £262.7 million that it received in 1996–97.

Significant additional funds have been made available to the health authority this financial year to address the pressures from emergency admissions experienced in recent months. Those include almost £2.2 million for accident and emergency admissions, almost £1.6 million to expand critical care services, £400,000 for elective capacity in the private sector to cut waiting lists, and £1.15 million to deal with winter pressures. As the right hon. and learned Member can see, there are good foundations on which to build.

Before I turn to the changes in east Kent, I shall deal with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concerns about primary care trust reconfigurations. I understand that there is support for a stand-alone, shared-way primary care trust. The configuration of PCTs in east Kent is a matter for local determination, and I will ensure that the right hon. and learned Gentleman's views are brought to the attention of the health authority. The decision will be very much a local one.

I return to the foundation on which we have been building. We cannot maintain the status quo; that must be accepted. Health services in east Kent cannot stand still—they need to change. They need to be modernised to ensure that everyone receives faster, fairer and more convenient services.

The way forward has already been decided. The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to the east Kent reconfiguration, which will centralise specialist services at Ashford and Margate and retain a core of local services at Canterbury. That was approved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) following extensive consultation in 1998.

At no point during the process has the driving force for change in east Kent been financial savings. That force has been the need to modernise services. For that to take place, there will be expansion of the William Harvey and the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospitals and refurbishment of Kent and Canterbury and Buckland hospitals. On 15 February, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health announced that work will begin this year to procure these £102 million developments. They will ensure that everyone in east Kent receives the NHS services for which we are striving. We will not turn back from this.

In the shorter term, I appreciate that change is unsettling and that there will always be people who would have preferred an alternative course of action. However, the decision has been made, and I believe that it is the right one. Everyone must now work together to ensure that the changes are a success.

I want to be clear. I am not saying that everything is perfect in east Kent. Of course it has not been perfect, and the right hon. and learned Gentleman has provided examples to illustrate that. I want to focus on the direction in which we are heading. The expansions and refurbishments will take time to complete, and I am aware that the transitional arrangements are causing some concern. However, things are not as bad as they are sometimes painted. I shall give a few examples.

At the William Harvey hospital, a new ward with an extra 54 beds opened in July 2000 to allow transfer of acute medicine from Buckland hospital. A 19-bed medical acute assessment unit opened in August 2000, and the critical care unit was enlarged from six to 10 bed spaces in December 2000. At the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital, the critical care unit was expanded from five to 10 bed spaces in December 2000, and a new block with an extra 75 beds, including a 23-bed medical acute assessment unit, was opened to accommodate catchment change from the Canterbury area in January 2001. At Kent and Canterbury hospital, December 2000 saw expansion of the surgical ward block by 18 beds, the establishment of a separate gynaecological unit and the expansion of renal in-patient beds.

More action is required in the interim period and other actions are due to come on stream in the near future. These include the completion of a new cross-sectional imaging suite at the William Harvey hospital, the opening of an extra operating theatre and the starting of a £1.1 million modernisation of the accident and emergency department at the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother

[Ms Stuart]

hospital. At the Kent and Canterbury hospital, there will be the completion of the refurbishment of the day surgery area in April. There will also be the completion of a purpose-built unit for the health care of older people service, including two rehab wards, a stroke unit, a therapy centre and day hospital in June, and the opening of the new cataract centre in July.

I fully accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's concerns that the situation in east Kent is not perfect. However, we are making steady progress. We are not talking about aspirations in the distant future; something really has happened. There are positive developments. The right hon. and learned Gentleman has given examples to show that the NHS in east Kent has failed a small number of patients in recent months. I say a small number, and I do not mean to lessen the seriousness of the individual cases, but we need to get them in perspective.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman spoke of how many more complaints he has received recently about the NHS. To get a sense of proportion, the East Kent Hospitals NHS trust received 266 letters of complaint between October and December last year. During the same period, it received 2,392 letters of thanks. As Members of Parliament, we all know how much more likely it is that a letter of complaint, rather than a letter of thanks, will be sent. We must not forget the many patients who do not have cause to complain.

Mr. Howard: I thank the hon. Lady for giving way. I have listened carefully and patiently to what she has said. She has spent considerable time speaking about her future plans. Can she please tell the House how those future plans, even the long-term plans, will address the problems that I described, if all they aspire to do is to maintain the current bed baseline in east Kent? If there are not more beds, how will people be admitted to the wards more quickly, rather than spending dreadful periods in the accident and emergency department?

Ms Stuart: I hope that the right hon. and learned Gentleman will not consider it presumptuous on my part if I profoundly and fundamentally disagree with his analysis of the problem. What I have described are not future changes; they have already happened. Change was needed because maintaining the status quo would not be acceptable.

The number of beds must be seen in the context of what has happened in respect of medical assessment units, better bed bureaux, better management, the intermediate care that is being put in place, and what we are doing together with social services with regard to home care packages. The national beds inquiry made it clear that the decline in the number of acute beds cannot continue, but a range of other provisions must be put in place.

I urge the right hon. and learned Gentleman to look at the package as a whole. The experiences of his constituents that he described are convincing evidence that change is needed in Canterbury and the whole of Kent. I was particularly struck by his comments about dirty hospitals. Yes, some of our hospitals have cut back on cleaning, and I remind Opposition Members how that came about. It is a result of the way in which the previous Government managed the NHS. It is no good hon. Gentlemen shaking their heads; that is the truth.

Mr. Green: I shall be brief, as I know that the hon. Lady does not have much time. First, my right hon. and learned Friend made it clear, as did I in my intervention, that we are speaking about managerial problems that have occurred in the past two years. That has nothing to do with what happened long in the past or what will happen long into the future. We are discussing care at the William Harvey hospital now.

The second point that the Minister has not addressed is that, in the end, we will have roughly the same bed numbers, yet her Government plan to increase the size of Ashford by 3,000 houses a year for the next 15 years. To say that the same bed numbers will be adequate for the population of east Kent is risible.

Ms Stuart: The hon. Gentleman simply has not listened. It is a matter not only of bed management and acute bed numbers, but of home care packages and rehabilitation. The situation must be looked at in the round.

I shall refer briefly to the comments of the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier). We have had Adjournment debates on his concerns. As an immediate response to the letter to which he referred, the acting regional director for the South East regional office asked the chief executive of East Kent Hospitals NHS trust and East Kent health authority jointly to undertake an urgent review of those concerns. The trust has agreed to some of the actions proposed.

The status quo is unacceptable. I have outlined the steps that we are taking and the direction in which we are moving. I recognise that the reconfiguration in east Kent has been particularly unpopular in some quarters, but let us not be fooled—some of the opposition is based on self-interest, not the interest of east Kent as whole. Ministers must think of east Kent as a whole.

That is not to say that some of the issues raised locally are not valid. Of course they are. Let us be clear that the Government will take immediate action where NHS services are failing to deliver, but we will not allow much-needed progress to be derailed. If we did, the only people to lose out would be the people of east Kent.

The modernisation of east Kent will proceed. The programme of change has gone well so far. I acknowledge that there have been some problems in east Kent in recent months, but I stress that those have not been caused by the reconfiguration. They are a sign of the need to invest in and modernise the service in east Kent, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Apart from the changes that I have outlined, by March 2001 there will be better separation of emergency medicine and elective surgery, and the potential preparation of a dedicated gynaecology unit at the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital. By April 2001, we expect to see the completion of a new cross-section imaging suite at the William Harvey hospital, an extra operating theatre is due to open at the Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother hospital, and the refurbishment of the day surgery area is expected to be completed at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. By spring 2001, there will be a £1.1 million modernisation of the accident and emergency

unit and the completion of a purpose-built health care and older people's services unit, including two rehab wards, stroke unit, therapy centre and day hospital at the Kent and Canterbury hospital. The transfer of services for the elderly from Nunnery Fields hospital will be managed much better. By July 2001, the new cataract centre is expected to open, subject to planning permission.

To say that no progress has been made is simply not the case. I accept that there are problems in the transition, but the direction of travel is clear. The outcome that we want is a better health service for all the people of east Kent.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Eleven o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

Deferred Divisions

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 7th March, notwithstanding the provisions of the Sessional Order of 7th November 2000 (Deferred Divisions) votes on divisions which have been deferred until half past Three o'clock on that day shall be recorded for one and a half hours after half past Five o'clock, no account being taken of any period during which the House or committee proceeds to a division.

The House divided: Ayes 318, Noes 119.

Division No. 138]

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Robert *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Martin *(Tatton)*
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Brand, Dr Peter
Breed, Colin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Butler, Mrs Christine
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Dr Michael *(Rayleigh)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbett, Robin
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Darvill, Keith
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Etherington, Bill
Fearn, Ronnie
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foster, Michael J *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Mrs Linda
Godman, Dr Norman A
Goggins, Paul
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gunnell, John
Hain, Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David *(Somerton & Frome)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Ms Jenny *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kingham, Ms Tess
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Livsey, Richard
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
Macdonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Michie, Mrs Ray *(Argyll & Bute)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mountford, Kali
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Oaten, Mark
O'Hara, Eddie
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Mrs Diana
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Radice, Rt Hon Giles
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Nick
Reed, Andrew *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooker, Rt Hon Jeff
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Rowlands, Ted
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra

Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Mrs Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Dr George *(NW Norfolk)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Wicks, Malcolm
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Arness, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Baldry, Tony
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Body, Sir Richard
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Mrs Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Burns, Simon
Butterfill, John
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Day, Stephen
Duncan Smith, Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Fowler, Rt Hon Sir Norman
Fox, Dr Liam
Fraser, Christopher
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gill, Christopher
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Green, Damian
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, Rt Hon Sir Archie
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Hunter, Andrew
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson Smith, Rt Hon Sir Geoffrey
King, Rt Hon Tom *(Bridgwater)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lyell, Rt Hon Sir Nicholas
McCartney, Robert *(N Down)*
McCrea, Dr William
MacGregor, Rt Hon John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Madel, Sir David
Maginnis, Ken
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Norman, Archie
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prior, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion *(Broxbourne)*
Rowe, Andrew *(Faversham)*
Ruffley, David
St Aubyn, Nick
Sayeed, Jonathan
Shepherd, Richard
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John M *(Solihull)*
Townend, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Wells, Bowen
Whitney, Sir Raymond
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 1 March 2001

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Family Incomes

1. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What measures he is taking to increase the incomes of families with children. [150135]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government are committed to supporting all families, recognising the extra costs and responsibilities that come with parenthood and targeting resources at those who need them most, when they need them most. As a result of measures introduced during this Parliament, families with children will be on average £850 a year better off.

Helen Jackson: Does my hon. Friend agree that raising the income of families with children depends on our having a stable economy where industry and public services thrive and everyone has the chance of a good job? Does she further agree that the Government's determination to eliminate child poverty through progressive fiscal policies and the working families tax credit must work alongside the statutory minimum wage, which must be maintained or even enhanced so that employers can play their part too?

Dawn Primarolo: I agree with my hon. Friend that the national minimum wage has an important role to play in raising the income of all those in work, particularly families, but I stress that the working families tax credit, particularly in respect of child care costs, the increase in child benefit and the introduction of the children's tax credit in April will make a huge contribution to the budgets of working families and ensure that the Government and employers play their part in tackling poverty in our society.

Mr. Ian Bruce (South Dorset): Surely the Minister will have seen the helpful leaflet that was produced by the citizens advice bureaux telling us just what a mess the Government are making of the working families tax credit. Has she spoken to her colleagues in the Department of Social Security who believe that the Treasury is making a mess of it and will she look again to see whether she can actually help working parents? Clearly, as always, the Treasury has been all spin and no delivery.

Dawn Primarolo: I would recommend that the hon. Gentleman reads the whole of the CAB report. If he does, he will see that it welcomes the working families tax credit and acknowledges that 1.1 million families are being helped to the tune of £30 a week or more, compared with what they received under family credit. That is a contribution to the reduction in child poverty. The CAB report identified that, of the 90,000 calls that the bureaux received, there were only a handful of exceptional cases, and it gave one example involving a bad employer.

I repeat to the hon. Gentleman what I said to the CAB. The working families tax credit has built-in protection against bad employers, but the overwhelming majority of employers welcome it and recognise the contribution that it makes to enabling their work force to stay in work, particularly by helping with child care costs, and to reducing child poverty, which the previous Government forced to increase.

Full Employment

2. **Mr. John McFall** (Dumbarton): If he will make a statement on the prospects for achieving full employment. [150136]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Employment has risen by over 1 million since May 1997 and there are now 1.1 million vacancies across the United Kingdom. In this Parliament 250,000 young people have moved from welfare into work in only three years since the start of the new deal, at around half the estimated cost. Our challenge now is to extend new opportunities to areas which in recent decades have too often been left behind. In some of our high unemployment areas the rate of new business creation is one sixth of that in the more prosperous cities and towns.

We are today publishing a consultation document on a new and generous tax credit for community finance intermediaries to encourage new flows of private investment to areas where investment is needed most. The tax credit will be implemented in a new way by competition for resources with the tax credit awarded to the best bids for economic regeneration. Taken together, all our new investment initiatives are estimated to increase investment in high unemployment areas by £1 billion and to create thousands more jobs. Copies of the consultation document are available in the Vote Office.

Mr. McFall: I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on the transformation in employment over the past few years. However, as he is aware, there are disadvantaged communities in my constituency and elsewhere where the light of increased employment has not shone. In addition, the rate of business starts in those communities is very low. My constituency has the sixth lowest number of business starts in the United Kingdom. What further measures is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that disadvantaged areas can play a full part in the economic and business life of our society?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who works hard to create new jobs and opportunities in his

constituency. He is absolutely right. The business creation rate in his area is 19 per 10,000 resident adults. That needs to be increased. Today's measures, in addition to previous measures, will help to increase the ability of people to start businesses and cut the costs involved. We are also expanding the new deal, which others want to abolish. Youth unemployment is at the lowest level since 1975; long-term unemployment is at the lowest level since the 1970s; and last week's unemployment claimant count was the lowest since 1974.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): The Chancellor announces a new tax credit to help to create new businesses, but why does he feel it necessary to clobber existing businesses with new rules and regulations and new stealth taxes, the latest of which is the climate change levy? Has he assessed the impact that that might have on jobs in horticulture and manufacturing, because it will increase their costs? Among those affected will be Mr. Eddie Topping of Barton Grange, a horticulturist in my constituency, who employs 35 people in the winter and 70 people in the summer. Horticulture will be hit very hard indeed. Will the right hon. Gentleman reconsider that dreadful tax?

Mr. Brown: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was going to thank us for the fact that unemployment has fallen by 44 per cent. in his constituency since the election. As for the climate change levy, far from being a stealth measure, it is the result of a process of consultation that started with a report by the president of the Confederation of British Industry. Its recommendations are being implemented in consultation with industry. The levy gives no revenue benefit to the Treasury because all the money is passed back in a national insurance cut for employers. *[Interruption.]* Well, Opposition Members are drawing me towards attacking Conservative policy, which I am reluctant to do until there is another campaign.

On businesses and taxation, the small business tax rate has been cut from 23p to 20p—something that the hon. Gentleman's Government never did; there is a small business starting rate of 10p; mainstream corporation tax has been cut from 33p to 30p; and, of course, the income tax that many small businesses pay has been cut from 23p to 22p. The hon. Gentleman should be congratulating us on the jobs that we have created.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the north Derbyshire coalfield area, where every deep-mined coal mine was closed in 15 years of Tory Government, there are still pockets of high unemployment? We appreciate the £24 million for the Shirebrook employment zone that was recently passed on by the Treasury. However—hon. Members should remember these words because they will hear them a lot in the next Parliament—we want the Markham employment zone, which will create 9,300 jobs, and junction 29(A) off the M1. We do not care what kind of employment it creates. Oil companies can go up there so long as they do not line the pockets of the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. While he has been making money on the side, many of my constituents have had to go on the dole. It is the job of this Government to put that right now and in the next Parliament.

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I take what he says as a Budget representation for next week. He is absolutely right. It will be necessary to expand the new deal in some areas, to increase the number of employment action teams and to do more to tackle long-term and youth unemployment in those areas where people have been left behind. That is possible because we are committed to the new deal. It would not happen if the new deal were abolished under Conservative policies.

Mr. Michael Portillo (Kensington and Chelsea): Will the Chancellor of the Exchequer put right the hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), who described a transformation in unemployment? Is it not the truth that since the right hon. Gentleman became Chancellor, unemployment has been falling more slowly than before? *[Interruption.]* It is true—let me give the figures. Will the right hon. Gentleman admit that more jobs were created in the last three years of the Conservative Government than have been created in the first three years of the Labour Government? Will he admit that, whatever he says about the new deal, the fact is that it has had no impact on unemployment; and that youth unemployment has also been falling more slowly than it was before? Is it not the case that the last Conservative Government created 69,000 manufacturing jobs and that under the current Government 350,000 manufacturing jobs have been destroyed? Is not the real truth that there can be no prospect of full employment under the current Government because they are determined to raise taxes relentlessly year after year, while other countries cut their taxes? The Chancellor of the Exchequer is increasing the tax burden and putting at risk this country's jobs.

Mr. Brown: I know that the right hon. Gentleman was out of Parliament for some time, but he does not seem to know what has been happening in the United Kingdom. Even the International Monetary Fund report that he was quoting last night said that the new deal programmes

"appear to be working well".

The right hon. Gentleman should join other Conservative Members who have said that the new deal is a good measure.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Name them.

Mr. Brown: I believe that it is terrible mistake for the Conservative party to tell the young and long-term unemployed of this country that it would abolish the new deal. What we have achieved—

Mr. Bercow: Name them.

Mr. Brown: I am reluctant to name people, but the shadow Chancellor, before he returned to Parliament, said that, on the face of it, the new deal was working well.

Youth unemployment is now the lowest since 1975; long-term unemployment is now the lowest since the 1970s; unemployment among men is the lowest since 1980; unemployment among women is the lowest since 1976. If unemployment was lower under the Conservatives, how can those figures be accurate? Unemployment is now lower than it was at any time under the Conservative Government.

Mr. Portillo: The Chancellor of the Exchequer is absolutely unable to deny any of my points. Unemployment has been falling more slowly under the present Government than under the last. The present Government have destroyed manufacturing jobs; the last Government created manufacturing jobs. The right hon. Gentleman is unable to provide a shred of evidence that the new deal has helped the young unemployed because the rate of youth unemployment has been falling more slowly under the present Government than it was before.

Let me ask the right hon. Gentleman this question: how exactly does it help employment to pile an extra £5 billion of taxes on to business? How does it help employment when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry reacts with contempt to the complaints made by business about being over-regulated? How does an energy tax that is particularly directed at manufacturing industry and the constituencies of Labour Members help employment in this country? Will the Chancellor admit that, even if in the Budget he were able to take something off income tax, he has presided over an increase in taxation equivalent to 10p in the pound and would merely be the 10p-up-2p-off Chancellor?

Mr. Brown: If the shadow Chancellor denies the existence of rising employment and falling unemployment in this country, the country will no longer listen to him. In the past four years, as a result of the new deal, 274,000 young people have moved from welfare to work. Instead of criticising that, the right hon. Gentleman should congratulate us. Now, long-term unemployed people are moving from welfare to work; lone parents are moving from welfare to work; disabled men and women, who were denied the right to work for 20 years, now have better chances of moving into work. As for the Conservatives and their policy of attacking us on the economy,

"Governments are in a strong position when the economy is doing well. There is absolutely no point in denying that . . . I'm not going to go around saying the economy is not doing well.

That was the shadow Chancellor speaking on 23 March 2000.

Mr. Portillo: Every time the Chancellor fails to deny what I have said, the more eloquent it becomes. He cannot deny that unemployment has been falling more slowly under the Labour Government than it was under the Conservative Government, nor that youth unemployment is falling more slowly under the Labour Government than it was under the Conservative Government, so he cannot sustain his claim that the new deal has had any impact at all.

Would not a real policy for employment depend on a real policy for cutting taxation in this country? Is it not absolutely absurd that the right hon. Gentleman has raised taxes in this country, forced many families into means-testing and forced people to plead with the state for sufficient income to pay the taxes that he has imposed?

When we come to office, we will abolish taxes on savings, thus helping 16 million people. We will let pensioners have another £2,000 of tax-free income a year. We will recognise marriage in the system and we will provide extra assistance to families with children. We will abolish the climate change levy to help with employment. We will abolish IR35 to help with employment. As always, there is only one party that believes in lower taxes and only one party that will deliver lower taxes, and that is the Conservative party.

Mr. Brown: Let me remind the right hon. Gentleman of something.

"Even after three years of Labour government, we are less taxed and less regulated relatively than our continental partners."

That was the shadow Chancellor on 5 July.

Why does the right hon. Gentleman not thank us for the fact that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by 51 per cent? Youth unemployment has fallen by 81 per cent. Long-term unemployment has fallen by 79 per cent. The Conservatives were in government for 18 years. They are in danger of being in opposition for more than 18 years.

Mr. Derek Twigg (Halton): Unemployment in my constituency has fallen considerably. It is certainly much less than the 18 per cent. that it reached when the Tories were in power. However, it remains stubbornly high, and the situation was not helped by the announcement by Ineos Chlor yesterday that it was to shed 600 jobs, many of which are well paid and highly skilled. One of the main reasons for the scale of those job losses is lack of investment by the previous owners, ICI, which did not invest for more than 10 years. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important that businesses invest for the long term, not the short term? Will my right hon. Friend ensure that disadvantaged areas such as Halton are the subject of special measures that he has mentioned? Ineos has made a grant application to help it restructure the business in Runcorn, which may need Treasury approval. Will my right hon. Friend consider the application favourably?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Job losses are personal tragedies, and the Government wish to do what they can. I think that my hon. Friend will agree with me that that is why we need a new deal, which the Opposition would abolish. It is why we need regional development agencies with economic strategies for the north-west, which would also be abolished. It is also why we need the working families tax credit and special measures for the over-50s, which again would be abolished. It is precisely because we know that it is our duty to help people cope with change that we are prepared to take these actions, and will continue to do so.

Tax Revenue

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): What his forecast is of the revenue from *(a)* personal taxation, *(b)* corporate taxation and *(c)* VAT for each of the next seven years. [150137]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): Forecasts of tax revenues were published in tables B8 and B11 of the pre-Budget report. Updated forecasts will be published in the "Financial Statement and Budget Report" next week.

Mr. Hughes: I predicted that reply. The projections show that the tax take over the next five years will be constant as a proportion of national income. However,

investment in health over the term of this Government is on average lower than it was under the term of the Major Administration, the previous Tory Government. Average investment in education over the Government's term of office is less than it was on average under the Tory Government. On the same basis, investment in pensions is less than it was.

Have Treasury Ministers got the message from the public that they have no desire next week to be bribed with their own money, following a tax-cutting agenda that the Tories are suggesting? The public want real extra investment in public services such as education and health and for groups in the community who need it and deserve it, such as pensioners throughout the United Kingdom?

Mr. Smith: It is because we made tough choices, which the hon. Gentleman's party opposed, that we have been able to get the national debt down from 44 per cent. of gross domestic product to 33 per cent., and it is due to fall to 30 per cent. That is establishing the strong foundation for the investment that is under way—a doubling of investment across the spending review period, with record increases in health, education, transport and fighting crime, the people's priorities. We can deliver because we took tough choices and built a strong economy, which the hon. Gentleman's party would never do.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is important to continue the sensible and prudent planning and forecasting of revenue and expenditure? I urge the Government to ignore and not be tempted by the advice of either the Liberal Democrats, who seem to think that money grows on trees, or the Conservatives, whose sums never seem to add up.

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. I shall take my hon. Friend's comments as a Budget representation. I can assure him that we have no intention of being drawn down the path of irresponsibility proffered by either the Conservative party or the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): If everything is so rosy, why is the European Union worried about the Government's future taxation and spending plans, and why did the International Monetary Fund warn yesterday of

"negative consequences for investment and growth"?

How can the Government describe that as vindication?

Mr. Smith: That is a total misreading of what the IMF said. Let me give the hon. Gentleman the quotes. The directors stated that

"plans to increase public investment in infrastructure and human capital are justified in the light of the evidence".

They said:

"even after taking account of recent spending decisions, the fiscal position remains sound and fully consistent with the authorities' medium-term fiscal framework."

The acting chairman, summing up, commended the authorities for the continued strong performance of the United Kingdom economy.

Education Investment

4. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): What his assessment is of the impact on Government finances of his plans for future investment in education. [150138]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): As I said, because we took tough choices, stuck to prudent fiscal rules and built strong public finances, we are able to raise capital investment in education from £2.4 billion in the current year to £3.8 billion by 2004, a real-terms increase of 48 per cent. Total education spending will rise by £11.7 billion over the same period, an increase of 16 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Rammell: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. When I recently visited the Water Lane primary school in my constituency, the head teacher told me that in 25 years of teaching, she had never known so much extra money going into schools. Given that capital spending on Essex schools has more than doubled in the past year, that is hardly surprising. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that investment needs to increase in future years, as set out in the three-year comprehensive spending review, and does he share my concern that were any party to come to power committed to cut that investment by £16 billion, that would be entirely the wrong way forward?

Mr. Smith: I share my hon. Friend's concerns. I am grateful for his remarks and those of his constituent. Those remarks reflect the Government's record in already increasing average spending per pupil by £300 in real terms. That will be a £450 real increase next year. As for the future, by 2004 we will increase real-terms education spending by one third—a bigger real increase in the early years of this Government than in the entire period of office of our predecessors.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): As the Chief Secretary and the Chancellor are so keen to take comments as Budget representations, will they take the remarks of Mr. Chris Woodhead, the former chief inspector of schools, as a Budget representation, when he states:

"As a taxpayer, I could not stomach the way in which public money was being squandered"?

Do they agree with Mr. Woodhead that the Chancellor and the Prime Minister have

"presided over a set of initiatives that has wasted taxpayers' money, distracted teachers from their real responsibilities and encapsulated the worst of the discredited ideology that has done so much damage since the 1960s"?

Do they agree that the Government have not delivered, and that

"a generation of children has been betrayed"?

Mr. Smith: Education has suffered in the past from being turned into an ideological battleground. I would caution the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues against trying to do the same on the basis of those comments. The truth is that under Chris Woodhead's leadership, Ofsted made a distinguished contribution to raising standards, worked closely with us on the literacy and numeracy

strategy, praised what we did in respect of cutting class sizes for infants—a policy opposed by the Opposition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) asked a question. He must show some courtesy when the reply is delivered.

Mr. Smith: What the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) should do is praise the accomplishment of this Government, which is based on their work on raising literacy and numeracy standards from the disgraceful level to which they fell under the previous Government, raising the proportion of pupils who achieve top GCSE grades and turning around 650 failing schools that would have continued to suffer under the Conservative Administration.

Employment Statistics

5. **Gillian Merron** (Lincoln): If he will make a statement on changes in employment and unemployment over the past 12 months. [150139]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): Since the Government were elected, employment has risen by more than 1 million. Over the past year, it has risen by 225,000 and International Labour Organisation unemployment has fallen by 169,000. The claimant count now stands at just 5,000 above 1 million.

Gillian Merron: My hon. Friend will be aware that unemployment in Lincoln has almost halved since the general election, while long-term youth unemployment has decreased by 86 per cent. However, that positive picture is not exactly uniform across the city, as people in wards such as Park and Abbey remain more likely to be out of work. Will my hon. Friend step up the application of targeted measures to areas such as Abbey and Park, to ensure that all my constituents can benefit equally from the stable economy created by the Government?

Dawn Primarolo: My hon. Friend correctly identifies that there are particular areas where it is necessary for the Government to concentrate our effort, perhaps through the expansion of new deal opportunities to help people into work. We must continue to remove the barriers to ensure that people can move from welfare into work and be financially secure. Of course, we must also continue to ensure that that work pays and that people can progress through work using lifelong learning. It is through all those measures, including expansion of the new deal, that we intend to continue to drive down unemployment, to move to full employment and to ensure that all the talents of all the people in this country can be used.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In reflecting on employment policy, does the Paymaster General, as a former member of the Bennite left-wing Campaign group of Labour MPs, now accept that that free-market capitalist the United States of America has been dramatically more successful than most countries in creating and retaining jobs? To that end, has she made any assessment of the efficacy of the Regulatory Flexibility Act 1980 and the Small Business Regulatory Enforcement Fairness Act 1996? If not, why not?

Dawn Primarolo: I should like to remind the hon. Gentleman of a couple of facts. First, the United States has the welfare-to-work partnership, which includes 10,000 firms. Secondly, it was the Conservative party that said in government that unemployment was a "price worth paying", following which it rose to the record level of 2.9 million. It is under this Government that 1 million jobs have been created and that long-term and youth unemployment are down. There are 1.1 million vacancies in the economy and the challenge is to match them with the people who are seeking jobs. The hon. Gentleman has no answers to that proposition.

Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster, Central): In my constituency, we have a new deal for communities area, which means that about £50 million will be invested in the next 10 years to help people back into work, among other things. Thanks to this Government, big capital projects are also starting, such as the North Bridge road and the transport interchange. In the light of my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's earlier statement about community investment, will my hon. Friend consider what incentives can be given to big companies to ensure that they employ local people in areas of high deprivation?

Dawn Primarolo: I reassure my hon. Friend that that is precisely why my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has emphasised the importance of investment in our communities and, in particular, the use of tax credits in that work to build on the new deal for communities. I shall certainly bear her comments in mind.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Given that the word "employment" appears in the title of another Department, is not the fact that this question was not transferred an example of the Treasury's astonishing contempt for other Departments in Whitehall?

Dawn Primarolo: If the hon. Gentleman does not understand that employment is part of the economy, I cannot help him further.

Euro

6. **Mr. Alan Simpson** (Nottingham, South): What rate of conversion between the pound and the euro is compatible with the UK's long-term economic interests. [150140]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The best contribution that the Government can make to delivering a stable and competitive pound over the medium term is to adhere to stability-oriented policies based on delivering low inflation and sound public finances.

Mr. Simpson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for a non-committal statement on the exchange rate—it is exactly what prudence would have expected—but can he confirm that even the most gung-ho and enthusiastic of his current or former Cabinet colleagues has not urged him to join the single currency at either yesterday's or today's rates of exchange? If there is a case to be made

for devaluing the pound, which is implicit in the representations that they make, will he use his powers of persuasion to urge them to recognise that macroeconomic consequences will follow in respect of precisely the issues that he has set out—inflation, interest rates and the implications for personal and company taxation?

Mr. Brown: It is precisely because there are major issues to be addressed in any decision about the euro that, in 1997, we said that although we supported the euro in principle, in practice five economic tests have to be met. We said that we would review the matter and make those assessments early in the next Parliament—indeed, within the first two years. That is precisely what we shall do. We support the euro in principle because of the benefits. We believe that there are constitutional issues, but if the economic benefits to Britain are clear and unambiguous there is a case for joining—but the decision would be based on the five economic tests. If we were to recommend yes, there would be a referendum.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): Does the Chancellor agree that the highly relevant question asked by the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Simpson) is unanswerable? Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that our national experience with the pre-war gold standard, the Bretton Woods dollar standard and the exchange rate mechanism has surely proved that any fixed rate exchange arrangement must, inevitably, become incompatible with our long-term economic interests? Will he use his great influence in such matters to ensure that this country does not re-enter any form of monetary straitjacket imposed on us from overseas?

Mr. Brown: It is precisely because of the major issues involved in dealing with the relationship between the euro and the pound that we have set the five tests. We shall assess those matters early in the next Parliament and report accordingly—but I take it that the hon. Gentleman is criticising the policy of the previous Government.

Mr. Ben Bradshaw (Exeter): Is not it the case, despite the recent exchange rate, that, to quote the International Monetary Fund report again, our economy has enjoyed

"the longest period of sustained non-inflationary output growth in more than 30 years"?

Is not it a counsel of despair to suggest that the best or, indeed, the only way to maintain competitiveness is through a weak sterling policy?

Mr. Brown: The IMF report does mention the euro and says that our proposals to make assessments based on economic tests are the right way forward. The report, as my hon. Friend said, commends the authorities

"for the continued strong performance of the U.K. economy."

It continues:

"Sound fiscal and monetary policies have contributed to the achievements"

and says that, looking ahead, directors expected that

"output growth would remain robust, with a substantial increase in public spending from measures announced in last year's budget offsetting slower private consumption growth . . . prospects for inflation remain benign".

If the previous Government had achieved a good report from the IMF in any one year, as we have received in every year of our government, they might have some cause to ask us questions about the economy, but they never did.

Mr. Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Following his embarrassing interview on the "Today" programme, when he refused to discuss his so-called tests, will the Chancellor at least give Parliament some straight answers? Does he agree that his five tests on the euro are nothing more than a sham, that they are completely subjective, and that they add up to four fudges and a fiddle? The best way to protect Britain's long-term economic interest is to keep the pound by voting Conservative at the next election.

Mr. Brown: The IMF report quoted by Conservative Members overnight suggests that the five economic tests are the best way forward. They are not arbitrary tests; they are tests concerning the issues that are relevant to the United Kingdom economy—*[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo) and his friends now think that it is not relevant to assess first, investment; secondly, employment; thirdly, manufacturing industry and financial services; fourthly, flexibility; and fifthly, the degree of sustainable convergence, it is clear that their policy is built purely on dogma.

Public Service Investment

7. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): If he will make an assessment of the implications of the comprehensive spending review for future investment in public services. [150141]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): The plans set out in last year's spending review will double public net capital investment over the next three years to £19 billion. The Government will reverse years of underinvestment in order to deliver modern schools and hospitals and an integrated transport network.

Dr. Palmer: In Broxtowe, there are two new schools, numerous refurbishments and two major hospital developments. Does my right hon. Friend agree with my constituents, who feel that such action makes more sense than the last Government's policy of squeezing public investment in order to pay for their other policy of high unemployment?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend gives excellent examples of the benefits of public investment in his constituency. I well recall discussing these and other matters with him at the consultation meeting with his constituents that he arranged for me last year. The good news he reports is proof that the Government are listening and delivering.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): What contingency plans does the comprehensive spending review contain for increasing investment in London's public transport services if the public-private partnership is not concluded by the end of the financial year? Is the Minister aware that alternative public investment plans for

the tube, first presented by the Liberal Democrats, are now supported by more than 80 per cent. of Londoners, by Bob Kiley, and—following their latest U-turn—even by half of those on the Conservative Front Bench? Will the right hon. Gentleman therefore also support a plan that is safer and more cost-effective than the PPP, draw back the curtain, and come down the yellow brick road?

Mr. Smith: The refurbishment and modernisation of the tube in London is of the utmost importance. That is why we have presented the public-private partnership as the best means of delivering cost-effectively the modernisation that is needed. The operation of trains will remain in the public sector, health and safety will remain independently in that sector, and discussions must take place—and are continuing—with Mr. Kiley and with Transport for London. It is in the interests of Londoners and the future of the modernisation of our tube that those talks succeed, and that through the public-private partnership we avoid the overruns on costs and time that characterised the Jubilee line extension.

Public Investment (Emergency Services)

8. **Mr. Jim Fitzpatrick** (Poplar and Canning Town): If he will make a statement on the implications of the pre-Budget report for investment in public services, with particular reference to emergency services. [150142]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): We have been reminded in the past 24 hours of the critical importance to all of us of the work of the emergency services. The whole House will want to express its admiration for their work at Selby.

The Government's plans for spending on public services were set out in last year's spending review, and updated in the pre-Budget report. Police spending is set to rise from £7.7 billion to £9.3 billion in 2003–04; the standard spending assessment for fire services is set to rise from £1.4 billion to £1.6 billion in that year.

Mr. Fitzpatrick: Given the extra resources and the new partnership arrangements being created across the emergency services, can my hon. Friend assure us that full consultation will take place with both trade unions and professional associations, as well as with local authority representatives and the managers of the various organisations and services?

Mr. Timms: What has happened is that national debt is down. In 1997, it was 42 per cent.; it is now 31 per cent. and decreasing. That plus lower interest rates means that £4 billion is available for extra spending. Unemployment is also down, which again makes extra spending available. Those key changes enable the emergency services to plan with confidence for the future, working—as my hon. Friend said—in partnership with local authorities, trade unions and others who are involved. What the services could not cope with is having to contribute to the spending cuts that would be necessary to deliver the policy of Conservative Members.

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): Is the Minister aware that in Surrey, the sum being given to our police force is being cut in real terms and, according to figures supplied to me by Surrey police, in absolute terms by as much as £6 per head? How can we have any confidence in the Government's commitment to fight crime when they are prepared to cut the funding of one of the best performing police services in the country?

Mr. Timms: I have said that our plans are to increase spending on the police service. The hon. Gentleman must explain why he supports cuts if he is really looking for more spending. In the next three years, an additional 9,000 recruits across the country will be funded centrally by the crime fighting fund. Police numbers will reach 128,000 by March 2002, and we are expecting further increases after that.

Interest Rate Policy

9. **Mr. Tony Lloyd** (Manchester, Central): If he will make a statement on the impact of interest rate policy on the exchange rate of the pound. [150143]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): Interest rates are set by the Monetary Policy Committee to deliver the Government's inflation target. Interest rates are among a wide range of influences on the exchange rate.

Mr. Lloyd: As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has already reminded the House, the Government have an extraordinarily strong record on employment creation. Nevertheless, does my hon. Friend accept that one current concern is the loss of jobs, particularly in manufacturing industry, and the consequences of those losses in different economic regions of the country? Will he take the time to remind the Monetary Policy Committee that to overshoot on interest rates—or to undershoot on inflation—has serious consequences, and that manufacturing jobs have borne some of those consequences?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend is right about the current strength of the economy. It is worth bearing in mind, for example, that the sterling exchange rate was stronger in June 1999, when interest rates were 5 per cent., than in 1998, when interest rates peaked at 7.5 per cent. Manufacturing needs stability in the economy, low interest rates and stable growth, and that is what it now has. The latest figures for manufacturing exports for the three months to December 2000 were 10 per cent. up on a year earlier. That is the fastest growth rate for more than a quarter of a century.

I think that the prospects for manufacturing are very optimistic indeed. Yesterday, I was in my hon. Friend's part of the country talking to manufacturers in the chemical sector—in which increased research and development is critical to success—and heard about various developments such as the new university innovation centre for organic materials at Manchester university. We want there to be more such developments and partnerships between manufacturers and universities to promote further productivity increases and to sow the prospect of even better developments in manufacturing.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Is it still the Government's position that we would not need to enter a form of the exchange rate mechanism if we were

to decide to join the single currency, despite all the protestations, information and statements from the Commission to the contrary?

Mr. Timms: The Government have made our position absolutely clear: we have no intention of rejoining the ERM.

Mr. Dale Campbell-Savours (Workington): I have told Corus that my view is that the euro's inevitable rise against sterling next year will be of immeasurable help to its United Kingdom operations. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Mr. Timms: I think that we will have to wait and see what happens. As I said earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), recent figures from manufacturing have been extremely encouraging. We are seeing very good performances in many parts of manufacturing. My hon. Friend may have read, for example, about the new British-made models launched this week at the Geneva motor show. There is a new optimism in the car industry. He may also have read about the new South Yorkshire advanced manufacturing centre, which is being supported by Boeing and builds on the very latest metal cutting technology developed in Sheffield. Aerospace, too, has been a big UK success story. I therefore think that the prospects are extremely encouraging.

Gold Sales

10. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If he will make a statement on the sale of gold by the Bank of England in the past 12 months. [150144]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Andrew Smith): In the current financial year, the Government have sold 125 tonnes of gold at five auctions, raising revenue of $1.1 billion. A further auction is scheduled for March. Along with the auctions in 1999–2000, the sales have been successful and have achieved value for money for the taxpayer. Over the medium term, the sales will achieve the Government's overall aim of a better balanced portfolio of reserve holdings.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the Chancellor has instructed the Bank of England to put 40 per cent. of all the proceeds into euros; as the Bank has been instructed to take over the issue of vast quantities of euro bonds; and as it has been widely reported that Britain, Japan and America have been intervening directly to prop up the euro, would not it be helpful for the Government to announce the size of the mountain of euros now in the Bank? Does not the right hon. Gentleman understand that, instead of engaging in this very expensive exercise, it would be better for the world economy if the Government simply allowed the euro to find its natural level in world markets? Surely that would be far better than all the back-door methods of trying time and again to prop up the euro.

Mr. Smith: I admire the hon. Gentleman's persistence on this issue, which he raises endlessly, as he has the right to do, in the House and the Treasury Committee. He is becoming something of a gold standard in his own right. The National Audit Office has looked into all these matters and concluded that the Treasury has

"met successfully its objective to sell in a transparent and fair manner while achieving value for money."

The report said that, in taking income from the foreign currency securities that we have purchased on account, the Government were on 18 December showing a gain of £23 million over what the gold would have been worth.

Such sales have nothing to do with propping up the euro, as the hon. Gentleman suggests. If he reflected for a moment, he would realise that every time there is a gold auction, we are involved in purchasing something like 80 million euro. That contrasts with the $1.5 trillion turnover on the foreign exchange markets on any single day. So, such sales represent a very small pebble in a very large lake.

Third-world Debt

11. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South): What recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in other countries on the elimination of third-world debt. [150145]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): On Monday, I was pleased to hear from the head of the International Monetary Fund, Horst Köhler, and the President of the World Bank, Jim Wolfensohn, that following the path-breaking initiative on which we congratulate them, 22 countries are to receive debt relief and will qualify for 100 per cent. write-off of debt owed to the UK. Among those countries still to qualify, many are in conflict and civil war. Britain has renounced from December 2000 its right to debt payments. Those payments will be held in trust until they can be used for poverty relief.

I met the chairman of the heavily indebted poor countries Finance Ministers group on Monday, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and I hosted a conference to discuss the 2015 targets for education, health and poverty. On 17 February, I met the G7 Finance Ministers in Palermo, where the Italian presidency made new proposals to extend debt relief during 2001.

Mr. Cunningham: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. He is probably aware that many organisations in this country appreciate his efforts in trying to get the IMF and other countries, as well as Britain, down the road of debt relief. What further plans does he have on third-world debt, particularly with regard to Bangladesh, which, as he knows, fairly recently suffered some tremendous natural disasters?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and all those on both sides of the House who have raised the standard for debt relief and worked with the Churches, non-governmental organisations and many UK and international charities which have been pressing for a sensible solution to the problem of unpayable debt. Forty-one countries qualify under the HIPC initiative; 22 have already received debt relief. As I have said, most of the others are in conflict or civil wars. Bangladesh is not one of the countries in the HIPC initiative because its debt is less than that of other countries. It is, of course,

being committed resources through the Department for International Development's aid and development budget, which has risen by 41 per cent. in real terms in the five years to 2004.

Life Insurance

12. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the performance of the regulatory authorities in respect of with-profits life insurance. [150146]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Financial Services Authority took responsibility for the prudential supervision of insurance companies on 1 January 1999. With-profits business forms a significant part of that responsibility. Howard Davies announced an FSA review of the with-profits business last Friday.

Dr. Cable: Does the Minister agree that when the Government are encouraging millions of inexperienced investors to put their money in some new products, such as stakeholder pensions, it is vital that the regulator must be seen to act in the consumer interest in cases of mis-selling and the irresponsible assumption of liabilities risk, as occurred at Equitable Life?

Specifically in relation to the inquiry that is under way, will the Minister undertake to look not merely at the misregulation of the FSA, but at the events of the early and mid-1990s when, inexplicably, reporting standards on the industry relaxed and the Government regulator of the day appears to have completely ignored the impact of falling interest rates and falling inflation on the sustainability of guaranteed annuities?

Miss Johnson: As I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware, the FSA was set up with the important objectives of recognising the needs of consumers and, indeed, to educate consumers. In addition, the FSA has a consumer panel. That is an important part of the FSA's remit, and I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is an important focus of its work. Indeed, that is why we set up the FSA.

The FSA's report will cover both its role as a prudential regulator and the Personal Investment Authority's role as a conduct of business regulator. The report will look into the background and events leading up to the point at which responsibility for prudential insurance regulation moved to the FSA.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does my hon. Friend accept that there needs to be more clarity about how bonus payments within with-profits policies, particularly terminal bonus payments, are decided?

Miss Johnson: The FSA's report is yet to emerge. When it does, we will study it carefully to see what issues are identified in relation to the history of Equitable Life and the events surrounding its closure for further business. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that, without seeing the report, it is premature for us to draw any conclusions at this point.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I declare an interest in that I hold a with-profits insurance policy. Will the Economic Secretary explain why neither the Treasury nor the regulator took a proper interest in this matter when the original action was taken to block new members taking policies with Equitable Life?

Miss Johnson: All these matters are clearly monitored by the Financial Services Authority. It is producing a report and, when it does, we will have some conclusions to study.

Chester Street Holdings Ltd.

13. **Mr. Michael Clapham** (Barnsley, West and Penistone): If he will make a statement on Chester Street Holdings Ltd., previously known as Iron Trades Holding Ltd. [150147]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Miss Melanie Johnson): The Government understand the concern of those suffering from asbestos-related disease as a consequence of employment in firms whose employers' liability insurance has been provided by Chester Street Holdings Ltd.

Mr. Clapham: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. I also thank her for meeting my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) and me yesterday to discuss the issue. As she is aware, it appears that Iron Trades dumped the asbestos liabilities into Chester Street Holdings in 1990. The company continued trading until the late 1990s, when it was sold to an Australian insurance company.

The insurance protection board will provide some protection for some of the cases, but the pre-1972 cases—that is, cases of men exposed before 1972—may not be covered by the protection system. Will my hon. Friend therefore set up an inquiry into Iron Trades? Will she also consider how she might urge the insurance industry to work with the Government with the aim of ensuring that each claimant gets compensation in full?

Miss Johnson: As an insurance company, Chester Street—and Iron Trades before it—was authorised to do business in the UK, and has been supervised by insurance regulators to ensure that it meets the requirements of the Insurance Companies Act 1982. Since 1 January 1999, the FSA has been responsible for prudential supervision of insurance companies.

The Policy Holders Protection Act 1975 offers protection for compulsory employers' liability insurance policies, which are required under the Employers Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969. It is the employer who holds the policy with Chester Street, not the employee. The employer remains liable for claims made against it by employees or former employees. It is for the employer to establish whether any further protection is required under the 1975 Act, to the extent that Chester Street is unable to meet the terms of the insurance contract in full.

I am aware of the problem mentioned by my hon. Friend of the pre-1972 claims. The Treasury is considering that issue.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Would the Leader of the House give us the business for the coming week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mrs. Margaret Beckett): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 5 MARCH—Debate on Welsh Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

TUESDAY 6 MARCH—Second Reading of the International Development Bill.

WEDNESDAY 7 MARCH—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 8 MARCH—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 9 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 12 MARCH—Continuation of the Budget Debate.

TUESDAY 13 MARCH—Conclusion of the Budget Debate.

WEDNESDAY 14 MARCH—Remaining stages of the Criminal Justice and Police Bill.

THURSDAY 15 MARCH—Estimates Day [2nd Allotted Day].

The Liaison Committee will recommend subjects for debate.

At 7 o'clock the House will be asked to agree the Spring Supplementary Estimates, Votes on Account and Defence Votes A.

FRIDAY 16 MARCH—Private Members' Bills.

The House will wish to be reminded that on Wednesday 7 March, there will be a debate relating to motor vehicle distribution and servicing agreements in the European Community in European Standing Committee C.

On Wednesday 7 March, there will be a debate relating to health requirements for animal by-products in European Standing Committee A.

The House will also wish to know that on Wednesday 14 March, there will be a debate relating to community immigration policy in European Standing Committee C.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Wednesday 7 March 2001: European Standing Committee A—Relevant European Union document: (a) 12648/00 and (b) 12646/00, Health requirements for animal by-products. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee reports: HC 28-iii and HC 28-vii(2000-01).

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: 13889/00, Competition in motor vehicle distribution and servicing. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee report HC 28-iii(2000-01).

Wednesday 14 March 2001:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union document: 11529/00, Community immigration policy. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee report: HC 28-iii(2000-01).]

Mrs. Browning: I am grateful to the Leader of the House. Yesterday's debate in Opposition time on the continuing foot and mouth crisis was welcomed by Members on both sides. Despite the fact that we have a busy schedule next week, including the Budget statement, I hope that the right hon. Lady can confirm that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be available to come to the House as necessary to share new information and advice with hon. Members, not least because the disease has now spread throughout the United Kingdom. Members will have questions in respect of telephone calls and queries from constituents, and it would be helpful to be updated by the Minister and to have an opportunity to ask questions. I hope that time will be found for that.

On foot and mouth, can the right hon. Lady tell us what contingency arrangements are in place in case the crisis continues? In particular, I have in mind the need to collect national census forms across the country on 29 April and any change that may have to be made to county council elections scheduled for 3 May.

Can the Leader of the House tell us whether Downing street has yet received the report of the Hammond inquiry? She will know that there are press reports that it has. If the conclusions of the report are imminent, will she outline how the Government intend to convey that information to the House and what opportunities the House will have to question the Government on it?

May I bring the Leader of the House back to something that I raised at the last business questions: namely, the continuing problems with programming motions, especially in Committee? I have mentioned the Criminal Justice and Police Bill. The House was told that the Government intended to allow 16 sittings on the Bill but, in Committee, the Home Office Minister concerned offered only 14. I gather that in a meeting of the Programming Sub-Committee, that was increased to 15 sittings. However, on the last day of its deliberations, the Committee will have to deal with no fewer than 50 clauses as well as new schedules, all of which will have to be compressed into a Thursday, when there are fewer hours for consideration.

I know that the right hon. Lady shares the concern that the programming procedures should be sorted out. I ask her to focus on our experiences with Home Office Bills in particular and to consider the case of the Criminal Justice and Police Bill. It is a matter of grave concern to my colleagues that they will have to deal with that very important Bill in such a short space of time.

On the same subject, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill is due to come to the Commons soon from another place. Conservative Members in another place tabled many amendments to the Bill as a result of consultation with many large charitable organisations. It was a matter of great concern to them that they faced open criticism from Labour Members of another place for doing so. I flag that up now because I hope that the Leader of the House will ensure that the education team is responsive to the need for clauses and amendments to be properly scrutinised and discussed when the Bill comes to the Commons. It is clearly a matter of interest not just to us but to many charitable bodies with an interest in special educational needs.

Mrs. Beckett: I can certainly assure the hon. Lady that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food intends to try to keep the House

informed about foot and mouth. I understand that he is seeking to put in place arrangements to keep hon. Members informed and to extend the availability of information in localities so that there can be as much accurate information as possible available in the public domain. I know that my right hon. Friend is, among other things, anxious to learn the lessons of the Phillips report and the handling of the BSE crisis, and feels that open and transparent provision of information is desirable in such circumstances. I hope that the House shares that view.

The hon. Lady asked me whether I could say any more about contingency plans for issues such as the census and the local elections; these were well-concealed inquiries about the date of the general election, I thought. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Minister has issues such as the handling of census forms under active consideration. I cannot give the hon. Lady any more information about that at the present time.

The hon. Lady and the House will be aware that the time period is such that we are probably talking about outbreaks of the disease that were incubated before movement was stopped. How great the difficulties are and how speedily they can be resolved will depend on events in the next few days. I cannot tell her any more about that at the moment, but I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister will wish to do so.

I would have assured the hon. Lady that there will be an opportunity to question my right hon. Friend the Minister in the near future but for the fact that two Departments will be answering oral questions next Thursday, so I shall handle that matter with some caution. However, there will come a point at which the hon. Lady and the House will be able to question my right hon. Friend.

I am not aware that the report of the Hammond inquiry has been received, although, of course, I am aware of the great interest in the matter. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made it plain that he has every intention of publishing the report as speedily as possible. The issue is under consideration, but I understand that it is not yet resolved.

The hon. Lady again raises the issue of programming motions. I am mindful of the concerns that she expresses. We are extremely anxious, as she noted, to reach agreement on those matters. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill receives its Third Reading in the Lords today. Although I am aware that the Bill is progressing, I am not aware of the issues raised by the hon. Lady or of problems with regard to the amendments. I certainly assure her that the education team will take seriously any issues or concerns that arise during the Bill's passage through this House.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): In view of the article in *The Daily Telegraph* today, will my right hon. Friend arrange an early debate on the record of the former chief inspector of schools? I refer especially to the evidence, documented in his own reports, of the success of many of the Government's policies, including the rising GCSE standards, the vastly improved literacy and numeracy standards in primary schools and the success in cutting infant class sizes. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should have the opportunity to debate those issues before the former chief inspector becomes a Conservative peer?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend asks me to arrange a debate on those issues. However, given that we are to have Education questions and that the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill is to come before the House, I suspect that there will be opportunities for Members to air such issues.

I am, of course, aware of the former chief inspector's comments. I also heard my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on the radio this morning handling the issue with extreme skill. He showed the concern for educational standards that I hope everyone in the House shares. I share my right hon. Friend's view that it is to be regretted that the former chief inspector has, apparently, changed his mind on several things that he previously supported; that is, of course, entirely a matter for him.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I return to the scourge of foot and mouth? Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Home Secretary to come to the House as soon as possible so that we can hear more about the contingency plans that may have to be used if this terrible disease continues to spread across the country? I draw her attention to the statement made yesterday by her colleague, the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, that there seemed to be a good case for the postponement of the census. Will the right hon. Lady confirm whether that requires legislation? If so, we need to know in good time.

Will the right hon. Lady go further and ask the Home Secretary to come to the House and explain what the arrangements would be for polling day on 3 May—whatever elections take place on that day? As I understand it, new regulations provide for a complete election by post, if necessary. There has been a complete relaxation of the postal vote arrangements. It would be possible to use postal votes in rural areas, such as Cornwall, where there would be a total distortion of the result—of the county council elections or any other election—if any foot and mouth restrictions remained in the area on polling day. Will the right hon. Lady ask the Home Secretary to explain to the House exactly what contingency plans are in place?

Mrs. Beckett: The hon. Gentleman raises two issues. I think the census may be a matter for the Treasury rather than for the Home Office. People are obviously considering contingency plans, although there may be some reluctance to get into detailed discussions until we know whether there is a need for such steps. I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my relevant right hon. Friends.

On voting, it is certainly my understanding—although I have not checked the matter with the Home Office—that postal voting, which is much more widely available, might assist in resolving any difficulties. I cannot undertake to ask the Home Secretary to make a special statement on that issue in the near future, not least because Home Office questions will take place on Monday 12 March, offering an opportunity to raise it at a pertinent point.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is my right hon. Friend aware that if any criticism is to be levelled at the

[Mr. David Winnick]

Government about Woodhead, it would be that he was not sacked on day one? It is difficult to understand why someone who was so hostile to the Government's plans for education was kept on for so long.

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend has had reservations about those issues for some time and is, of course, free to express them. I simply say that I understand that one of the former chief inspector's criticisms is that he believes that there is a lack of follow-through on policies. I understand also that Mr. de Gruchy, who is not always the Government's greatest fan, has said that however much he may disagree with many of the Government's policies, he does not believe that it can be justifiably alleged that they are not followed through.

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): In the context of the questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on the Government's handling of foot and mouth and the considerable concern about foot and mouth across the island of Ireland, will it fall to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to keep us informed of events in Northern Ireland and their effect on the border counties?

Mrs. Beckett: To be honest, both are involved, as the right hon. Gentleman will clearly appreciate. However, without becoming too involved in the detail of a specialist subject, I understand that, as far as we are aware, the outbreak in Ireland has some relationship to the original case in the north of England. In that sense, such matters still fall within the remit of my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Clearly the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is involved and will certainly play his part in keeping the House informed.

Perhaps I may trespass on your good graces for a moment, Mr. Speaker, to confirm to the House that questions to the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will take place on Thursday 8 March and questions to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment will take place on 15 March. Those are the occasions on which Members will have an opportunity to raise the issues to which I have referred.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Will my right hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the work of the staff and pupils of the excellent comprehensive schools in my constituency? Each of those schools has its own diversity of ethos, and each has high standards and is producing improving results, year on year. Those improvements are largely due to the work of the staff and pupils and have little to do with the policies of the former chief inspector, but they are also due to the support provided by the excellent local education authority in Bury. In view of the publication last week of the Green Paper on the future of secondary schools and the huge interest that those wide-ranging proposals have produced, does my right hon. Friend agree that there is now a strong case for a debate in Government time about the future shape and structure of comprehensive education in this country?

Mrs. Beckett: My hon. Friend raises an interesting issue and I join him in paying tribute to the excellence of the schools in his constituency. On the day the recent announcements were being made, I happened to be visiting an extremely good comprehensive school—which, as he says, has a richness of diversity—in the Halifax area. There is no doubt that much excellent work is being done, but it is important that we raise the standards of all schools, as he suggests. *[Laughter.]* Opposition Members are enjoying themselves, but those are the schools that our children attend, even if theirs do not; they are important to Labour Members.

My hon. Friend is right to pay tribute to the work of many good LEAs, which are working in partnership with schools. He refers also to the Green Paper. I am mindful of the remarks in the *Financial Times* this week that much of the detailed policy in the Green Paper—particularly the emphasis on secondary schools—deserves praise. That view is widely shared.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): May I return to the issue of the foot and mouth crisis? Following the Downing street emergency meeting with farmers' representatives on Tuesday and the debate that took place in the House yesterday, I understand that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will announce that the Government will open selected abattoirs to take livestock from farms that are free from foot and mouth.

J. J. J. Heathcote, a small but modern abattoir in my constituency, has been in touch this morning to advise me that it understands that the Government will open only large abattoirs. That means that animals may have to travel many, many miles, which some believe has contributed to the crisis that we face today. If that is the case, it could have a devastating impact on small farms and small abattoirs. Will the Leader of the House assure me that the Minister will open not just large abattoirs, but will consider opening small, modern abattoirs? We believe that that would help farming communities.

Mrs. Beckett: I am aware that my right hon. Friend is giving careful and detailed consideration to the issue of how the travel of animals to slaughter can be handled so that they do not come into contact with other animals. Consideration is being given to what that will mean in terms of travel distances, times and so on.

I am not aware of the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman has just raised about the size of the abattoirs that the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has in mind. However, I take his point, as will my right hon. Friend. I certainly undertake to draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to my right hon. Friend's attention.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Last year on 19 July, an hour and a half debate was held in Westminster Hall following the report of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' working party on park homes. Should we not now have a full debate on the issue in the House, as it is becoming an increasingly serious matter? More and more people who are not interested in the sites are becoming site owners; they merely rip off the residents. The report of the park homes working party was an attempt to flag up future legislation to introduce controls over these sites. It is important that we make effective progress on the matter.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's concern. I am aware of a number of examples of people expressing

anxiety about the running of such sites. I fear that I cannot find time for a special debate on the matter on the Floor of the House in the near future, but I undertake to draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Mr. Speaker, you will have noticed that, at Treasury questions, Labour Members appeared to be under orders not to ask supplementaries about the euro and the exchange rate that relates to it. Labour Whips may wish to give up discussion of the subject for Lent. However, will the Leader of the House arrange a debate so that we can discuss the truncated questions that were asked at Treasury questions today and consider the condition in the treaty that there should be a period of stability for at least two years before we would be allowed to enter the euro? We could also consider whether the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were he still to be in post after an election, proposes to have a referendum before that condition is met or intends to wait two years before he holds any referendum.

Mrs. Beckett: There is no ordinance—self-denying or otherwise—on the questions that Labour Members ask. I imagine that they wish to raise other matters and, unlike Conservative Members, do not want to keep going obsessively over the same ground. My hon. Friends have heard the answers and know that they have not changed. Consequently, I can only guess that they feel disinclined to dwell on an issue that has already been resolved. I simply say to the right hon. Gentleman that it is rather sad that Conservative Members are so obsessed with this issue. They insist on asking the same questions over and over again, even though they keep getting the same answers.

Mr. Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My right hon. Friend will be aware that, yesterday, the Home Office published a draft statutory instrument on the prevention and suppression of terrorism, listing 21 organisations that it sought to have banned in this country. When is that measure likely to be debated in the House? My right hon. Friend will be aware also that many people have misgivings about the inclusion of certain organisations on the list, which might restrict peace negotiations. Under the current procedure, the measure can be debated for one and a half hours on an unamendable motion. Does my right hon. Friend accept that this is an extremely serious issue, that we should have longer than one and a half hours to debate it and that right hon. and hon. Members should be able to table amendments so that we can discuss the individual organisations that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is proposing to ban? Many of us believe that there are implications not only for civil liberties, but for the peace process in a number of places, including Sri Lanka.

Mrs. Beckett: I can understand my hon. Friend's concern. As he rightly says, these are serious issues and he knows that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary takes them extremely seriously. I am afraid that I cannot undertake to provide for a procedure that would allow amendments to be tabled to a statutory instrument. There is a precedent; such proposals have often been considered in the House, but have been rejected by every Government. While I understand my hon. Friend's wish to have a lengthy debate on the matter, he will understand that I have to balance that wish against a number of other pressures on time. However, he will know that Home Office questions will take place on Monday 12 March, when an opportunity may arise to consider some of these issues. I undertake to draw his remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend who, as always, will do everything that he can to meet the concerns of hon. Members.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): May I return to the foot and mouth outbreak? It is not acceptable that we should have to wait another week until Agriculture questions next Thursday to raise the matter, as it is a fast-moving disease. This morning, I was contacted by Mr. Kevin Feakins of Garron Livestock Ltd. in my constituency. The company was closed down two days ago due to foot and mouth disease. He is very concerned about some 3,400 sheep that he exported to France which are currently being slaughtered by the French authorities. The French authorities are telling the British Embassy in Paris that Mr. Feakins will receive only FF300 per sheep, which is approximately one third of their value. Whatever we may think about live exports, they are still legal. Given that Mr. Feakins will receive the full market value in compensation for sheep that are slaughtered in the United Kingdom, but not for those exported to France, will the Leader of the House make sure that when the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food returns to the House, he will have details about those sheep, as well as those being slaughtered in the United Kingdom?

Mrs. Beckett: I did not say that we would have to wait a week to discuss the matter. I said that Agriculture questions would take place next Thursday, providing a natural opportunity for right hon. and hon. Members to raise the issue. I also said that my right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will try to keep hon. Members informed by whatever means he can. The hon. Gentleman may have overlooked the fact that I told the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) that my right hon. Friend is even now working on arrangements whereby hon. Members can be kept informed and speedily updated on any developments. I know that he will seek to do that. With regard to the specific issue that the hon. Gentleman raised, I understand his concern. I cannot undertake that my right hon. Friend will make a statement specifically about that matter, but I shall certainly draw it to his attention. I am confident that he will be in contact with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to future business on the Order Paper. The Home Secretary has tabled the draft European Parliamentary Elections (Franchise of Relevant Citizens of the Union) Regulations 2001. Before those regulations are brought to the House, will they be reviewed, as they are flawed? They omit to fulfil the Government's commitment to enfranchise the people of Gibraltar in the next European elections, which they are obliged to do following a court action that they could have avoided had they taken the advice of myself and others. I hope that the measure will be looked at again before it comes to the House because some of us will not acquiesce in this grave omission by our silence.

[Mr. Andrew Mackinlay]

If my right hon. Friend thinks it somewhat irksome that I keep raising these issues as a matter of attrition with the Home Secretary, let me say that I take heart because the Home Secretary is a listening Minister. Two or three years ago, I asked him to introduce a measure to allow Church of England and Catholic priests to stand for election in the House of Commons; he refused. It pays dividends to keep working at it because, this afternoon, I hope that we will give a Third Reading to the very important measure for which I campaigned.

Mrs. Beckett: I would never dream of regarding my hon. Friend as irksome. He is a conscientious and hard-working Member who has had a good deal of success in raising issues in the House, as he points out. I shall draw the matter to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, but I cannot undertake to find time for a separate special debate. The order will have to go through a scrutiny process in the House and outside, and I shall ensure that his concerns are aired.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate next week on departmental replies to the correspondence of Members of Parliament? If she cannot do that, will she use her influence with other Departments to ensure that we receive speedier responses? I wrote to the Department of Health on 29 September 2000 and received an answer on 12 February which said:

"You and your constituents will be pleased to learn that the British Medical Association currently runs a mentoring scheme for overseas doctors. They can be contacted at . . . BMA House."

That was an interesting answer, but I do not think that I should have waited five months for it.

Mrs. Beckett: I share the hon. Gentleman's view, as will my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, to whose attention I shall draw that example.

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster): Now that my right hon. Friend has had an opportunity to read the Procedure Committee's report on the election of the Speaker, what progress has she made in finding time to debate its recommendations at an early date?

Mrs. Beckett: I am mindful of the Committee's report and its excellent work. We have not been able to find time to hold that debate in the next couple of weeks, but I am aware that there is pressure on both sides of the House for the matter to be discussed.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): On foot and mouth, can the Leader of the House guarantee that a Minister will give guidance on how animals that were sold for slaughter in Carlisle ended up on an open-range farm in south Armagh? Something has to be done to tighten procedures, especially when that practice could have a devastating impact on the hard-hit industry in Northern Ireland and could spread the disease to the Republic, which would be even worse hit.

Mrs. Beckett: I believe that that is under active consideration.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Will it be possible to debate the impact of Government policies on single parents, if only to dispel the myths peddled by the tabloids and to demonstrate that the vast majority of single parents are victims of desertion, bereavement or divorce? Perhaps we could also discuss cases such as that of my constituent who came into my office the other day to tell me that her life had been transformed by the working families tax credit. She was able to afford child care, which meant that she could get off benefits, into work and do something interesting.

Mrs. Beckett: I know from experience and from comments that people have made to me how much many single parents welcome the beneficial changes that the Government have introduced, especially because they are directed at children, which is a prime concern for single parents in particular. What my hon. Friend says is true: most single parents are involuntarily in that role and are doing their best to raise their families without them being harmed further by the circumstances that they face. I fear, however, that I cannot find time to hold a special debate on the matter on the Floor of the House in the near future, but she might want to pursue the issue in Westminster Hall.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. During business questions, hon. Members should ask for either a statement or a debate. Furthermore, if they are brief, I can call all those who want to put a question.

Mr. Stephen Day (Cheadle): Thank you, Mr. Speaker—I shall try to get this right.

The Leader of the House will be aware that, although the Opposition Whips Office is extremely effective, it cannot possibly be so effective as to have planted two or three moles on the Labour Benches this afternoon to demand that the Secretary of State for Education and Employment come to the House to explain why a former head of the schools inspectorate launched such a devastating attack on the failure of the Government's education policies. I hope that she will feel able to listen to the demands of her Back Benchers. If she agrees to them, I assure her that the Opposition will be extremely pleased.

Mrs. Beckett: I do not think that I can add much to what has already been said, but no doubt the matter will be returned to many times in the House.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 365:

[That this House, bearing in mind the calls in the NHS plan, echoed by the British Medical Association, for more medical professionals, welcomes the joint bid by the universities of York and Hull to establish a medical school; notes the support from NHS trusts in York, Hull, North Yorkshire, the East Riding and South Humber; further notes that this is the largest population centre in England without a medical school; and expresses hope that, if successful, this bid will improve healthcare provision and training in a region with significant areas of deprivation and help alleviate the significant problems the region has in recruiting and retaining clinical staff.]

It refers to the need to expand provision for medical education and new medical schools if we are to satisfy demand. A bid focusing on my constituency has been

made by the universities of Brighton and Sussex. Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on that important issue, given that the provision of more doctors is one of the keys to bringing our health service up to scratch?

Mrs. Beckett: I share my hon. Friend's view on the importance of providing more doctors. He will know that the Government have already expanded the number of training places and that we are keen to ensure that the work force is expanded in that way. I am aware of the application to which he refers; it will be given sympathetic consideration, as are all such applications.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Can the Leader of the House provide for an urgent debate, immediately after the Budget statement, on the disproportionate state benefits and expenditure in Scotland compared with those in England? Does she not agree that it is important that the electorate are informed, through a lengthy and detailed debate in the House, as to why Scotland is such a privileged and cosseted part of the United Kingdom? She will know that the Scots sometimes receive as much as 25 per cent. more expenditure per head than the English on education, health and other matters. The taxpayers of England will want to know why that is so and where the Government stand on that issue well ahead of a general election.

Mrs. Beckett: The Government stand where previous Governments have always stood on implementing the agreement on and breakdown of the provision of public moneys. As I recall, that was not changed by the Conservatives when they had a 20-year opportunity to do so. In that context, I cannot undertake to provide an urgent debate on a matter that is not an emergency and has no urgency about it.

Mr. Christopher Leslie (Shipley): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on local transport investment? This week, the final report of the Aire Valley public transport commission in my constituency will be launched. It will help us to take advantage of new investment in the Bingley relief road and improvements to Leeds city station, as well as bringing together for the first time all the bus and train companies and transport user groups.

Mrs. Beckett: I understand my hon. Friend's strong interest in the issue, on which he has long campaigned—in fact, I think that he chaired the Aire Valley public transport commission, which provides a good example of a range of local interests coming together to address and satisfy local need. I also understand my hon. Friend's desire for the matter to be aired. Perhaps he will find an opportunity to do that in Westminster Hall; I fear that I cannot find time for it on the Floor of the House.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the Leader of the House reconsider her uncharacteristic truculence of 8 February and agree now to a debate on the Government's plan to scrap the pound after a rigged referendum? Given that millions of Labour voters want to keep the pound and that the right hon. Lady herself has a distinguished track record of euroscepticism, why does she not now do the noble thing and resign from the Cabinet to speak up for those people, thereby ensuring that she becomes a real heroine, perhaps the length and breadth of the land and certainly from her birthplace of Ashton-under-Lyne to her constituency of Derby, South?

Mrs. Beckett: That is all very flattering. I appreciate the hon. Gentleman's warm wish to welcome me back to the Back Benches.

First, it is pushing the boat out a bit to talk about a rigged referendum for which no preparations have yet even been made or announced. The hon. Gentleman is convinced already that it will be rigged.

Secondly, I fear that I must disappoint the hon. Gentleman. Although he is entirely right that I campaigned in 1975 and for some years thereafter on the issue of membership of the European Union—I not infrequently remind those who did not share that point of view at the time that I did so—I have long since come to the conclusion that the United Kingdom has been involved in the EU for so long, and our legal and financial structures are so enmeshed, that it is now essential that we make the best of our membership. If that means that at some point we must consider entry into economic and monetary union, the House and the country will have to consider it.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): Will the Leader arrange for a Minister at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions to make a statement, following much concern about the erection of telecommunication masts and related environmental and health problems? In my constituency, there are three applications involving Ribchester, Clayton le Dale and an area just outside Longridge. It is a rural constituency and we do not want to turn the Ribble valley, or the countryside of the rest of England and Wales, into a giant Meccano set. Is it possible for a Minister to advise us of the changes that may be made to ensure that more power is given to local authorities to determine where masts are erected?

Mrs. Beckett: I know that the issue arouses concern on both sides of the House. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) introduced a ten-minute Bill on the subject yesterday. Incidentally, it was opposed by the hon. Member for Lichfield (Mr. Fabricant), which shows that there are different views on both sides of the House.

The issue is frequently aired, and I shall draw the remarks of the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. In the circumstances, I cannot find time for a special debate on the matter on the Floor of the House. There are many opportunities to raise the issue, and it is raised and aired continually. I shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman's concerns are passed on.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): After the premature leak to the media yesterday of the results of the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry, will the Deputy Prime Minister make a statement on the report, which is of enormous interest to London and south-east Members. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to give us a courteous and proper presentation of the report's conclusions. When he does so, will he tell us what action he is taking to trace the leaker of highly market-sensitive information?

Mrs. Beckett: My understanding is that there has not been a leak and that no decision on the inspector's report

[Mrs. Beckett]

has yet been taken. I do not know from where the report originated. I undertake to let my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister know of the concern in the House that, when a decision is made, it should be properly conveyed to the House.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Will the Leader of the House make a statement next week on the delay in Departments responding to written parliamentary questions? One of my written questions was answered yesterday and appears today in *Hansard* at column 649W. I tabled the question to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport four weeks ago. It was a simple question. I asked when the Hinduja foundation paid the sponsorship money for the dome—hardly the most exacting question. I now have the answer, which is that a 10 per cent. deposit was paid in February 1999, just before the passport was issued, and that the rest was paid afterwards. I am still waiting for answers to questions that were tabled at the same time about the involvement of Lord Levy in the episode. I cannot understand why I am not getting more timely responses.

Mrs. Beckett: The issue that the hon. Gentleman raises has been aired in the House and no doubt will be aired again, but I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on it.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): May I take the Leader back to the foot and mouth crisis? Farmers in my constituency are subject to movement restriction orders because of outbreaks just across two county boundaries. They are desperately worried about the situation. Will the right hon. Lady make earnest representations to her right hon. Friend the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to make a statement to the House early next week on the fast-moving situation? Farmers are urging me to make representations about the welfare implications of their not being able to move animals to slaughter, and the compensation arrangements.

If the Leader of the House is unable to do that, may I make a practical suggestion to her, which I ask her urgently to consider? My suggestion is that after the Minister takes Agriculture questions next Thursday, he should answer a separate question on foot and mouth, so that we will have time to question him specifically on the issue. Thursday is a light day of business in the House. It is one of four days' debate on the Budget, and there is no reason why a little time should not be found for such a serious situation.

Mrs. Beckett: I will convey to my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food the general wish that has been expressed today for the House to be kept informed. The hon. Gentleman knows that my right hon. Friend is extremely conscientious about doing that. I know that my right hon. Friend hopes that the arrangements that he intends to put in place for information will mean that hon. Members do not need to question him at the Dispatch Box about developments, and that he will keep them informed by other means, but obviously that remains to be seen. The hon. Gentleman makes a very interesting suggestion about how to handle the issue at Agriculture questions, which no doubt Mr. Speaker will also have heard. Again, I will draw that to the attention of my right hon. Friend, to see whether he considers it the right way to deal with the matter.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): May I draw the right hon. Lady's attention to this week's edition of *Computer Weekly*, which is published today? It alleges that two leaked internal Ministry of Defence documents indicate that critical changes were made to the Chinook mark 2's FADEC software. As a consequence of that, I was given a misleading answer to a question that I tabled in the summer of 1999. The Leader of the House will be aware that the matter is of interest to hon. Members in all parts of the House, and that the Prime Minister has answered a number of questions on it. The other place is due to debate the issue next Monday. Given the allegations made in *Computer Weekly*, does the right hon. Lady agree that the House deserves a statement or, at the very least, a fulsome written answer?

Mrs. Beckett: I fear that *Computer Weekly*, no doubt incorrectly, is not my daily reading, or even weekly reading. Consequently, I am not aware of the issue to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I undertake to draw it to the attention of the relevant Ministers, who are no doubt already being briefed on the matter. I fear that I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on it, but if there is concern that the wrong information has been given, that will doubtless be addressed in some way.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement, please, from the Prime Minister explaining the contradiction between what he told our most important ally, President Bush, about the so-called European Union rapid reaction force being "firmly embedded" in NATO, and the provisions of the annexes to the treaty of Nice, which make it abundantly clear that the command and control of any such force will be entirely independent of NATO or any other organisation, other than the EU?

Mrs. Beckett: The issue has been aired repeatedly in the House. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is certainly aware of the concern that has been expressed. I understand that the discussions that took place in the United States were full and constructive, and that there is complete agreement between our Government and the Government of the US that there will be real value in the different role that the European rapid reaction force will play, and about the huge importance of NATO.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): May I endorse the calls for a debate on education policy that were made by the hon. Members for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) and for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor)? Clearly, they want to sort out the confusion among Labour Members, who now know that they are part of a Government in which the Secretary of State for Education and Employment finds it difficult to make tough decisions and the Prime Minister cannot see things through. Of course, the Government are also prepared simultaneously to attack comprehensive and grammar schools. They are terminally confused and they do not know whether they are in favour of selection or against it, so it is time that we had a statement or debate to clear the matter up.

Mrs. Beckett: There have been extensive statements and debates on education matters, and more will no doubt

occur in future. The only confusion of which I am aware exists on the Opposition Benches, and perhaps in the mind of the former chief inspector of schools.

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire): Is the right hon. Lady aware of the huge threat that is posed to rural magistrates courts by the requirements of the Human Rights Act 1998? To conform with the Act, courts must be reorganised so as to ensure that the public do not see prisoners in handcuffs, as such restraints infringe their dignity. The courts of Market Drayton, Whitchurch and Oswestry face significant costs. For example, Oswestry magistrates court requires £197,450 for compliance. May we have an urgent statement from the Lord Chancellor's Department, explaining its policy? The requirements are imposed by central Government, but in theory the local expenditure is decided by magistrates.

Mrs. Beckett: I cannot undertake to find time for a special debate on the matter, although I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern. I know that issues regarding the handling of rural magistrates courts and their problems are frequently raised with the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy). Indeed, I believe that Question Time for that Department will be held next week, so he may find an opportunity to raise the issue then.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the right hon. Lady agree that the timing of the foot and mouth outbreak is especially unfortunate for hard-pressed farmers, as at least 50 per cent. of last year's lamb exports were destined for France and other European Union markets, which also form 90 per cent. of the culled sow markets? I understand that those two categories would not qualify for the funds that the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food explained yesterday. Will she therefore invite the Chancellor of the Exchequer to make a statement next week to announce the application of contingency funds to those categories?

Mrs. Beckett: I am aware of the particular misfortune in respect of the timing of what is in any case a very worrying outbreak, and of the great anxiety that is felt in the farming community. I cannot undertake to invite my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to make a special contribution on that issue next week, not least because he will be making his Budget statement. What that will contain is another matter, about which I know no more than she does.

BILL PRESENTED

Fixed-term Parliaments

Tony Wright, supported by Mr. Giles Radice, Mr. Robin Corbett, Mr. Frank Field, Helen Jackson, Mr. Austin Mitchell, Mrs. Anne Campbell, Ms Harriet Harman and Mr. Mark Oaten, presented a Bill to provide for fixed-term Parliaments: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 6 April, and to be printed [Bill 54].

Point of Order

1.23 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that the terms of the Order of the House made on 6 February this year ensure that if the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill, which we are about to consider, is amended during its Committee stage, consideration on Report must begin no later than 5 o'clock this afternoon. On behalf of my hon. Friends, I am therefore interested to establish what guidance you can offer as to the admissibility or otherwise of manuscript amendments, especially in view of the regrettable experience of 17 July last year, when the House considered the Football Disorder Bill in similar circumstances. After the Committee stage, we proceeded to Report and there was no proper opportunity for hon. Members to table amendments. Obviously, we would want to avoid a repetition of those events, which were acknowledged to be a farce by not only my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) but the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes).

Mr. Speaker: If manuscript amendments are submitted, I shall obviously consider them, as I always do.

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Ordered,

That—

(1) the matter of the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales, being a matter relating exclusively to Wales, be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Welsh Grand Committee shall meet at the County Hall, Cwmbran, on Monday 12th March at half past Ten o'clock to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the matter of the Budget Statement and its implications for Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)), proceedings being interrupted at Four o'clock.—*[Mr. Pearson.]*

Orders of the Day

House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill

Considered in Committee, pursuant to Order [6 February].

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

1.25 pm

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): On a point of order, Sir Alan. I am sorry for interrupting, but may I raise with you the availability of the responses to the consultation document, which underlie the Bill? As Committee proceedings get under way, it would be helpful if we had the fullest information, as a Standing Committee would have. The explanatory notes, which you may have before you, refer to the consultation process that the Government undertook before producing the Bill. On Second Reading, the Minister in charge prayed in aid the results of the consultation with the various Churches concerned. However, when I asked the Library whether the Churches' replies had been deposited there, I was told that this was not a public consultation exercise.

I have not telephoned the Minister's office—I gather that that is rather dangerous and one might lose one's job over it—but this point matters. Allowing priests to stand for Parliament is a significant change to the constitution and one would expect such a change to involve a consultation. A consultation has been conducted, but one would also expect the Minister to make the results available. On Second Reading, he said:

"All were content for the restrictions to be removed."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 806.]

However, perhaps that does not convey the complexity of the Churches' response on some issues and the Committee will therefore be forced to rely on his interpretation of those responses, rather than have the documents to hand.

Would it be in order to suspend proceedings for a few minutes so that the material could be made available? In Standing Committee, it is normal for such a request to be made and, indeed, for a Minister's office to supply the necessary documents.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I have allowed the hon. Gentleman to air his point in full, but I have to tell him that it is not a matter for the Chair; it is a matter for debate. I have no doubt that he will have the opportunity to press the point further in the course of later debates.

Clause 1

REMOVAL OF DISQUALIFICATION OF CLERGY

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I beg to move amendment No. 14, in page 1, line 5, at beginning insert "Subject to subsection (1A),".

The Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 13, in page 1, line 6, after "ordained", insert—

'to the office of priest or deacon'.

No. 12, in page 1, line 7, after "minister", insert "(or the recognised equivalent)".

No. 15, in page 1, line 7, at end insert—

'(1A) A person is disqualified from being or being elected as a member of the House of Commons if—

(a) he has been ordained to the office of priest or deacon in accordance with any form of episcopal ordination, and

(b) he is practising as a priest or deacon.'.

Miss Widdecombe: I should say at the outset that there will be free votes for Conservative Members on all the issues being debated in Committee and on Report, though the Government obviously intend not to allow that stage of consideration, as well as on Third Reading.

I have moved the amendment to try to distinguish between serving and ex-priests. The Minister will be aware that I said on Second Reading that I was unhappy with the prospect of practising priests, as opposed to ministers in non-conformist Churches, being able to sit in the House. Bishops of the Church of England, who are, of course, practising, are allowed to sit in the other place. However, they do not have 70,000 constituents to look after, nor do they have long and complicated Committee interests. Their attendance tends to be confined to debates on issues that have a direct impact on matters on which the Church has, or is expected to have, a view.

An ordained priest who had not given up his orders would serve as a Member of Parliament both as a priest consecrated to the full-time service of almighty God and one engaged in the service of Caesar in this place. That is, in my view, an amazing combination even to contemplate, but we are now putting the possibility of such a combination into law. The proposal needs to be tested on its merits, and should be viewed entirely separately from the issue of ex-priests.

1.30 pm

We all know why the Bill is being introduced: it is to enable a particular prospective Labour party candidate to take his seat if he is successful. It is not about great issues of principle. As I said on Second Reading, the Bill could have been presented on at least four earlier occasions—I subsequently discovered a fifth—had the Government been seriously moved by its merits. The fact is, however, that it was not presented on those occasions, because it was of no interest to the Government until it affected a Scottish Labour candidate, who suddenly realised that if he won he would not be able to sit in the House. He, of course, is an ex-priest.

Mr. Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I may be able to deal with some of the right hon. Lady's other points later if I catch your eye, Sir Alan, but I now have a question about the narrow point relating to episcopally ordained and practising priests. Does the right hon. Lady extend that to a priest ordained in the Liberal Catholic Church or any of the old Catholic Churches? She should bear in mind, for instance, that our late and distinguished friend Dr. Eric Taylor, Assistant Clerk of the House, was ordained as a priest in the Liberal Catholic Church. Would

she have excluded him or his colleagues for seeking election, given that such people are by definition part-time pastors as well as episcopally ordained priests?

Miss Widdecombe: I am going to stick to—

Mr. Mackinlay: The right hon. Lady does not know the answer.

Miss Widdecombe: I do, but I am going to stick to the definitions on which we have worked throughout. I fully acknowledge that they are arguable: I doubt whether anyone here would suggest that there is a logical coherence in the definition of what constitutes a priest and, for that matter, the definition of what constitutes an ex-Roman Catholic priest. No one is likely to claim that those definitions are perfect.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The right hon. Lady described David Cairns as an ex-priest. I understand that he is currently a priest, although he no longer conducts the Mass: he no longer does the work of a priest, and I gather that he has no intention of returning to the priesthood. Under the rules of the Catholic Church, however, once a priest, always a priest. That presents one of the difficulties and in many ways illustrates the point that the right hon. Lady appears to be making.

Miss Widdecombe: Indeed. The Minister may recall that during our last debate I called out, from a sedentary position, "Once a priest, always a priest".

It is already possible for members of the Church of England who have been ordained and have forsaken the priesthood to be elected to sit and to serve. That is not possible if they are currently serving members. There is a distinction between those who have left the priesthood and those who are currently serving. The candidate on whose behalf all this shemozzle is taking place no longer practises—although I agree that "once a priest, always a priest" is one of the more confusing issues.

What I am trying to ascertain is whether, when we gave the Bill a Second Reading—unwisely, in my view—we should have explored in more detail the issue of allowing someone who is currently practising to sit, and allowing someone who no longer practises to sit, regardless of whether his Church has released him from the title or order of the priesthood.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Is not the point that my right hon. Friend has introduced to the debate more properly a matter for the Church or religious denomination or institution itself and its adherents than for the law? The issue on which she is now touching—whether we need the law to rescue religious beliefs and believers from themselves—is very important.

Miss Widdecombe: We are already using the law for that purpose. That is why we are having this debate. If we had always taken the view that the matter was nothing to do with Parliament, there would not be a law prescribing who can and who cannot sit in our midst. There is already such a law. No religious denomination really has the power to prevent its ex-priests from doing anything that they like. Therefore, one cannot sensibly argue that we can leave it to the Pope or to the Archbishop of Canterbury when his people have forsaken the priesthood, renounced their vows and decided that they are not going to be bound by the strictures of whoever it was to whom they previously pledged obedience. I think that my right hon. Friend will acknowledge that there is some difficulty in just passing the whole matter over to others.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am struggling to understand why the right hon. Lady—who objects to the legislation because she thinks that a pastor has too great a work load—makes a distinction between those who are episcopally ordained and other ministers of religion.

Miss Widdecombe: The law does.

Mr. Mackinlay: If the right hon. Lady were to pursue her argument to its logical conclusion, she would be seeking to amend the Bill to exclude ministers of other religions. I am a walking witness to the fact that the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) is, according to his lights, an extremely good and diligent pastor; I have been to Martyrs Memorial church, which is extremely good value in terms of preaching and in every other term. He also demonstrably fulfils his role as a very diligent, albeit controversial, hon. Member. Why is there a distinction between those who are episcopally ordained and those who are ministers of religion but not ordained?

Miss Widdecombe: As I made very clear to the hon. Gentleman on Second Reading, the issue is being debated from the point of view of conscience. He will be aware that some of us regard the priesthood as something that is consecrated and flows from recognising the orders of those who do the ordination in the first place. There are other denominations, to which neither he nor I belong, that do not take that line in their recognition of ministers. I have always held that view. However, it is not only a matter of where I might be coming from; in this case, the law itself makes the distinction. Therefore, operating on the basis of the distinction that the law already makes, I am trying to examine whether, on that same basis, we should be proceeding as was decided on Second Reading.

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): The Bill says that we should not make a distinction between those who are episcopally ordained and those who are not, whether they are Baptists, Methodists or any of the other great faiths. Surely we are saying that it is up to Churches themselves to decide what their ministers or priests can and cannot do and that it is not up to the state to do that. Our job is to extend as far as we possibly can the boundaries of those who can stand.

Some of us share and practise the same religion. In a way, the fact that Catholicism is at the centre of this particular case might obstruct us from seeing the overall illogical nature of the debate. However, if we want to go ahead and attempt to define in law what an ex-priest is, we really will have the wrath of the Catholic Church on us.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Lady is catching a bad habit from the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) in making an intervention into a speech. An intervention must remain an intervention, even in Committee.

Mr. Mackinlay: I anointed her.

Miss Widdecombe: Whether the hon. Lady made an intervention or a speech, it did not take us much further.

[Miss Widdecombe]

With all due respect, she was raising exactly the same point as that raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), and I answered it. I do not see much point in repeating the answer. It is worth while debating whether it is proper for people who have been episcopally ordained—I know that the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) will complain that I confine myself to that, but so does the law—and are full-time serving priests to sit in this House.

Dr. Norman A. Godman (Greenock and Inverclyde): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Miss Widdecombe: I hope that the intervention is sensible.

Dr. Godman: The right hon. Lady speaks with characteristic courtesy and all the fervour of a recent convert—*[Interruption.]* To someone born into the Church, she is a recent convert. Would not proposed section (1A) in amendment No. 15 harm the interests of former priests?

Miss Widdecombe: No, I do not believe that it would. On the other hand, my position is straightforward, as I have always said that once one is a priest, one is always a priest. By tabling the amendment, I was endeavouring to debate a distinction that was not made on Second Reading, when we debated matters in the round. What do we accept in the case of ex-priests? If somebody enters holy orders, subsequently leaves and then wants to pursue some other avenue in life, why should not they be allowed to do so in law? There is a quite serious case to be made on that basis. There is a distinction, however, between whether such people should be able to sit in this place and whether somebody who is consecrated, practising and has a flock should be able to do so, which is worthy of debate.

The House will know, because I said it on Second Reading, that I do not believe that the two go together. I believe also, however, that there are other big issues concerning bishops, which may be debated under later amendments. If the Bill were enacted, a bishop would be able to sit in this place. I see a distinction between a fully serving diocesan bishop not being allowed to sit in this place, because he could be called to the House of Lords, and a suffragan bishop, who is not—I was about to say in danger—likely to be called to the other place. We have gone into this rather too quickly because of the Labour candidate in question, and we have not properly considered a host of refinements that raise further questions.

I shall endeavour to press the amendment to a Division because it would at least be appropriate if those of us who do not believe that consecrated priests should be involved in this place had the opportunity to put that on record.

Dr. Godman: I promise to be brief.

The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) has said a couple of times that once a priest, always a priest. It would be fair to say that that complies with paragraph 3 of canon 285 of the Roman Catholic code of canon law 1983, which states:

"Clerics are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power."

Although I have no experience as a parliamentary draftsman, my concern—I asked the right hon. Lady about this—is that the wording of amendment No. 15, against which I shall happily vote regardless of whether it is the subject of a three-line Whip or is a free vote, as I believe it should be because it is a matter of conscience, would harm the interests of former priests. That is a serious charge to lay against the right hon. Lady, whose attention I do not expect to receive, although I am glad that her hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), is listening.

1.45 pm

I know a goodly number of fine, decent and honourable men who have given up the priesthood. A man whom I am honoured to say is a very close friend of mine gave up the priesthood after 25 years of selfless and remarkable service to his parishioners in Glasgow. He decided that he could no longer accept the canon law on celibacy and that he wanted to lead an ordinary life, as many others throughout the Catholic Church have decided to do. That man now leads a happily married life in the south of Glasgow.

There is no chance of the right hon. Lady's amendment being accepted because it does not make sense and it is harmful to those who have left the priesthood. *[Interruption.]* Yes it is, in my view.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Godman: I shall give way with, I hope, better grace than the right hon. Lady gave way to me.

Miss Widdecombe: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and for doing so in a state of grace. Amendment No. 15 would not affect those who have left the priesthood because of the use of the word "and", not "or". The amendment says that he would be disqualified if he has been ordained to the office of priest and he is practising as a priest or deacon.

Dr. Godman: That is an assurance of sorts, but it is a question of interpretation. I stick to what I said: the amendment is unhelpful.

Of course, I am closely involved in what has become known as the Cairns affair in the west of Scotland. In this place, just three weeks ago, I had to defend the good faith of the members of the local Labour party, who were quite unaware of the anomaly faced by Mr. Cairns. He chose not to make this known at the hustings. That was a decision for him and his conscience. I am saying, in all conscience, that I am deeply disturbed by the right hon. Lady's amendment. She seems to be seeking to subsume the law of the United Kingdom under that of Roman Catholic law. That I find unacceptable.

A priest may choose to give up his parish duties and take up what I think is a more normal life. I have never been convinced about the law concerning compulsory celibacy—I think that it is harming the Church badly. I hasten to say that I speak as a lapsed Catholic. I was born and baptised into the Church, but I left. It was many years before the right hon. Lady entered the Church—there was no link between my departure and her arrival into the Church, I am pleased to say.

It is only right and proper that we enact the Bill. I believe perhaps in a Leninist way—I am old Labour rather than a Marxist or a Leninist—that in the light of the right hon. Lady's comments about a certain candidate, the ends justify the means. That is why I support the Bill but certainly not amendment No. 15.

At present, if that good friend of mine in Glasgow chooses to stand for the Scottish Parliament, it seems that there is no impediment to his doing so and, if he were successful, to taking his seat there. The same holds for the Northern Ireland and Welsh Assemblies, and it should hold for this place, too. It might improve matters in this place if we had a few former priests on the Benches.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend accept that we would take precisely the same attitude towards the Bill if the person concerned was a Conservative or Liberal candidate? I certainly would. It would make not the slightest difference.

Does my hon. Friend also accept that there should be no discrimination against anyone in this place? Catholics campaigned to be able to stand for Parliament and so did Jews in 1860. Charles Bradlaugh, who represented Northampton, was refused the right to sit in this Chamber four times because he had no religious views. We want an all-inclusive House of Commons, and I hope that that will always be the case.

Dr. Godman: I agree with my hon. Friend. As soon as this anomaly became known to people in the west of Scotland—I do not think that ordinary people knew about it before—a number of Catholics asked me whether it was yet another element in discrimination that they had suffered down the years. I make that point in relation to amendment No. 15. Catholics and others, from the Church of Scotland and from elsewhere, have said that the anomaly is absurd and should go. I hope that when I address a meeting of ministers and priests in my constituency tomorrow, I shall be in the happy position of being able to say that the amendments—especially amendment No. 15—have been rejected and that the Bill is proceeding on its way to the other place, which should be abolished anyway.

Mr. Fallon: I shall speak to amendment No. 13, though I confess that amendment No. 14, moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), covers a much bigger point. Although she kindly indicated that we have a free vote, I am happy to tell her that if she chooses to press it to a Division, I shall be in the Lobby with her.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way to allow me to let him know that I have asked my officials to ensure that at least some of the letters from the Churches that we consulted will be placed in the Library, as he requested. Letters from the United Kingdom Churches—Catholic, Church of England and so on—should now be in the Library, or at least on their way there. We are still seeking the consent of the Catholic Church in Ireland and the Church of Ireland to allow their letters to be placed in the Library. I shall obtain that as soon as possible.

Mr. Fallon: I am not just grateful, but stunned at such speedy action by a Minister. It is important that the responses are in the Library so that we may read the wording used by the Churches on these complex issues.

I was speaking specifically to amendment No. 13. The Bill appears to have been drafted rather hastily. It contains no definition of "ordained", and we should be clear on exactly what we are talking about. My amendment reflects the wording of The House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act 1801, which will be repealed by the Bill, picking out the words "priest or deacon". I note that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald picked out the same phrase for amendment No. 15, and I hope—indeed pray—that if I support her on amendment No. 14, she may be moved to support me on amendment No. 13. I stress that it is essentially a drafting, technical amendment, and is not as significant as amendment No. 14, which I shall support.

Mr. Mackinlay: During this Committee stage, I want to express some irritation. My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) initiated a private Member's Bill that would, in effect, have introduced the measure before us, but because of our procedures, it was not enacted. I had previously questioned the Home Secretary about the desirability of such a measure during this Parliament, but he saw me off. We know that the Bill is now being introduced because of events in Greenock and Port Glasgow—

Dr. Godman: Inverclyde.

Mr. Mackinlay: I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman). That is the reason for the Bill's introduction, and it is the worst possible reason for making a change. Nevertheless, it is a change that we should make. Sometimes, I am a moderniser, while some of my good friends on the Front Bench are deeply conservative: they should have taken the initiative sooner as a matter of human rights and enfranchisement, rather than introducing a Bill now for the worst possible reason. I wanted to make that point, and I do so unashamedly. I wish that the Home Secretary and others would listen more to Labour Members and others in this place. It would be better for the House.

Also on a serious note, long before I had an early ambition to be a Member of Parliament, I wanted to be not a train driver but a priest. I remember telling a small group of children about it in later years. They were pretty geared up and they said that it reminded them of a parable. I asked what they meant and they said, "A man came from Jericho and fell among robbers." They were referring to the fact that I took a different course. I persuaded them that the honourable House was not like that, but the course of my life could have been somewhat different had ambitions from early childhood been sustained.

More recently, I remember that the vicar of East Tilbury, who was a good friend of mine in the constituency and has now moved on, was indignant that he was prevented by law from standing for election to the House of Commons. He did not want to stand, but he found the fact that he was prevented from standing an affront to his human rights. He pressed me on the matter; he was the cause of my tabling the original question to the Home Secretary. The fact that he was prevented from standing by virtue of his calling is discrimination that is contrary to human rights and to our traditions of democracy in the House.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Is not the phrase "by virtue of his calling" the key point? That is

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

the higher calling. If the priest exercises his mind overmuch with his rights, is he not giving rather less attention than he ought to his duties and responsibilities to his flock?

Mr. Mackinlay: I am coming to that point. It is an interesting one. I listened carefully to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) when she moved her amendment, and I think that it is fair to say that part of the thrust of her argument was that a good priest—for some reason, she makes the distinction between those who are episcopally ordained and ministers of religion, as if they had different obligations to the people for whom they provide pastoral care—cannot possibly have time to give service to the House of Commons. That is a very dangerous argument for any of us here to advance, and especially for a Conservative Member.

Yesterday, I stumbled across the Register of Members' Interests, which has now been published, and my breath was taken away by the dexterity with which my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) and the hon. Member for Banbury (Mr. Baldry) can apparently fulfil all their other obligations and still fulfil their obligations to the House of Commons. I am amazed at, and admire, their dexterity.

I invite people to look at the Register of Members' interests. I only wish that Members of Parliament were full-time. We are told that it is perfectly proper and honourable, and that as a matter of capacity, it is possible for people to fulfil the office of Member of the House of Commons and diligently pursue other offices as well—except, if we accept the argument of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, if one is a Roman Catholic priest or a practising priest of the Church of England. It is illogical to suggest that there is an incompatibility.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): If the hon. Gentleman attended the Second Reading debate, he will know that I am sympathetic to the Bill. May I counsel caution to him in traducing, deliberately or inadvertently, the track record of hon. Members on a particular side of the House? Does he accept what the empirical evidence will demonstrate to him—that the most active and assiduous attenders of the Chamber sit on the Conservative Benches?

Mr. Mackinlay: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the *Official Report* tomorrow, he will see that I carefully crafted and weighed up every word that I uttered about my fellow Members of the House of Commons. I expressed some amazement, nay admiration, for their dexterity and capacity diligently to fulfil both the office of Member of the House of Commons and other obligations. I only wish that I was as qualified—or even ordained—so to do.

2 pm

There is an important point that relates to the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick) and to a matter that we have also debated in this place: should the parliamentary oath be an impediment to serving here? I am amazed that hon. Members cannot understand that the right to be a representative in this place should come from the people alone. If the people want to put up the candlestick maker, the clock maker, the good, the bad, the ugly, the malevolent, the eccentric—*[Interruption.]*—the National Front, a minister of one religion or a pastor of another, that is their right. If people overextend themselves so that they are dilatory in discharging their office as Members of the House of Commons, that is something that the electorate can and should take into account if those people offer themselves for re-election. Indeed, their electoral opponents could legitimately draw attention to their conduct, their stewardship and their attendance to the business of the House.

It is irrelevant where those who offer themselves as candidates come from. It is the right of people in every constituency to choose their representative in this place. It is not for us to impose conditions. As well as supporting the measure, I want a greater extension of the possibilities by doing away with the problem of the oath. Historically, the oath was an impediment to membership of this place, and it remains so.

Mr. Winnick: Is my hon. Friend aware that he is using almost the same words as those who argued for the right of Charles Bradlaugh to enter this place? As I pointed out, Bradlaugh was refused on four occasions; and even when he was willing to take the oath, the House said that it would be a mockery. However, he lived long enough to hear the House apologise for its conduct. He established a right without which many of us would not be able to be Members of the House of Commons.

Mr. Mackinlay: Indeed. Furthermore, if those impediments exist, either people are invited to ignore such unenforceable provisions or they have to do so anyway, because their conscience dictates that they are entitled to be Members of this place.

I shall come to the question of whether a priest is laicised or has renounced his priesthood in a moment. However, we are illustrating the absurdity of the amendment proposed by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald. We touched on the oath as an example. Fianna Fail Members were kept out of the Free State Parliament because they had to sign an oath of allegiance to George V. Eventually, De Valera said that the procedure was a charade and signed the oath. That is not healthy—

The Chairman: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I think I need to try to maintain a distinction between matters that are better discussed on Second Reading and those that are directly applicable to the amendment that we are discussing. I have given him some leeway for illustration, but he must now come back to the point of the amendment.

Mr. Mackinlay: I am grateful to you, Sir Alan.

Amendment No. 15 refers to "episcopal ordination". The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald seems to believe that there can be some material distinction between people who are episcopally ordained—primarily, although not exclusively, in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

As she has invited us to do so, we must look into what episcopal ordination means. It relates to episcopal succession, a concept that even some of the most distinguished theologians of those churches and other denominations consider somewhat dubious. The question turns on whether there has been a continuity, since the apostles, in the laying on of hands in an order, so that there can be political succession.

Mr. Swayne: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I will give way in a moment, but I am dealing with the right hon. Lady's argument.

The concept is challengeable by theologians. It is nonsense that it should be an issue in British constitutional law. Bishop Montefiore—a distinguished former Member of another place and the Anglican bishop of Birmingham—challenges that view in one of his tracts. In dealing with the validity of Anglican orders, about which the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England have disagreed for some 150 years, he said that the question of the laying on of hands is dubious.

If the right hon. Lady's proposal were passed, could a part-practising priest be elected to the House? If he were challenged, his defence might be to challenge the meaning of the phrase "episcopal ordination". That would involve the absurdity of going back not hundreds but thousands of years, and bringing in theologians as witnesses to say whether the ceremony, rubric and intention of the laying on of hands, which goes right back to the apostles, was involved. I invite the House to consider how absurd that would be.

Miss Widdecombe: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mackinlay: I shall give way to the right hon. Lady in a moment, but I hope that I am diligently dealing with her proposals from a constitutional and a canon law point of view.

The right hon. Lady failed to respond to the point about the very important—albeit minor—religious denominations that ordain episcopally. For example, Dr. Eric Taylor—Assistant Clerk at the House of Commons who sat alongside your predecessors, Sir Alan—was ordained in the Liberal Roman Catholic Church and became a bishop in that Church. His orders were fully recognised as valid by the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church. The right hon. Lady has not explained whether that small but fully recognised denomination would be excluded.

Orthodox Churches are now extensively found in the United Kingdom—the Greek Cypriot Church is one of the bigger ones. Would a priest or minister of the Orthodox Church be excluded, and if so, on what basis?

Miss Widdecombe: The hon. Gentleman is trying to suggest that such matters are irresolvable, and that if someone said that his ordination was not episcopal, we should have to go back 2,000 years to prove the opposite. That exact issue arose in the argument about the ordination of women priests, when certain priests of the Anglican Church wished to move to the Roman Catholic Church. The issue was whether their orders could be recognised, because generally, Anglican orders are not recognised by the Roman Catholic Church, as the hon. Gentleman will know. However, the orders could be recognised when the ordination had taken place in a line that was demonstrable from old bishops. Those lines are already established; they are on record. So it is much easier to resolve the question than the hon. Gentleman suggests. My answer to the other question is that where orders are recognised as valid, those involved have been episcopally ordained.

Mr. Mackinlay: The right hon. Lady implies that she would extend the constitutional impediment to priests of other religions. I understand that the current legislation relates exclusively to priests in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England.

Siobhain McDonagh: The legislation also includes priests in the Orthodox Churches because they, too, are episcopally ordained. It might be useful if we were to concentrate on the Greek Orthodox Church, rather than the Catholic Church, because we seem to be going off in a number of directions that are perhaps not that relevant.

Mr. Mackinlay: In any event, for the reasons that we have adduced, priests should not be excluded. The right hon. Lady has not dealt with priests who have the approval of the Holy See to stop fulfilling the office of priest—laicisation is the term used. I regret that the current Holy Father has tightened up on allowing his bishops to grant laicisation. The result has been that many people have left the "priesthood"—I use that term in inverted commas, because once a priest, always a priest—without the permission of their bishops. Therefore. they have not been laicised. We then get this absurd blurring of their position. They are still priests and are fully empowered to administer the sacraments.

In the Church of England—it is a very good practice in many cases—some priests are part-time. They may work in commerce or banking and fulfil their priestly duties on a part-time basis. Why should they be impeded from standing for the House of Commons? The right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald has not dealt with that black and white issue, and she cannot do so because her amendments and her deeply—I do not know—conservative view—*[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady says that I took a long time to get that phrase out, but it is very difficult to find adjectives that adequately describe her troglodyte view. Her view is not mediaeval but, as I have said, goes back 2,000 years.

If we look in the *Official Report* tomorrow, we shall see that someone said that this issue was not easily resolvable—but, of course, it is. We should pass this Bill and move on to the next argument, which is about the oath. We have got to deal with the problem. I hope that hon. Members will do that, not because of Greenock and Inverclyde, but because it is a matter of matter of human rights. It is a matter of principle to extend our democracy, so I hope that the Committee will dismiss these absurd amendments and the House will support the Bill's Third Reading.

Mr. Forth: I declare my personal position, because it is important in such a debate that everyone knows where we are coming from. I am not a member of any Church or faith. In that respect only, I probably represent in my modest way more people in this country than most of

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those who have spoken or who are likely to speak. I can therefore claim to come to the issue from a genuinely impartial point of view. I have no involvement with faith, Church or religion, so I consider the issue from that perspective.

In principle, I support the thrust of the Bill. On this point, I share the views expressed by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). It is a matter for the voters only to judge who should come to this place. However, to elaborate on what he said—I hesitate to say that I am correcting him—the House of Commons Disqualification Act 1975 contains a list of the people who are disqualified from election to the House of Commons. They include senior civil servants, judges, ambassadors, members of the forces and the police, paid members of the boards of nationalised industries—it is a pity that there are any left—Government-appointed directors of commercial companies, of whom there certainly should be none, and directors of the Bank of England: bless their cotton socks.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Has my right hon. Friend noted that those posts are all connected in that they are, in some sense, offices of profit under the Crown? The difficulty with this Bill is that it deals with a residual issue whereby Roman Catholics were specifically excluded. Will he consider the fact that other disqualifications apply to Her Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects? However, they are not dealt with by this Bill because it applies to a particular person in particular circumstances. That is what I object to in the Bill.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend because I was going to say, in parenthesis, that I will not support the Bill unless the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and myself is accepted. I will not support a Bill that has been introduced at this stage to benefit one individual in a very political fashion, but that is a matter for subsequent debates and perhaps for Third Reading. However, I share my right hon. Friend's view.

2.15 pm

I would support any measure that sought to remove an artificial, arbitrary, historic, traditional or any other kind of discrimination against the members of any Church or faith. Because I see all Churches or faiths in exactly the same way, I see no reason to discriminate. I understand the ramifications of any change for the established Church and the monarchy, and they will have to be resolved properly—not with such indecent haste. My support for the measure in principle is unshakeable but, unless we amend the timetable, I will regrettably be unable to support the Bill in its present form.

My amendment No. 12 may be unique. It is certainly very rare in that it exhibits what I would normally describe as political correctness. When I examined the Bill, a doubt entered my mind as to whether the use of the words "minister", "religious denomination" and "ordained" would necessarily cover all Churches and all faiths. I wish I heard less of it, but I hear endlessly about how we are now a multicultural society and that all faiths are equal and welcome. To the extent that that is the case, such a Bill should cover beyond doubt with equal validity all the people who may be affected. That covers the point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) made, but in a slightly different way.

I have searched elsewhere for definitions of the crucial terms that appear in the Bill. I looked up the word "minister" in my thesaurus. It first resorted to the term "clergyman", which it defined as

"one duly ordained to the service of God in the Christian Church."

My anxieties were therefore multiplied. The terms of art used in the Bill rely on the words "minister" and "ordination", but I have seen a definition that relates them simply to the Christian Church. Interestingly, the thesaurus offered alternatives to the word "minister"; they included cleric, divine, parson, preacher, priest, reverend, chaplain, curate, pastor and vicar and—because it was an American thesaurus—it offered several other suggestions that I thought I had better not repeat in this place.

That gives us an idea of the difficulty of the issues that we are now exploring. Things get more intriguing when one considers the use of the term "the Christian Church". As the hon. Member for Thurrock asked, does it include the orthodox Churches? Obviously, it must, but what about—I hope that I do not offend anyone—Jehovah's Witnesses or the Plymouth Brethren?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to inform my right hon. Friend that neither of those denominations has ministers, so there is no difficulty. Jehovah's Witnesses are, of course, heretical and potty. What is more, they do not vote in elections as they are still waiting for the theocratic kingdom that is unlikely to come.

Mr. Forth: That is a matter for Jehovah's Witnesses, but I am not sure that my right hon. Friend has answered my question in the way that he had hoped to. In the list that I cited, "preacher" was offered as a possible alternative to the word "minister". No doubt I shall have to elaborate on this point, because I have not yet satisfied all members of the Committee. However, my point is that the alternative terms for "minister" show the difficulty that we shall face unless we put the matter beyond doubt. That is the reason for the wording of my amendment.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is entirely correct to say that Jehovah's Witnesses do not vote, but I certainly do not identify with what he said about their being potty—far be it from me to cast aspersions. I am a mild-mannered fellow and I would in no way descend to that level of abuse. I should point out that the same goes in terms of non-voting for members of the Plymouth Brethren. However, the fact that neither the Plymouth Brethren nor Jehovah's Witnesses vote does not mean that they are not entitled to ask others to vote for them.

Mr. Forth: Indeed. The fact that a large number of Labour supporters may not vote in the coming election may also have some implications, but I am not sure whether to get involved in that.

Mr. Gummer: In order that the House should not be misled by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), I should point out that it is not true that the Plymouth Brethren do not vote: only closed members do not vote, whereas open brethren do. That distinction is

very important. I have closed brethren in my constituency and they do not vote, but open brethren do. If my hon. Friend has open brethren in his constituency—

The Chairman: Order. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) are moving to the periphery of the argument. I should like us to return to the centre.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful, Sir Alan. I do not want to be diverted from the main thrust of my argument— *[Interruption.]*

The Chairman: Order. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I am always ready to help him.

Mr. Forth: Indeed, Sir Alan; I am always conscious of that.

I was at the end of my list. My right hon. and hon. Friends rather spoiled what I thought was a whimsical point, but I shall persist with it anyway. As well as giving what are now rather contentious definitions, I was going to throw in the Wee Frees—I do not know whether anyone in the Chamber understands that term.

It is obvious even from this brief explanation of the matter that the term "minister" is not satisfactorily defined and therefore may raise some doubts. That is even more so in respect of the definition of a rabbi as one ordained and having juridical and ritual functions. In the Muslim religion, the term "mullah" is an honorary title referring to ecclesiastical dignitaries. When I got to looking up Hindu and Brahmin religions, there was also mention of the priestly order.

People of various other faiths could be subsumed into the general term of "minister" because the word "ordination" and the phrase "holy orders" arise repeatedly. The definition of "religion" gets us into even deeper water. It refers to belief in a superhuman being or beings, a personal god, a system of faith, doctrine and worship. That would encompass a very wide range of beliefs, activities and adherences.

When I looked for a definition of "ordination", what I found touched on a point that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) drew to our attention. "To ordain" was defined as to set apart for office or duty, to appoint and consecrate, to dedicate or to confer holy orders. The term "dedicate" was defined as to give up wholly for some purpose. That takes us back to what my right hon. Friend said at the start of the debate.

Frankly, I do not want to get involved in all that. I am not qualified to judge—certainly in the company of my right hon. Friends—but I wanted to draw the attention of the Committee to and gain its support for my amendment, which would put it beyond doubt that where we are seeking to eliminate any disqualification of someone who is a minister or ordained as part of a religious denomination, we intend to refer to what I have set out as the equivalents. I have tried to expand that in a Pepper *v.* Hart sense. If we are going down this route—and I hope that we are, because in principle I want to sweep away all historic and arcane disqualifications—we have to get the provision right and make sure that it is all-encompassing.

Mr. Gummer: I am worried about my right hon. Friend because it seems to me that we should be drawing a distinction between the decision of this House as to who should be qualified to stand for it and the decision of Churches as to who they should allow to stand for Parliament. It seems to me to be perfectly proper for the Catholic Church to say that it does not want its priests to stand for Parliament. It can make that decision; whether or not one agrees with it is a personal matter—I declare an interest in that I am a Catholic and accept that piece of discipline—but it is not for the House to support that view or in some way to give credence to it. I am not quite sure whether my right hon. Friend has explained why his amendment deals with that issue better than the Bill does, and that is what the Committee needs to know.

Mr. Forth: I agree with my right hon. Friend, but we seem to have reached opposing conclusions. I am absolutely of the view that it is a matter for religions, Churches and faiths and their adherents to decide or determine whether or not they wish to disqualify themselves from political activity. Some approach the issue in a fundamental way, and others do so in different ways. I respect that; I have no difficulty at all with it.

There is nothing wrong with the Bill in terms of its historic context, but I may disagree with other right hon. and hon. Members in terms of the individual concerned. It would appear that it is necessary for us to put beyond doubt in legislation the fact that anyone who is a minister of religion will not be disqualified by the law from being elected to this place. I hope that we would all respect the right of members of an institution of faith—to use a rather modern, all-encompassing term—to decide what they will do and from what they may be disqualified. That is a different matter altogether. My amendment is designed to put beyond doubt the fact that we wish this to be an all-embracing principle.

Because of our history, we may have started by focusing on the Roman Catholic Church. I understand that, but I want to make sure that now, early in the 21st century, we acknowledge that we can no longer focus simply on the established Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church or other Christian denominations. Our society now consists of many different faiths, both Christian and non-Christian, and, even within the broad umbrella of the Christian faith, many others of which we may approve or disapprove. I have no view on any of them, for the reasons that I have given.

My amendment is simple, direct and uncomplicated and I hope that it will attract the support of right hon. and hon. Members. I really cannot get involved in the amendments tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends, for reasons that I have tried to explain. However, I believe strongly that the House should be able to express its view on matters such as this. My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald said that she wanted to express her view and wanted to know the view of the Committee, and I am certainly prepared to help her to divide the Committee so that Members can express their views, although that should not be taken as an expression of my supporting or not supporting the substance of my right hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. Bercow: I wonder whether my right hon. Friend can help me. If we posit a scenario in which an individual, either with the approval of his faith and its masters or in the face of their acquiescence, decides to stand for Parliament, is elected and takes his seat, but subsequently

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finds himself in conflict with his organised religion and subject to a threat of excommunication because of a speech that he has made or a vote that he has cast, does my right hon. Friend think that that would constitute a contempt of the House?

2.30 pm

Mr. Forth: My instant response is no. I do not believe that our responsibilities lie in that direction. As a general principle, the law should not interfere in the internal workings of a Church or institution of faith. That should be respected as a matter for its adherents, not for the state. Another Bill, which will be discussed at a later date, involves the same principles, and they are of great importance. I do not agree that it is our responsibility to frame laws that would interfere arbitrarily in the internal workings of faith groups, Churches or other institutions, to sort out matters that are, by definition, issues of faith. That would be dangerous, even if we dressed them up as human rights.

I hope that I have persuaded the Committee to support my modest but important amendment. If my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald wants to divide the House, I shall be only too happy to give her my assistance.

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I reject all the amendments. I am especially concerned about amendment No. 15. The tone of the debate worries me. I get the impression that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) is interested in the issue only because of her particular faith, and many outside the House would probably agree. The remarks about the Plymouth Brethren and Jehovah's Witnesses were deeply intolerant. Some hon. Members seemed to smirk and sneer at people whose beliefs they do not have much in common with or share. Those who are members of a church that has people who are episcopally ordained—be it the Catholic Church or the Church of England—have put themselves on a higher plain. I absolutely reject that notion.

I was born and brought up a Catholic. I am committed to being tolerant and to working, living and acting in a community that is multifaith and multiracial. I want a community that is based on equality and tolerance. People outside the House will find it impossible to believe that other hon. Members approach communities on the same basis. Some of the remarks were very unchristian.

Mr. Gummer: I hope that the hon. Lady will draw a distinction between my comments on the Plymouth Brethren and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Plymouth Brethren are respectable and earnest people who belong to a long-standing faith. Although we have different views, I respect those people. However, Jehovah's Witnesses hold a belief that is provably fraudulent and wrong. It is right to be tolerant, but not to be ignorant. Jehovah's Witnesses base their faith on doctrines that are propounded by a crook and a fraud who was arrested and found guilty as such in court. For us not to make that perfectly proper distinction is to mislead our constituents.

Ms Ryan: The right hon. Gentleman makes my case. I cannot comment on such remarks.

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is well able eloquently to defend himself at all times. However, the hon. Lady is trying it on when she attacks my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe). I have taken an interest in the Bill since its inception. To avoid any doubt, I am neither a Jehovah's Witness nor a member of the Plymouth Brethren. However, many of my constituents are, and I have the highest respect for both faiths.

Ms Ryan: The hon. Gentleman demonstrates that we all want to be tolerant and respect others.

It is important that we stick with the Bill as drafted. We would create or perpetuate problems were we to accept the amendments. I have some sympathy with the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald. I doubt whether a practising priest could fulfil his commitment to that role while working here. Being a Member of Parliament is a full-time job. However, the same argument applies to anyone with an outside interest, such as directors of businesses, lawyers or barristers. The situation is problematic whether one is a practising Catholic priest or a Church of England minister.

As for the conduct of the debate, it is important to mention—as many hon. Members have—that the Bill has been proposed because David Cairns, who is a man of great integrity, was selected to stand as a Member of Parliament. On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister admitted that that is what triggered the legislation. However, we cannot hold David Cairns responsible. We would have taken the same action irrespective of a candidate's party. The Bill is long overdue and it is right that we propose it. It is wrong to make David Cairns the subject of the debate and responsible for the Bill. This is a matter of equal rights—his as much as anyone else's—and he is entitled to be treated fairly.

Mr. Bercow: None of us wants to over-personalise the issues, but the hon. Lady, in common with other hon. Members, has referred to Mr. Cairns. I am not going to pontificate on Mr. Cairns's integrity. As I said on Second Reading, I have no strong views about him, for the simple reason that I have never made his acquaintance. However, she is unwise to bang on about his integrity when, on the admission of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman)—for whom I have the highest regard—Mr. Cairns deliberately refrained from telling the constituency Labour party of the problem that would arise in the event of his selection.

Ms Ryan: That point has been made. However, it is right that David Cairns was able to put himself forward for selection on the same footing as other candidates. Legislation that is against human rights and is discriminatory should not be able to place a millstone around his neck that prevents him from being selected. The law is completely out of date and unnecessary. When David Cairns put himself forward for selection, he knew that he could expect a Labour Government, of all Governments, to do something about his rights.

The Chairman: Order. I think that we have heard enough on that. The hon. Lady should speak to the amendment.

Ms Ryan: Thank you, Sir Alan. I was about to sit down, but I should like to reiterate my rejection of the amendments. Two wrongs do not make a right. The Bill as it stands does the right thing.

Dr. Godman: I am exceedingly grateful to my hon. Friend for showing her characteristic courtesy by giving way to me. May I point out that I was misquoted by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow)? If she cares to read the *Official Report*, my hon. Friend will see that what I am saying is the truth.

Ms Ryan: I am certain that my hon. Friend agrees about the integrity of David Cairns and about how good a Member of Parliament he will be for Greenock and Inverclyde.

Mr. Swayne: I rise to speak in favour of amendment No. 15. I started with rather greater enthusiasm for that amendment, having made the same mistake as the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) and believed that it was a wrecking amendment. I have now heard my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) correct the hon. Gentleman.

Despite opposing the principle of the Bill, I acknowledge the force of the amendment. It appears to deliver a compromise that should be acceptable to those on both sides of the argument, by delivering the remedy to the problem in Inverclyde that the Bill is designed to solve and at the same time addressing absolutely the reservation held by those who oppose the principle of the Bill, which is that we do not regard it as proper for a member of the ordained ministry of either the established Church or the Roman Catholic Church to hold a position as a Member of Parliament.

Mr. Mackinlay: Why?

Mr. Swayne: With respect, that is a Second Reading question rather than one that relates specifically to the amendment.

Mr. Mackinlay: It is a matter relating precisely to the amendment. It mentions "episcopal ordination", which almost exclusively relates to the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England. That is my reason for asking, from a sedentary position, "Why?" A Methodist minister is not covered by the provision, yet the same arguments about compatibility advanced by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and, I assume, the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) apply. The difference is purely a matter of rubric, relating to the question of the laying on of hands and the episcopal succession. It is an absurd distinction.

Mr. Swayne: It is a distinction rooted in an historical context. I shall come later to the hon. Gentleman's question about "episcopal ordination", but I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) wants to intervene.

Mr. Gummer: The amendment is even worse. A Methodist minister ordained in America is ordained episcopally; therefore, the amendment would exclude an American-ordained Methodist minister, but not an English-ordained Methodist minister. The argument is not about the episcopacy, but about whether the episcopacy is within the apostolic succession, which is a wholly different argument and one that would exclude Anglican bishops as well as Methodist bishops. My hon. Friend must think twice before supporting the amendment.

Mr. Swayne: I remind my right hon. Friend that the amendment stands in the name of our right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I know that I come rather late to the debate, but at least I come with an open mind. I have a great deal of sympathy with the question raised by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay). My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) says it is improper for a priest of the Church of England to serve as a Member of the House of Commons. Will he be so good as to explain his reasons to those who, like me, have great difficulty understanding why it is improper?

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) said that it would be highly unlikely that a clergyman—according to my understanding of the amendment, a priest of either the Church of England or the Church of Rome—could fulfil his role as a priest and carry out the duties of a Member of Parliament. However, the hon. Lady recognised that that might apply equally to any number of other callings—if calling is a proper word to use in that respect—and I am sure that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) will find that he has some sympathy with that point.

From my point of view, they are clean different things: there can be no comparison between functioning as a clergyman of the established Church or the Roman Church—a very special role, administering sacraments and occupying a leadership role in what I suppose we would now call a faith community—and carrying out an occupation that involves political controversy and political leadership.

2.45 pm

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Swayne: I face any number of Members wanting to intervene. As I have referred to her, I shall give way to the hon. Member for Enfield, North first.

Ms Ryan: Is the matter the hon. Gentleman addresses for us, or for the electorate to decide?

Mr. Swayne: Obviously, since I support the amendment, I would say that it is a question for us and one on which the House should divide. Equally, I think that it is a matter of some impertinence on our part to intrude on the decision-making processes of the Churches. The Church of Rome has a clear position: it does not believe that it is proper for its priests to hold any sort of elective office of the sort to which the Bill would welcome them. Therefore, to introduce the Bill strikes me as impertinent.

Mr. Gummer: Surely if the Church of Rome makes that decision, it is not up to us at all—the matter has been sorted out. However, my hon. Friend must explain one simple issue arising from his argument: if I were,

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for example, an Anglican worker priest or a Catholic worker priest, I could work in a factory and be a priest, but not become a Member of the House of Commons and be a priest. My problem is that that is to denigrate the work of the House of Commons—to say that what we do is so unpleasant that one cannot be both a Member of Parliament and a priest. I do not approve of that. I think that what we do is as perfectly priestly a function as working on a factory floor.

Mr. Swayne: I disagree profoundly with my right hon. Friend in that respect. I share the views of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth): I believe that consensus is no friend of the legislative process. The House should divide as often as possible and propositions should be tested by vociferous and rigorous argument. I am prepared to extend that principle beyond the confines of the Chamber to the positions that I take among my constituents: I am prepared to argue robustly about clearly political and ideological questions. I do not therefore believe it would be proper for me to occupy such a position and behave in such a way and, at the same time, to attempt to perform some priestly function and expect constituents with whom I might have profound disagreements—perhaps outside the bounds of good will, as is often the case in politics—to come and kneel at the altar and take the sacrament from my hand. That would be an abomination.

Mr. Bercow: Methinks my hon. Friend doth protest too much. None can gainsay his qualities of robustness, eloquence and ideological purity; in his company I have often greatly enjoyed dividing the House and ordinarily I am in agreement with him. However, did he not give the game away a few moments ago when he said that the practice of a priest and the pursuit of other, outside occupations were, from his point of view, clean different things? Does he accept that, in a matter of this nature, his point of view is not the basis of statute?

Mr. Swayne: I am saying only, as Martin Luther said, "Here I stand. I can do no other." Of course I speak only for my own point of view; none the less, it is a point of view that I am prepared to press in the Lobby.

Mr. Mackinlay: The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) referred to worker priests. Had he been in the Chamber earlier, he would know that I referred to them. We have at least three diligent and highly regarded, albeit controversial, worker ministers in this place. They are Presbyterian ministers from Northern Ireland. The only distinction is that they are not episcopally ordained. Their pastoral functions and qualities are the same as those of Church of England priests or Roman Catholic priests.

The hon. Gentleman heard the argument of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), whom he is supporting. She alleged that the responsibility of pastoral care led to a conflict in terms of time—

The Chairman: Order. Interventions must not become speeches. I think that the hon. Gentleman has said enough.

Mr. Swayne: With respect to the hon. Gentleman's reference to the tradition in Northern Ireland, and specifically the hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr. McCrea)—

Mr. Mackinlay: And the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

Mr. Swayne: Yes, and the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth).

There is a difference of tradition. There is a tradition in Northern Ireland that does not apply here. As the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) correctly identified, those Members would not regard themselves as members of an ordained ministry in the terms that we are discussing. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Antrim would be appalled at the notion that he had been ordained for any sort of sacramental ministry.

Mr. Mackinlay: It is recorded in the Register of Members' Interests that the hon. Gentleman is a serving officer in the Territorial Army. I think that that is compatible with being a Member. However, if we accept the argument of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald, that is not so. The right hon. Lady says that a Member does not have enough time to do other things of that sort. Apparently a Catholic priest would not have enough time to serve as a Member, but apparently a serving officer in the TA would. We must think the matter through.

Mr. Swayne: It is not so much a question of time, which is important, but of role. My duties as a TA officer take up about one weekend a month. In the past, they took a great deal more time. To suggest that a clergyman—a practising priest—could continue with that commitment while serving as a Member would not say very much for the nature of his ministry.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend says that it is the role that makes it inappropriate. I am not sure whether my hon. Friend is telling the Committee that the congregation would be unduly beholden to the candidate or that the candidate would be unduly beholden to the congregation. Perhaps he will make that plain.

Mr. Swayne: I am not entirely sure that I understand my right hon. and learned Friend's question.

I do not want to be distracted any further from what I regard as questions involving the principle of the Bill. I have found it odd that my remarks have been taken as controversial. I am speaking for the status quo, and in favour of amendment No. 15.

Amendment No. 15 would spare us the argument that so many Members are seeking to have. It would remove the discrimination to which the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) referred, which penalises the Roman Catholic priest because he is not able to divest himself of his orders in quite the same way that would be open to a member of the priesthood of the established Church. The amendment would deliver the remedy that is sought through the Bill. At the same time,

it would not raise profound constitutional questions, as I regard them. In its present form, the Bill would do so because the priest would have to be practising before he were disqualified. That is the key distinction.

The hon. Member for Thurrock was on better ground when he complained about the distinction of episcopal orders. As he did so, I was reminded of "Decline and Fall". The Committee will recall that the central character found himself having hands laid upon him by an episcopi vagante—a wandering bishop, who bestowed valid holy orders upon him. That blights the rest of his life in so far as it is recounted in the book.

That is not quite as fictional as it may first appear. Wandering bishops exist, and they bestow orders. I clearly recall attending a patronal festival at St. John's church, Holland road. A number of priests, or those purporting to be priests, having been so ordained, presented themselves and asked whether they could sit with the clergy during the festival.

The amendment does not deal with the possibility of those who find themselves ordained in other traditions, such as the orthodox, and those who might have been ordained in another fashion. They would be captured by the amendment. However, as long as they do not practise, the problem does not arise. The amendment deals with that. We might have widened the catchment of those who might be disqualified by the Bill, but by accepting the amendment we will have a safeguard. As I see it the principal problem comes with those who practise.

We have been told that the candidate for whom the Bill is the remedy no longer practises and has no intention to do so. However, there is nothing to say that in future he might start saying mass. If he does not start practising priestly functions, the amendment would provide a proper safeguard.

Siobhain McDonagh: I am not sure of the religious background of the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), but I imagine that he is not a Catholic. If he were, he would understand that his suggestion that Mr. Cairns might suddenly decide to say mass is an unlikely proposition.

I find it strange to argue from the Government Benches that the state has no right, or should have fewer rights, to determine which religious priests should be able to stand for membership of this place, and which should not. I found the hon. Gentleman's contribution disturbing. We would be putting ourselves in the way of individual churches. We would be putting ourselves up as a counter-force to canon law. In my view, it is for any Church, Christian or any other great faith, to decide what its ministers do, whether they can stand for Parliament and what other work they can take up. It is not a question for Parliament.

Mr. Bercow: I do not want to cavil at the way in which the hon. Lady is developing her argument. However, I put it to her that there is a further and obvious lacuna in the argument of those who oppose the Bill and support the argument of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), the Shadow Home Secretary, and it relates to the issue of taking one's seat. Will the hon. Lady rephrase the advocacy of her argument and accept that part of the problem is that it is perfectly in order for someone in the situation that we have been describing to stand for Parliament, but that if he or she receives the democratic endorsement of his or her electorate, the individual cannot take up his or her seat in this place? That is an undemocratic outrage.

Siobhain McDonagh: I was aware of that. I am sorry about the way in which I phrased my argument. The hon. Gentleman is right to draw attention to a further anomaly. An ex-Catholic priest or an ex-orthodox priest, for example, can stand for Parliament. The problem is taking up his seat.

My argument with the amendment of the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) is not that it suggests that it is difficult for someone to be a full and proper Member and have another job, but that it does not solve the discrimination that we are discussing. If the amendment is agreed, a serving Methodist minister could be a Member, but not a serving Greek Orthodox minister. What logical reason can there be to exclude orthodox priests, but not Methodist ministers? The Bill would still be disturbing and confusing. Some aspects of the argument are being obscured because we are concentrating on the Catholic element, although I well understand why.

3 pm

The legislation is obscure. Currently, some religious officials are disqualified, but others are not. Some priests can relinquish their ministry to become a Member of Parliament, but others are unable to do so. Some Christian priests are disqualified, whereas ministers of all other religious faiths, such as Judaism, Islam and Buddhism, are eligible. All Catholic priests are disqualified. Ex-clergy are entitled to stand for election and to be elected, as we have said, but they cannot take up their seats. Non-conformist clergy are not disqualified, except for the Church of Scotland. As has been mentioned, several Protestant clerics have served and continue to serve with distinction. Finally, all episcopally ordained priests of the Anglican Church are disqualified, but not in Wales.

It is surely not up to us to determine which clerics can stand and which cannot. It is up to us to widen as far as possible people's ability to stand and to be elected, and to allow the voters to decide. If we attempt to define who is and who is not a Catholic priest, we will get into areas that are not within the scope of the business of the House, but which remain the pure preserve of canon law.

Mr. Gummer: It would be helpful if we remembered that the real problem with the law is that it confuses a series of thoughts.

Anglican clergymen are excluded from membership of the House of Commons because they were seen to have an office of profit under the Crown. The established Church was seen as being influenced by the Crown to such an extent that were an Anglican clergyman to stand for Parliament and be elected, he would not be a free agent because he would rely for his living on a Church that was subject to the Crown. That is a perfectly reasonable position; I will say later why I think that it has changed.

Catholic priests were excluded for an entirely different reason. They were excluded as part of the general determination to ensure that the Catholic faith did not

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return to our land. That was a clear decision, in the same anti-Catholic vein as the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 and the Ecclesiastical Titles Act 1871, that stopped Catholic bishops being named at the same bishopric as Anglican bishops.

The two kinds of exclusion happened to come together, and the proposed change in the law happens to touch them both, but we should not ignore the reasons why they came about. They are different, and we should argue the case differently.

Mr. Mackinlay: Is not that why—as I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will confirm on Third Reading—after the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, an Anglican priest who is ordained and serves in the Church in Wales can be elected to the House, even though he is episcopally ordained?

Mr. Gummer: That is exactly true. A clergyman of the Church of England ordained outside England, whether in Scotland, Wales or Papua New Guinea, is not covered by the same circumstance. That important distinction enables me to explain why I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) is wrong.

Mr. Hogg: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, as I seek information. I am sure that his explanation of why Catholic priests were disqualified from membership is right, but when the various other disqualifications on Catholics were removed, why was that prohibition not removed?

Mr. Gummer: I dealt with the point when my right hon. and learned Friend was inadvertently absent from the Chamber. Unfortunately, all those disqualifications have not been removed, which is one of the reasons why I am so unhappy about the Bill. I would have hoped that this was an opportunity to get rid of a range of disqualifications on Catholics. For example—I shall give just one brief example, as I wish to keep to the amendment—no Catholic church may ring a bell. That would be contrary to the law.

There are a series of such disqualifications. It would have been more proper for the Government to introduce a single, simple, one-clause Bill that lifted all the disqualifications that distinguish Her Majesty's Catholic subjects as against other subjects. Hopefully we would vote on such a Bill with no discussion at all. My objection to the present Bill is that that opportunity, which the Government should have taken, was not taken. However, that is not for this debate.

I shall explain why I believe that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald is wrong. The problem with the amendment is that it makes a statement in English civil law about what is a fundamentally ecclesiastical matter. I am among those who believe that there is a distinction between those who are validly ordained and those who are not.

I ceased to be an Anglican and became a Catholic because I believed that the Church of England had ceased to be able validly to ordain priests. That is why I became a Catholic, but it was an ecclesiastical, not a civil, decision. It is a fundamental matter of faith, more important than any civil decision that I could make. I do not underestimate such a decision; I merely say that it is different in kind.

A Catholic teaches that a priest ordained in the Catholic Church is ordained in the apostolic succession and is therefore able validly to administer the sacrament. Many Anglicans take the same view, and all the Orthodox and Armenians do. The amendment would make a distinction between those who do—actually or in their formularies, validly or because they think validly—and those who do not.

My problem with the amendment is that I do not understand what that has to do with standing for Parliament. I passionately believe in the distinction; I believe that there is a fundamental difference between a priest of the Catholic Church and the hon. Member for one of the Northern Irish constituencies who is, in a sense, self-ordained.

Mr. Hogg: Two Northern Ireland Members.

Mr. Gummer: No, the particular man is self-ordained because he decided to set up his own Church. That is a perfectly reasonable decision for him to make, but there is a difference between that view of ordination and the historic view of the Catholic Church. The difference is not a secular one; it is an ecclesiastical and religious difference. It is still a vital difference—more vital than any secular thing that I can think of.

Let us not mix the two issues up. We do not enhance the validity of the orders of Holy Church by saying what Parliament thinks about it. It does not matter two hoots to the validity of the orders of the Catholic Church what the House of Commons believes about it. If that were the case, none of us would be here. There was a time when the House of Commons said that not only were those orders not valid, but it would chop our heads off if we were found.

Let us not start saying that what Parliament thinks about the doctrines of Christ's Church is important. It is not.

Miss Widdecombe: What about the established Church?

Mr. Gummer: I shall deal with the established Church in a moment. I am dealing with my right hon. Friend's denomination.

Miss Widdecombe: And yours.

Mr. Gummer: And mine. My right hon. Friend should not object to my setting out the historic fact. We are not here to tell the Catholic Church what is valid and what is not. That is for God's Church to decide, not for us.

Miss Widdecombe: All this would be welcome if Parliament had never taken any view about Church matters or about who might or might not sit in Parliament, but, as I pointed out from a sedentary position, we have an established Church. My right hon. Friend and I, together with a collection of non-believers and adherents of other Churches, went through the Lobbies to decide

on such issues as the ordination of women as priests and divorced clergy. He did not take the view then that that was not a proper matter for us to consider.

Mr. Gummer: That is not the issue that we are discussing now. I shall deal with the nature of the established Church in a moment. I am speaking about a Church that is not established and which is not and never has been under the jurisdiction of the House. Indeed, it has been specifically as it is because it does not hold that established view, and it is unacceptable for us to purport to say what its priests should be allowed to do.

I now move from the Catholic Church to the Anglican Church. [HON. MEMBERS: "It is the other way around."] The truth is—*[Interruption.]* The joke has been made, so I shall continue. I shall move in my speech from the Catholic Church to the Anglican Church, and I do so with care. The Anglican Church is the creature of the state. The Church of England was created by the state as a result of a series of factors, including Henry VIII and Elizabeth I. That is the truth of history and it is a perfectly respectable position. Historically, there was a twofold reason why clergy of the Anglican Church in England—the Church of England—were denied membership of the House. First and primarily, they held offices of profit under the Crown, or if they did not, they were hoping to do so, which was even worse in terms of the fear of simony. Secondly, it was thought that they were represented by the Lords Spiritual in the House of Lords. Those were the two reasons why they were excluded.

However, we now have the following problem: should a person who does not have an office of profit under the Crown, but who has ceased to be a practising Anglican clergyman, be denied membership of the House? It is extremely difficult to claim that such people should be so denied. Indeed, they have not been prevented from becoming Members of the House in the past. There have been hon. Members who were ordained as Anglicans, but as they had cast aside their orders, nobody saw fit to take their cases to court. We know that to be true. In any event, is not it most illogical to say that when the Church of England has decided that something has finished, Parliament can decide that it should not end? That is what is being suggested by those who argue that a laicised Anglican clergyman can be regarded as a lay person by the Church of England, but not by Parliament.

That is a reversal of any sense, and I am not in favour of it. It is much more sensible to argue that it is for the Church of England to decide that Anglican clergyman cannot be Members of the House, if it wishes to do so. Similarly, if the Catholic Church continues to say that its priests cannot be Members of the House, that is for it to decide. However, if people present themselves as candidates and are elected, whether they were once ordained or whatever, it is not for the House to exclude them. That should be the proper procedure, which is why I find the amendment unacceptable.

We must face the issue with which my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) dealt: the different roles that are involved. There is a difference between the role of an episcopally ordained priest and that of a Protestant minister. I point that out in case the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan)—I am sorry that she is not present—feels that I am being dismissive. I think that one has to be honest about people's pretensions. I mean that in a non-offensive way. People have particular views about their ministry. The views held by Catholics about their priests are different from those that, for example, the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) would have about a minister. Indeed, as was suggested earlier, he would be displeased if one were to suggest that he was in any way a priest, and he makes that view very clear.

3.15 pm

A minister carries out a series of pastoral duties, including the preaching of the ecclesiastical doctrines of his particular Church, and a priest administers the sacraments. That is a very important distinction, but it cannot be of importance to parliamentary representation. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West is not right to suggest that somebody who is ordained as a priest cannot be a Member of the House of Commons, but that is not the case if he is made a minister. I do not believe that that is sensible, although I understand that it is emotionally clear. Becoming a priest is the highest demand that can be made of anybody. For me, it is odd that somebody who has been made a priest would want to do something different afterwards. However, some people have no decision in the matter and it is not for me to say in this secular House—at least, it is secular in that sense—that such a person should be prevented from becoming a Member of Parliament. It is for his religious superiors to make that decision.

With great respect to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West, I think that he is mistaking his vocation. As a Member of the House of Commons, it is not for him to say what our ecclesiastical superiors, either in the Church of England, to which he belongs, or in the Catholic Church, to which I belong, should decide. Our job is to ensure that if somebody is allowed to stand by somebody else, by his own conscience or whatever, he should not be stopped because he was episcopally ordained.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I do not think that that squares with what I understood to be my right hon. Friend's position regarding the ecclesiastical legislation that comes before the House. Is he suggesting that we should forswear any involvement in the legislation that has typically been considered in the House? As I understand it, the House still has an Ecclesiastical Committee, although it might not sit or its proceedings might not be very public. As I understand it, that is the forum where we consider ecclesiastical Measures in the House.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend is correct, but the Ecclesiastical Committee relates only to the business of the established Church. As there is an established Church, it is perfectly proper for the House to have the Ecclesiastical Committee, on which I have the honour of serving. Although it deals with the established Church, it does so on a non-denominational basis. Protestants, Anglicans and Catholics serve on the Committee, but it deals only with matters that relate to the effect of the establishment on the civil rights of the people of this country. That is what it is supposed to discuss.

As I have explained, the amendment would impose restrictions on people who are not members of the established Church, which makes it entirely different in

[Mr. Gummer]

any case. When I was being teased because I said that I was about to move from the Catholics to the Anglicans, perhaps the teasing prevented hon. Members from recalling that I was making that distinction precisely because I believe that it is wholly improper for the House to take on the right to legislate for Catholics, Armenians, Holy Orthodox worshippers and so on. They are not members of the established Church and we have no right to legislate on ecclesiastical matters in respect of them. Of course, there is a question about whether we should have rights in respect of the established Church, but that is a different matter altogether.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend has just said that the Bill imposes restrictions on individuals and cited the case of the Roman Catholics. Of course, he is right in that respect, but the restrictions imposed by the old law go much further. It restricts the ability of local associations to choose their candidates and, even worse, restricts the electorate's ability to choose in a general election the person whom they want to represent them.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

The Chairman: Order. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will bear it in mind that we are discussing the amendment, not the Bill as such.

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to return to that discussion, but what my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said is germane because passing the amendment would not only exclude those who have been accorded the grace of episcopal ordination, were they still practising as clergymen or priests, but prevent the associations that wanted to adopt them and those who had already voted for them from getting such people elected to Parliament. That is wholly unacceptable, for a rational reason.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald and I do not always agree on ecclesiastical matters, but we are usually on the same side in respect of reason. We are having a rational argument, but it is not rational to say that such people should be excluded, because nothing in their experience enables the House to say that they should not be Members of Parliament. Making a slight change by allowing those who are not doing the job to stand would be even odder, because that would suggest that those doing the job should not stand.

Some Methodists in America do not have bishops. Why should a Methodist minister who was not ordained by a bishop be allowed to sit in the House when an American Methodist who is a member of the United Methodist Church, and who was ordained by a bishop, would not be allowed to do so, even though that bishop is not in the apostolic succession and even though those people do not believe that such ordination is the same as ordination as even the Anglican Church teaches it? The amendment would take us to a pretty peculiar position.

Mr. Swayne: I merely point out that my right hon. Friend has raised profound issues that touch on the very establishment of the Church of England. The beauty of the amendment is that it would avoid all that by giving Labour Members precisely what they want—a candidate for Greenock and Inverclyde—without stirring up those other issues, to which my opposition and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald is total.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend cannot have that.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Yes he can.

Mr. Gummer: Well, he can have it, but it is not true. We can all have things. I do not want to return to the Jehovah's Witnesses, but they, too, can have it, although it is not true. The fact is that all that will not wash, for the simple reason that I cannot explain to my constituents why an Armenian is not allowed to stand for Parliament if he has been ordained in the Armenian Church, while a Baptist is allowed to stand. On the other hand, Methodists of certain sorts are allowed to stand while Methodists of other sorts are not.

If I may say so, there is another aspect that my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald has not thought through.

Miss Widdecombe: Just because you disagree!

Mr. Gummer: Let me put it this way. If my right hon. Friend has thought this aspect through, I would love to hear her answer. Some Pentecostal Churches have people who are called bishops. Therefore, when such a person ordains someone, one could say that he has been episcopally ordained. Can my right hon. Friend explain why a minister of the Elim Four Square Gospel Tabernacle is allowed to be a Member of the House whereas a minister of the Apostolic Tabernacle is not? They are charming people, all of them, and many of us would be hard put to distinguish between their doctrines—but, I am sorry to say, the fact is that accepting the amendment would mean that the House was suggesting that one could be a Member and the other could not. I would find it difficult to explain that distinction to the people of Walberswick. Intellectually able as they are, people in the local pub—

Mr. Hogg: The Mitre?

Mr. Gummer: No, not the Mitre. I am happy to say that it is a non-ecclesiastical pub.

Mr. Bercow: The Turk's Head?

Mr. Gummer: I am happy to say that no pub in my constituency is called the Turk's Head. *[Interruption.]* Why not? Because we are politically correct. If we started to use ecclesiastical terms of the clarity demanded by the amendment, we would get ourselves into severe trouble.

Miss Widdecombe: I thought that I should rise to the occasion once the mirth had subsided. My right hon. Friend's rebuke of me for making a distinction based on episcopal ordination would be valid were that concept not already what underlies the old system, which the Bill seeks to change. I have tried to stick with the old definitions, but not to make changes as significant as those that the Government want. That is all.

Mr. Gummer: Perhaps my right hon. Friend missed my remark, but at the beginning of my speech I said that

that principle did not underlie the legislation. Two principles underlie the Bill: first, the nature of the established Church of England and the fact that its clergymen were considered to hold offices of profit under the Crown; and secondly, the exclusion of Catholic priests from the House because it was the fashion of the time to believe that they were too dangerous. I only wish that they were as dangerous today, because that would be good for us all. That distinction was made, and my right hon. Friend must not introduce a false one.

Miss Widdecombe: It is not false.

Mr. Gummer: I apologise. My right hon. Friend should not introduce a misunderstood distinction, which has been used to explain an even more complex issue.

I must now address my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West on the question whether it is acceptable for a priest to be involved in party politics. I understand what my hon. Friend meant. I deeply oppose two attitudes to the priesthood, the first of which is that priests should be involved in party politics. I remember a minister who took that view: the late Lord Soper thought that it was impossible to be a Christian without also being a socialist. I think that that is wrong and I object to any suggestion that one cannot be a Christian and at the same time either a socialist, a Liberal or a Conservative. One cannot be a Christian and a communist or a Christian and a fascist, but one can be a Christian and a member of any of those democratic parties.

Therefore, I deeply oppose parish priests who espouse political views that derogate from their ability to be priests. However, I want priests in the pulpit to be able to talk about politics and to have a powerful voice in that respect. A fortnight ago, I was at mass and I listened to the parish priest make some telling points about the bombing of Iraq. I would not say that I agreed with every one, but a priest of the Church of God made proper statements about politics and I needed to listen to them.

The Government and the Opposition have to ask themselves big questions about bombing from on high people who are unable to defend themselves. Those moral questions have to be examined. I have still failed to get any answer to questions that I tabled about the bombing of an aspirin factory in Sudan. To me, that is a moral question. However, I am told that it is such a delicate matter of national defence that my question cannot be answered. It is right for the priest in the pulpit to be able to raise such issues, so I say to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West that priests who do not take politics into account are not doing their job properly. Politics is too big a part of life for the gospel to have nothing to say about it. The question is, could those priests be party politicians in the House while they were ordained? I would be unhappy about that, but it is not for me to decide; it is for the priests to decide.

3.30 pm

There are one or two Members of Parliament who are independent—or, as in the case of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), independent in practice. Although I disagree profoundly with my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge–Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) on a range of matters, it cannot be said that he is not independent in the House. I do not consider it unreasonable for someone to come to the House with a political label and then behave independently. Others, of course, come to the House as independents in the first place.

Mr. Hogg: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the more independent-minded Members we have, the better?

Mr. Gummer: I do not want to be led down that route, but one of the joys of debates such as this is that we hear some Members speak from the heart. That does not usually happen in the House. It is important for the House to have independent-minded and independent Members, and I would consider it perfectly proper for someone to perform such a role even were he an episcopally ordained minister of the Church of England or a priest in the Roman Catholic Church.

Dr. Godman: I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman. Paragraph 3 of canon 285 in the Roman Catholic code of canon law 1983 states:

"Clerics are forbidden to assume public office whenever it means sharing in the exercise of civil power."

Despite the explicitness of that law, I am given to understand by the Minister that the Catholic Church in Scotland, and indeed the Catholic Church in England and Wales, have no objection to the Bill as it stands.

Mr. Gummer: The Church has no objection because it thinks that this is its business rather than ours. I do not understand why we think it is our business; it is the business of the Catholic Church, and we should work on that basis.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: So it is the business of the Church of England to establish how many bishops should take their seats in the House of Lords, is it? I accept that it is for the Church to decide which bishops they should be.

Mr. Gummer: I am not discussing the established Church; I am discussing the Catholic Church. *[Interruption.]* There is a fundamental distinction to be made, and my hon. Friend must make that distinction. We happen to have an established Church in this country; we could have an argument about whether we should have one or not, but we do have one. We are now discussing something that straddles the established and the non-established Churches.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) referred quite properly to the canon law not of the Anglican Church—which has its own canon law—but of the Catholic Church. He was merely saying that the Catholic Church had reasons for what it decided. The Catholic Church has no bishops in the House of Lords—although if there were some there, they might say things that would shock, and would stand up to debate rather more powerfully than what I have heard from a number of bishops who are currently in that House.

Mr. Swayne: At least the Catholic bishops believe in God.

Mr. Gummer: That is certainly true.

Things used to be different. Bishops used to play an active part in politics, but they have decided, perfectly properly, that that is not how they wish to act in future.

[Mr. Gummer]

That is a reasonable decision, and we should respect them for it. In any event, it is their business. The question of how many bishops of the Church of England should be in the House of Lords, however, is a matter for the establishment, and hence a matter for the House of Commons, because that is what we have ordained. We have not ordained the same in the case of the Catholic Church, for two reasons. First, the Church did not want it; secondly, we would not have it. After all, we threw out the Catholic Church. We said, "We're not having you as the established Church. We're going to have this lot, and we're going to do things this way." We could not have said, "But while we're about it, there are one or two things over which we will retain control." That would be a very peculiar approach.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: Does my right hon. Friend not understand that in its current form, the Bill entitles a bishop in the Church of England, or the established Church, who is not a Lord Spiritual in the other place, to stand for Parliament, and that the same applies to an ordained and practising Church of England clergyman?

Mr. Hogg: Why not?

Mr. Howarth: That is another matter. I suggest to my right hon. Friend that unless the Bill is changed, a bishop in the Church of England could stand for Parliament.

Mr. Gummer: As it happens, that is the subject of a later amendment. I shall confine myself to the subject of amendment No. 14, which relates to clergymen.

I was trying to make a distinction between two arguments that are different. The reasons for them are different, and we should approach them from a sensible historical position. We should say first that we should not exclude Catholic priests, because they do not operate under the jurisdiction and within the structure of the established Churches, and secondly that we should not exclude Anglican clergymen, because there seems to be no rational case for doing so. Things are not the same now: Anglican clergymen no longer have an office of profit under the Crown as they once did, and it is reasonable for us to respect that. When it comes to the bishops, no doubt we shall all say what we think.

I want to say something about the whole question of independence. *[Interruption.]* I think we have had rather a good debate so far, and I do not want sedentary interruptions to spoil it.

I know nothing about the person who is to stand as a candidate, and I would say nothing that would denigrate his position or what he said to the selection committee. I do not think any of that matters. Let me, however, say something seriously to the Minister. Although I agree with every word of the Bill, I consider it an affront that, either through ignorance or for some other reason, the Government did not present a simple Bill to exclude all the discrimination that can be applied to Her Majesty's Catholic subjects under our law.

I do not think it proper that the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster is forbidden by law to walk down Victoria street in his clerical clothes. That is unacceptable, and in this day and age we should have removed the law. A short Bill would have removed it. *[Interruption.]* It is easy enough to say that earlier Governments should have done that. I am not making a party political point; I am merely saying that the present Government had a real opportunity with this Bill.

Miss Widdecombe: Five Bills passed by Parliament gave the Government an opportunity to introduce these measures, but they did not take that opportunity. We must conclude that that is because the Bill that we are discussing is all about the prospective Labour candidate for Greenock and Inverclyde.

Mr. Gummer: It is true that such action should have been taken before, and that there were a number of opportunities for it to be taken. We know why this Bill has been introduced. I do not think any member or supporter of the Government could possibly claim that it is here for any other reason—but that, in a sense, makes my point even stronger.

I support the Government in opposing the amendment, but I do so with a heavy heart, because I think that they had an opportunity to rid us of a manifest inequity. I do not understand the logic of the Home Office in not even asking itself whether we should think about other issues. Is it not about time we ended the present circumstances in which Westminster Cathedral commits an illegal act every day when it rings the bell? Is that not unacceptable? Does the Minister realise that when the millennium peal rang out at midnight, every Catholic church was doing something illegal?

Mr. Hogg: I rather agree with my right hon. Friend about the removal of all disabilities from Catholics, and I am sorry that it has not happened. My wife and my children are Catholics. In the spirit of inquiry, however, may I ask him whether his views extend to the succession to the Crown?

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. We are moving from bells to the succession. I think that it would be a very good idea if the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) returned to the amendment under discussion.

Mr. Gummer: Mr. Lord, as my neighbour in Suffolk you have often come to my aid, but today you have given us a spectacular example of that. I thank you very much indeed.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald has moved her amendment in a spirit of compromise, and of care to bring the two sides together. I think, however, that history is against her. The problem is that the two historical strands that have got us where we are do not admit of a compromise. We have to leave the Catholic Church, in its universal majesty, to make its own decisions and not to propose that this place has any right to shackle in any manner what the Holy Church does. Conversely, in the case of the Church over which, because of its establishment, we do claim some curious control, we have to say that there is no rational reason for clergymen not to stand for election to this place, nor, if they are elected, for this place to say that they may not sit here. That surely is the rational response.

For those reasons, I think that we should oppose amendment No. 14.

Mr. Hogg: I should like to begin with an apology—particularly to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), as I did not hear her speech—for missing the earlier part of the debate. However, I know my right hon. Friend's views, because I have occasionally had the opportunity to read them.

I shall be very brief because, apart from anything else, my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has said everything that could possibly be said on the subject, and a few additional words, too. I am a libertarian, and I ask myself four questions which I think deal with the matter pretty conclusively.

The first question that I ask myself is whether Members of Parliament are in fact capable of performing functions outside the House in some other capacity. I declare an interest: I am a practising barrister. I think that it is a very good thing for hon. Members to have external interests and to practise at them. My conclusion is that there is nothing about this place that prevents hon. Members from pursuing other activities as well. Indeed, I believe that it is a good thing that many do so, as it brings a wealth of experience and independence which I greatly welcome.

Mr. Gummer: Would my right hon. and learned Friend be kind enough to say that even more clearly? It is surely to the detriment of the House if hon. Members do not engage in business and other outside activities. If they do not, all they can bring to the House are their memories or their theories. Those with activities outside the House—I restate my interest—at least bring to it current knowledge of how the world outside works.

Mr. Hogg: I believe that very strongly. My right hon. Friend is right. He has described independence and independent-minded Members of Parliament. I believe that independence flows at least in part from having an existence and an experience outside this place, and also from having the resources to be able to say boo to the goose—by which I mean those from the Whips Offices who sit on the Front Benches.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I will remember that.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend can remember it as much as he likes.

Mr. Bercow: For the avoidance of doubt, and to respond to the earlier observations of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne), will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that, so far as this Bill is concerned, he sees no qualitative difference between the practice of a religious faith or responsibility and the practice of a profession or business arrangement?

3.45 pm

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend's mind is as logical as my own, because that was my second point. Having asserted that I think it is a very good thing for hon. Members to have current interests outside this place, my next question is precisely the one that he has just asked: is there anything about the role of an ordained priest that causes one to depart from the conclusion to which I have come in response to the first question? I think that the honest answer is no. I can see absolutely nothing qualitatively different about the role of a priest that makes it possible to distinguish it from, for example, that of a barrister, a practising doctor or a practising dentist—such as my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir P. Beresford). If I am wrong about that—being a modest man, I am always prepared to accept that I may be wrong—I believe that it would be a matter for the associations that adopt those people and for the electorate whose support they seek at the poll. That is my third point. Let us therefore have hon. Members in this place who have outside interests—which would surely apply to ordained priests. Nevertheless, if one is wrong about that, let the matter be for the associations and the electorate.

Finally, I find it quite impossible to distinguish between the reasons for disqualifying priests of the Catholic Church and the Church of England and those for not doing so in relation to the members of many other Churches, including the apostolic Churches identified by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal.

I am sorry to be robust with my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald—

Miss Widdecombe: It would not be the first time, would it?

Mr. Hogg: No, it would not be the first time. I have disagreed with her on other occasions and about other matters.

Miss Widdecombe: Yes, yes.

Mr. Hogg: My right hon. Friend sounds resigned. I am afraid that, so far as I am concerned, she is going to have to be resigned. I have disagreed with her on various occasions when she has spoken, and this is another of those occasions. I really cannot even get into the lists in terms of understanding the arguments in favour of this group of amendments. I think that they are wholly and utterly wrong. I shall therefore take very considerable pleasure in opposing amendment No. 14.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I should like first to apologise to the Committee for being absent for an earlier part of the debate. I notified Mr. Speaker and the Government and Opposition Front Benchers that I would miss it. I am sorry also to have missed what has evidently been a very lively debate. It has certainly been lively since my arrival.

I am very much with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) and very much against the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on this group of amendments. As I made clear on Second Reading, I do not approach the issue as someone with a Catholic or Episcopalian background; I am a Baptist by profession of faith. As I have also made clear, I disagree with many of the very fine points of distinction that have been drawn between ministers and priests—on who does what, and on whether there is a major difference between the roles.

I believe in the priesthood of all believers and that belief is founded on the New Testament. On another day and in another place, I might argue that case in great

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

depth. However, if we were to accept New Testament teaching on the priesthood, the consequence would be that all of us who are practising Christians would be excluded from membership of this place. That fact perhaps demonstrates the folly of the current restrictions, which are a way of keeping good people out of the House. We should be worried about whether that is really in the long-term interests of democracy and of the House.

The restrictions not only keep some good people out, but are entirely arbitrary in their effect. I fear that amendment No. 14 would make the impact of the restrictions even more arbitrary and strange.

We already have a situation in which a priest or other clergy member of the Church in Wales may stand for Parliament and, if elected, sit in this place. A retired clergyman or clergywoman in the Church of England may stand for election to this place. If one is a defrocked Roman Catholic priest, one may stand, but, if one is a retired Catholic priest who has not gone to the trouble of getting defrocked, one cannot stand. If one is an orthodox priest or a retired orthodox priest, one cannot stand. If one is a rabbi or a Methodist minister, one can stand. The distinctions are meaningless, not just in secular law but in New Testament theology.

The sooner that we sweep away the remnants of religious discrimination in our democratic practice, the better. That is not specifically the Liberal Democrat line. I am sure that in my party we would find people who hold a different point of view, as on many other subjects—*[Interruption.]* That may not surprise hon. Members, but I am happy to stand here in my own right to say clearly that it ought to be offensive to us in this day and age that religious discrimination is built into our legislation.

I take the point made by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal; perhaps we should have gone further. We certainly should have gone sooner. However, the fact that we should have gone sooner or further does not mean that we should now go nowhere. To that extent, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald is misdirecting her efforts, and so are those who support her case and her cause. We should be trying to eliminate religious discrimination, not entrench or refine it. To that purpose, I shall certainly vote against the amendment and support the Bill.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) said that the debate was lively. My instant reaction was that he was not talking about the debate that I had heard—but of course he was not; he was in a different debate.

The debate has been sensible, if lengthy. Sometimes it almost verged on being an argument about angels on a pinhead, but that might be appropriate in this case. The debate has none the less been good humoured, and certainly constructive. I extend my thanks particularly to my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay), for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) and for Greenock and Inverclyde (Dr. Godman) for their contributions and for their support for the Government's position.

I found surprising—indeed, almost frightening—the extent to which I agreed not only with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), with whom I have agreed on several issues, and even with the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg), whose civil libertarian views I have some sympathy with on occasion, but—although I thought I would never say it—with the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). Indeed, during part of the debate, I almost expected him to speak in favour of an inclusive, multi-faith, multicultural society. He did not quite do so, but in a very Tory way he almost advocated some form of political correctness.

I agree strongly with the right hon. Gentleman that the House should be open to as many people as possible, that it should be the choice of the electorate whom they send here and that it is not the job of the state to interfere with the internal organisation and practices of Churches. That is a Tory way of being politically correct, and I agree with him.

A number of points were raised with which I shall deal head on. Evidently, the Bill was introduced to address the case of David Cairns. I was open about that at the outset on Second Reading. Let me make it clear that that is the reason the Bill was introduced. It was patently obvious to us that an injustice would be done if David Cairns was prevented from taking the seat that the electorate might put him in a position to take after the election. It would have been wrong to allow that situation.

There are many demands on parliamentary time, all the time. Arguably, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal raised several points with which Parliament might like to deal. There are many other issues, too. I have been trying to secure the introduction of a fire safety Bill for a couple of years. There is always a premium on parliamentary time. However, a patent injustice was about to be done with which the Government felt it appropriate to deal. Other issues may well have to be dealt with at some point; that remains to be seen.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Hogg *rose—*

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. O'Brien: I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal, then to the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham and then to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), and then I shall make some progress.

Mr. Gummer: Does not the Minister agree that although it would have been inappropriate for him to have included in the Bill a series of clauses about fire safety, it would not have been inappropriate for him to have included a series of clauses that removed all disqualifications on Her Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects? That is the gravamen of the attack. He could have done so without the need for any extra parliamentary time. The fact that he did not do so is at least a disappointment and at most a serious wrong.

4 pm

Mr. O'Brien: I have much sympathy with the principle that the right hon. Gentleman is advocating, but I do not assent to the practical effects of introducing a Bill to

remove some of the distinctions. The bells, oh the bells! I can imagine the debate about whether people wanted more bells to ring or whether the muezzin should have rights to call the faithful to prayer, and to what extent we should allow that through loudspeakers. With his experience of Parliament, I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman can imagine that, too. So, I do not accept that introducing such a Bill would have been easy. We wanted a focused Bill, and that is what we have got. A particular case exposed the particular principle involved.

Mr. Hogg: The hon. Gentleman has spoken of the injustice to Mr. Cairns—just as there would be injustice to Mr. Cairn's association and electorate—and I agree, but would not the problem go further? Would not it probably breach Mr. Cairns's convention rights if he were prevented from standing? Would not it be difficult for the Home Secretary to make a declaration of compatibility on the Bill if the amendment were accepted?

Mr. O'Brien: I shall tread with a little caution. The right hon. and learned Gentleman rightly asks me to express a view on whether the amendment might cause us to breach the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Forth: Who cares?

Mr. O'Brien: It is the law of the land, and it is right that we take due account of it. I want to reflect on the matter. I suspect that we might get very close to an infringement. Indeed, I suspect that if we had not introduced such legislation as this Bill, we might well have found ourselves challenged in the Court under the convention on the Cairns or some other case. That was not particularly why we introduced the Bill, but the right hon. and learned Gentleman makes a good point.

Mr. Bercow: I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) will not spoil the argument, because I for one—I suspect that I will be joined by colleagues in this observation—could not give a tinker's cuss about the view on the European convention on human rights. I am motivated by different factors in my support for the Bill and in my opposition to the amendment.

I in no way dissent from what the Minister has said, but will he nevertheless confirm that one effect of the amendment tabled by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary would have been to enable Monsignor Bruce Kent, had he been elected, to take his seat in 1992 to represent the people of Oxford, West and Abingdon? If the Minister accepts that that is correct—I believe it is—why did no Labour Member propose such a measure in the run-up to that election? Was it on account of the fact that Labour knew that Father Bruce had not the slightest prospect of being elected, or was it because it did not wish him to be? Which is it?

Mr. O'Brien: I am not aware of any discussions that went on before 1992. I was not in this House, and neither was the hon. Gentleman. Therefore, neither he nor I were in a position to bring forward such a Bill as this. When the case of David Cairns was brought to my attention, I thought that justice needed to be done, and I think that in due course the House will do justice to David Cairns.

Let me explain why this issue was not dealt with in a Bill introduced earlier in the Session: we wanted to consult the Churches, and that consultation has now been completed. *[Interruption.]* I am being interrupted by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) who, from a sedentary position, and in her usual vociferous style, is waving her five fingers in the air and saying that there could have been five Bills. We could not have included this measure in five Bills in the period following the consultation. That was not the case. There were two possibilities, but the consultation period on this measure had not been completed in time to include it in those Bills. The short title of the Bills would not have enabled us to include this issue. None the less, short titles can be dealt with. However, by the time the issue was before the House and the consultation had been completed, it was not possible to include it in those Bills.

Dr. Godman: I disappeared from the Chamber for a minute because I dashed to the Library to obtain a copy of Cardinal Thomas Winning's letter, which was part of the consultation. Cardinal Winning says in his letter, inter alia:

"I would not be in favour of any priest being elected to the House of Commons. That, however, would be because of Canon Law and not because of what can be seen as discrimination in the civil law of our country."

That is the anomaly that I had in mind.

In his letter of 4 February last year, Cardinal Winning asked whether the restrictions would be lifted on "clergy"—that is, on bishops, priests and deacons, or simply on priests alone? Has that question been answered?

Mr. O'Brien: All the restrictions on bishops other than bishops of the Church of England who are Members of another place would be lifted. Therefore, any restrictions on deacons or anyone else would be lifted. The only people who would, as a result of their ecclesiastical background, continue to be excluded from this place would be those who were actually Members of another place and therefore had a voice in the legislative process.

The key principle is whether we should exclude certain citizens from participating in the legislative process. The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst read out the list of those who were excluded. As the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal pointed out, many of those are in receipt of some funding via the Crown and there are therefore reasons for excluding them. However, that does not include the sort of people we are now discussing, who are priests or ministers in various ways of particular religions.

Amendment No. 13 would limit the meaning of ordination as relating to ordination as either a priest or deacon. It would echo similar words used in the House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act 1801. We consider that the additional words are unnecessary, although their effect would not be inaccurate in terms of the purpose of the clause. Parliament has not thought it necessary to retain that gloss on the meaning of the word "ordination" in the more recent legislation that refers to disqualification on grounds of ordination—that is, the 1998 devolution enactments and the European Assembly Elections Act 1978. We are trying to place election to this House broadly on all fours with the sort of provisions that relate to the devolved Parliament and Assemblies and also the European Parliament.

[Mr. O'Brien]

I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst for explaining the purpose of amendment No. 12. Our view is that the amendment is unnecessary. The meaning of "minister" does not need broadening. Those affected by the disqualifications in the 1801 Act and the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829 are sufficiently identified in clause 1(1)—that is, persons who have been ordained or are a minister of any religious denomination. The addition of "or the recognised equivalent" would provoke doubts as to the sufficiency of the phrase referred to in clause 1(1), which appears in the 1998 devolution enactments for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and in the European Assembly Elections Act 1978. Accepting the amendment would therefore necessitate making similar amendments to those pieces of legislation.

The proposed words would also run the risk of being construed in a way that was restrictive. It is to do with the way in which the legal interpretation rules apply. If an additional phrase is added to a list, it may well restrict the breadth of the interpretation of those words. That could result in the amendment having precisely the opposite effect to the one intended by the right hon. Gentleman. In addition, including this wording could mean that we had to add it to the other relevant pieces of legislation. Accepting the amendment could cause problems.

For the purposes of Pepper *v.* Hart, the Government intend the Bill to receive the broadest possible interpretation and to cover the sort of circumstances about which the right hon. Gentleman is concerned. He and I agree on that issue, although I am not able to accept his amendment.

On amendment No. 15, I recognise that the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald has strong reservations about the possibility of ordained clergy sitting in this House if they are also practising as priests. She mentioned this on Second Reading, and I recognise her concerns. She and I are of the same religious background, and I have some sympathy with the ecclesiastical idea—the religious idea—that priests have a full-time job and should not do another one. A number of arguments were presented most eloquently by the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal about worker priests and other circumstances. However, the key argument was put forward by Members on both sides of the House—it is not the job of this Parliament to tell the Catholic Church what rules to follow and how its priests should carry on their work. It is Parliament's job to open to people the right to elect those whom they wish to elect.

The Catholic Church is not an established Church. The established Church may well have particular rules that apply. It is my view that election to this House and, indeed, to the devolved Assemblies and Parliament and to the European Parliament should be open to as many as possible, without artificial and unnecessary restrictions.

The Select Committee on Home Affairs looked at the issue in 1998 and recommended the removal of all restrictions on ministers of religion standing for and serving as Members of Parliament. It commented:

"these restrictions seem to us to be out of place in modern times. There should be no restriction on ministers of religion becoming Members of Parliament, and certainly no distinction between those of different faiths or of different Christian traditions. Whether such persons should serve as an elected representative should be a matter for the rules or customs of their own faiths or churches and for the electorate, and need not be restricted by law."

The Government share that view.

Secondly, we consulted the Church of England, the Church of Ireland, the Church of Scotland and the Roman Catholic Churches in England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland. All were content for the restrictions to be removed. Representatives from the Roman Catholic Church pointed out that it would not affect them, because canon law would prevent serving priests from sitting in this place. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham referred, quite rightly, to the Church in Wales. The Church in Wales was disestablished in 1912—*[Interruption.]* I am corrected—it was 1914. The effect is that its ministers are able to stand for election to this House. If I remember rightly, back in 1979 Rev. Bill Morgan was a member of the Church in Wales and was able to stand at Worcester, in England, without restriction.

Mr. Gummer: If the amendment were carried, ministers of the Church in Wales would, for the first time, not be able to stand for Parliament, because they are episcopally ordained. If they were in full-time ministry, they would be excluded.

Mr. O'Brien: I fear that the right hon. Gentleman may be right. I look to see whether the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald agrees with that; it appears that she does. I find that even more worrying. The arguments advanced by my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock and for Greenock and Inverclyde and by others on both sides totally demolished the points made by the right hon. Lady. I hope that she will feel able to withdraw her amendment, although I hear her saying that she intends to press it to a Division. That is her right, and many hon. Members will wish to express their strong views in opposing her. Her amendment is wrong in principle and would put the House in the position of interfering—wrongly—in the internal operations of Churches that have a right to make their own rules. It should not be for us to interfere with them.

Miss Widdecombe: I do not intend to withdraw the amendment. Members on the Government Benches are not being allowed a free vote, which is wholly inappropriate for a decision of this sort. They are being whipped to vote by the Government. I urge those who are free, who do not approve of what the Government are doing and who seek a workable compromise to support my amendment.

The Committee divided: Ayes 17, Noes 264.

Division No. 139] **[4.13 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Brooke, Rt Hon Peter
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Duncan Smith, Iain
Fallon, Michael
Heald, Oliver
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Syms, Robert
Viggers, Peter
Wells, Bowen
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wilkinson, John

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allan, Richard
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Ballard, Jackie
Barnes, Harry
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benn, Rt Hon Tony *(Chesterfield)*
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Best, Harold
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brand, Dr Peter
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm *(Gordon)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burns, Simon
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Rt Hon Dr David *(S Shields)*
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Eric *(Midlothian)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Ms Margaret
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Rt Hon Barry *(Alyn)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Ms Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian *(Makerfield)*
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKenna, Mrs Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Maxton, John
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheff'ld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morgan, Ms Julie *(Cardiff N)*
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Ms Estelle *(B'ham Yardley)*
Morris, Rt Hon Sir John *(Aberavon)*
Mowlam, Rt Hon Marjorie
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Ms Sandra
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheldon, Rt Hon Robert
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Miss Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Squire, Ms Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mike Hall and
Mr. Clive Betts.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Fallon: I beg to move amendment No. 4 in page 1, line 9, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

The Second Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

[Mr. Fallon]

Amendment No. 6, in schedule 1, page 2, line 8, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

Amendment No. 7, in page 2, line 13, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

Amendment No. 8, in page 2, line 18, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

Amendment No. 9, in page 2, line 23, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

Amendment No. 10, in schedule 1, page 2, line 28, at end insert—

'or Bishop of the Church of England'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed amendment, in line 1, after first 'of', insert 'a see in'.

Mr. Fallon: It is an extraordinary side effect of this Bill to enable David Cairns properly to contest his seat in Scotland that the Government should now propose that any bishop should be able to become a Member of this House. That is an enormous change, and something that certainly requires further consideration.

The Minister has prayed in aid of the change that he has recommended today the Home Affairs Committee report, but that same Select Committee report was careful to exclude not simply the senior diocesan bishops but all serving bishops from the change that is proposed. Indeed, the change was not recommended by Professor Blackburn, on whose paper the Committee relied. The House would be making a serious mistake if it allowed bishops to become Members of Parliament.

Of course, we are not simply talking of those senior diocesan bishops who are already represented in the House of Lords. Another 16—we may call them junior diocesan bishops—may well in the fullness of time move through to the House of Lords. Two other bishops may not—the Bishop of Sodor and Man and the Bishop of Europe. There are many suffragan bishops; there are also honorary assistant bishops. We would need to think carefully about suddenly allowing bishops to become Members of this House.

It seems to me that there would immediately be a recipe for a conflict of loyalty. Under the Bill, a diocesan bishop could be, say, a Labour Member of Parliament, and his suffragan bishop could be a Conservative Member of Parliament. We would have not only a conflict of loyalties between their duties to their Church and to their Parliament but a conflict of loyalties between bishops within the same diocese. If a junior diocesan bishop were elected to this House and a month later a senior diocesan bishop happened to retire, as the Bishop of Chichester has just done, and if the junior bishop was next in line of seniority to move through, he would have to cease being a Member of this House, even though he had been elected by his constituents, and proceed up the Corridor to the other place.

It is technically possible under the Bill for a senior diocesan bishop to retire and stand for election to the House of Commons all over again. It gives a new meaning to the phrase "flying bishops"; we could have bishops flying up and down the Corridor. I know that Lords Home and Hailsham sat in both Houses twice, but the House ought to think carefully before having bishops here, in the other place, and then back here. Why should a constituency that has elected a bishop to serve it here in Parliament suddenly face a by-election because that bishop becomes senior enough to proceed through to the House of Lords? That would inflict a wholly unnecessary by-election on that constituency simply as a result of the rotation of diocesan bishops.

Mr. Hogg: I remind my hon. Friend that there is a precedent for that difficulty. In a previous incarnation, the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) exposed his constituency to a by-election. Indeed, under the old regime, any eldest son of a peer who was elected to the House of Commons and then saw his father die would cause a by-election. We have been here many times before, and the House thought that the situation was wrong in that case. It is wrong to advance the argument now.

4.30 pm

Mr. Fallon: I take it from that intervention that my right hon. and learned Friend agrees with me. Under the Bill, we are putting the House in a position that, as he points out, was corrected in the case of hereditary peers. That is what the Government will do. It will be possible for bishops to become MPs, to move through to the House of Lords and then to come back to this place. That puts the House and the constituencies that would be involved in an absurd position—simply because of the drafting of the measure.

Those anomalies might arise if we allow bishops to become MPs. There are also two substantive arguments against bishops becoming Members of Parliament. First, they obviously already have their own place in the legislature; they have reserved seats and special arrangements in the other place—the only group to do so. The House of Bishops is collectively represented. I do not wholly agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), who referred earlier to the fact that some bishops were in the other place while others were not. The House is collectively representative, so because of the rotation principle, all the bishops would have the opportunity to sit there in the fullness of time. It is not right that they should also have an entitlement to sit in this place.

Mr. Bercow: I presume that my hon. Friend wants his amendment to receive a response from the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department. Does he agree that that might be difficult as the hon. Gentleman is not at present in the Committee? Is it the intention of the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, who is sitting on the Treasury Bench, to respond?

Mr. Fallon: I shall have to leave that matter to Members on the Treasury Bench to sort out among

themselves. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office is present in order to answer my second substantive argument, which I was about to develop.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Paddy Tipping): We shall ensure that the hon. Gentleman receives an adequate reply to his important amendment.

Mr. Fallon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that assurance, from which I assume that it does not matter which Minister responds.

My first substantive argument is that the bishops of the Church of England are collectively represented in the other place in any event; they thus do not need the additional facility of seats in the House of Commons.

Mr. Stunell: Is it the hon. Gentleman's view that those hereditary peers who were unsuccessful in the ballot for places in the Lords should also be disqualified on the grounds that they have representatives in the other place?

Mr. Fallon: I was coming to that point; it relates to my second substantive argument, and offers a good illustration of the mess the Government have got themselves into. We cannot admit bishops to this place without also considering the effect on the composition of the other place—the problem to which the hon. Gentleman draws our attention.

The Wakeham commission includes recommendations on those senior diocesan bishops. The report recommends that their number should be reduced from 21 to 16 and that five seats should be made available for members of other denominations. It also recommends that the principle of rotation and seniority be ended and that, somehow, the new Appointments Commission should be able to select the membership of the bishops' Bench by the process of "ecumenical instrument"; to be organised by a group known as CTE—Churches Together in England.

I am a little hazy on that point; I do not understand what is wrong with the principle of rotation and seniority. However, perhaps we should leave that aside.

The measure is a recipe for conflict. If there were bishops in this place and bishops in the other place, and if suffragan bishops and their senior bishops from the same diocese represented different parties in this place, that would seem muddled.

It may be that there is an agenda behind this sudden change. Perhaps the Government really want to drive bishops out of the House of Lords altogether. If we let the measure through, the Government could say, in a few years, that we need not have bishops in the House of Lords at all because they are entitled to stand for the House of Commons. Perhaps that secret agenda is at work in this measure.

If I were involved in the higher reaches of the Church, I should be extremely worried about that point—not only might the number of bishops be diminished, but there is a threat to their position altogether. Once we have bishops as MPs, someone is bound to ask why we should also have bishops with reserved places in the House of Lords. That is inconsistent.

The measure is muddled; there will be an important side effect that has nothing to do with David Cairns. That matter should have been considered much more carefully—perhaps by a Speaker's Conference, but certainly as part of the more general implementation of stage 2 reform of the House of Lords. I urge the Committee to accept the amendment.

Mr. Gummer: I often agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), but the picture he paints is unlikely. The idea that, all over the country, hordes of bishops are rushing out to get themselves elected seems to be, ab initio, unlikely. The idea that both the diocesan bishop and his suffragan would be elected to this place for different parties at the same time seems so unlikely as not to be worthy of consideration. It is possible that a bishop might be elected to the House of Commons, but even that is extremely unlikely.

The point at issue is different from that under discussion in the previous amendment; this amendment deals only with the established Church. I disagree with my hon. Friend for the simple reason that, for the most part, the bishops to whom we are referring are not able to be Members of the House of Lords. A suffragan bishop may not sit in the House of Lords; an assistant bishop may not sit in the House of Lords. Associate bishops or bishops from abroad may not sit in the House of Lords. The only people to whom my hon. Friend's argument applies are those diocesan bishops who are not rotationally able to sit in the House of Lords at present.

I am not a betting man, but I am prepared to take a large bet that none of those bishops would stand for election to this place in any circumstances—for two good reasons. The first is the rotational system itself. The second is that one cannot conceive of a diocesan bishop who would think it possible both to hold that office and to be a party political Member of this place—because that is what it would mean. The situation would not arise.

We are really talking about the other bishops. Surely it would be odd to remove the inability of clergymen of the Church of England and priests of the Roman Catholic Church to stand for election to this place, while saying that clergymen who are bishops of a different sort—associate bishops, suffragan bishops and the like—should not be able to stand. It is not that I think that any of them would stand, but that there is no logic for excluding them. It would be logical for the Church of England to do so, but not for Parliament to take that step.

In this situation, we are much better guided by history. In the past, the word "bishop" referred only to diocesan bishops; the Church of England did not go in for suffragan and assistant bishops. We are treading new ground. Change has taken place in the Church of England since the legislation that we are dealing with became extant. There is thus no historical reason why we should not take this step.

I do not believe that the procedure will take place. Even if it were to do so, my hon. Friend's concern about bishops flying up and down the Corridor is unlikely to come about. After all, there is a perfect answer: the people who elected them would know of the possibility and would take it into account. It is not for us to say that that is not possible and proper. Even if they elected them and the occasion arose, it would be possible for the bishop to refuse the preferment.

The amendment makes a meal out of something that is not really worth a bite. We can perfectly properly leave the matter; it will not, in fact, make a ha'p'orth of

[Mr. Gummer]

difference. If I were to vote for the amendment and it were passed, that would not make a ha'p'orth of difference either. However, it happens to be a bit more logical to carry the argument through as the Bill now stands. I suggest that the House can do so without any fear at all that we shall be under the jurisdiction of a horde of bishops, whether vagantes or not. The fact is that they will not come; we will not have them here, so either agreeing to the amendment or not is, frankly, immaterial—but it is a matter of rationality, and I prefer to be on the side of reason.

Mr. Stunell: For the second time today, rather worryingly, I find myself in almost complete agreement with the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

Mr. Bercow: Savour it.

Mr. Stunell: Yes, I will; it may not happen again. I struggled to comprehend the argument adduced by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon). If I understood him properly, he was saying that we should not pass the Bill in its current form because the bishops already have representatives in the House of Lords who can speak for them. However, as I tried to suggest in my intervention, it is also the case that hereditary peers who were unsuccessful in the election have exactly that kind of representation. Of course it is arguable that that applies to other people who sit there in some sort of representative mode. No special reason exists to use the representative role of those bishops who sit in the Lords to disqualify those who do not sit there.

The second argument was that by-elections could be caused. If a by-election were foreseeable, that would perhaps be a reason for not having certain categories of candidate. I wondered whether we should also introduce a rule to prevent people who have a series illness from standing for Parliament. Should we have health checks? To be honest, by-elections are much more often caused by death than by preferment, so they might best be avoided by having rigorous medical checks to weed out those who are not up to the next four or five years. In all conscience, I think that the by-election argument is not sustainable; it is only adduced as an argument to prop up the weakness of other arguments.

Another argument is that there is a see-saw case and people may appear in one House and then the other. We may like to think that the right direction for traffic is from this House to the other place, but in all conscience, why should not there be a route back from that House to this place? If a retirement age were introduced, or if other factors came into play, what on earth would be wrong with that?

The third argument seemed to be that there might be a conflict between bishops if they finished up in this House, but on different sides. As hon. Members will know from my previous contribution, I am not a member of the Church of England. I do not take detailed account of what goes on in the Synod, but I was under the impression that its members were on opposite sides already. The idea that we would somehow avoid conflict by keeping them out of the House seems misplaced.

The fourth argument was perhaps the most feeble of all. It was suggested that if the Bill were passed, it would be bad for bishops because it would sound the death knell of bishops in the other place if they were allowed to sit in this House. That is a self-serving argument. Allowing politicians from that place into this place certainly has not sounded their death knell, so there is no particular reason why allowing bishops into this place should sound their death knell either.

In fact, it would suit hon. Members best if we had the smallest possible constituency of people who were allowed to be elected to the House. Ideally, we would restrict entry to those who have already been elected, but we widen it a little. There is always a tendency for us to consider restrictions on those who can be elected not solely in terms of the benefit to democracy, but perhaps at the back of our minds, subconsciously, seeing benefit to ourselves.

I argue strongly that the amendment is wholly mistaken in its purpose and will not achieve what the hon. Member for Sevenoaks seeks. I hope that it will fall.

4.45 pm

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) is perfectly capable of defending and promoting the amendment, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not seriously suggesting that my hon. Friend seeks to restrict the opportunities for people to stand for election to the House of Commons because he is personally fearful of priestly competition.

Mr. Stunell: I am properly drawn up by the hon. Gentleman—there is a tendency slightly to overstate one's case. I do not envisage that bishops will be clamouring to stand at the forthcoming election for the constituency of Sevenoaks. I may have missed something, but so far as I know, the Archbishop of Canterbury does not have an eye on Sevenoaks, or on Buckingham. I am happy to confirm that no such suggestion was intended. I hope that the House will very quickly dispose of this unnecessary amendment, which would have poor outcomes were it to be passed.

Mr. Hogg: I should like to make a quick contribution to what I hope is the rapid disposal and dispatch of the amendment. I do not agree with it. I have already argued in general terms why I am in favour of freedom. All that I said in the debate on the first group of amendments applies to this group. I believe in choice and freedom; they are traditional Conservative values, and I shall do nothing to depart from them. I approach this group of amendments from that general position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) has adduced four arguments. They are all misplaced. He first talked about a conflict of loyalty between the bishops and their suffragans, or between the bishops and their Churches. That may be so; there may be a conflict of loyalties. Many Members have various conflicts of loyalties, and it is ultimately a matter for the person who puts himself or herself forward for election to resolve. It is a matter for the associations to address and, ultimately, it is for the electorates to decide. It is not for us to be prescriptive. Yes, there may be conflicts of loyalty, but they are no greater and no less than the conflicts of loyalty that already face many Members.

The second point was the suggestion that by-elections may be caused by the death or retirement of a Lord Spiritual and his replacement in another place by an elected bishop. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) expressed his views on that point, and I agree with him.

In any event, what is the problem? As I said in an intervention on my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks—I do not think that he quite followed the point—we have been here many times before. In the past, the eldest sons of peers have triggered by-elections on the death of their fathers. That happened in the case of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn) and in the case of my right hon. and noble Friend, my father, when he succeeded my grandfather and had to vacate his seat at Oxford. Constituency associations selected the right hon. Member for Chesterfield and my father to stand for Parliament and the electorate voted them in at a general election. It is therefore an issue for the associations and the electorate and not something about which we should be prescriptive.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) made a perfectly sound point when he said that, if we were to extend the provision so that the possibility of causing a by-election would lead to someone's disqualification, we would almost, by definition, have to exclude the elderly and the very elderly. I shall not say into which category my right hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Sir E. Heath) falls, but I am entitled to say that the House would have been the poorer without his presence. I am very glad that his association and the electorate returned him over many years, and he has now served for 51 years in the House. That same point applied to Sir Winston Churchill. We must not make the possibility of a by-election become a barrier to someone's being adopted or selected as a candidate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks said that the proposal might push forward the secret agenda that the Lords Spiritual should no longer sit in the other place. I wish to make a couple of observations about that. If it were left to me, I would not have Lords Spiritual in the other place. I would have an entirely elected second Chamber, and I suspect that we are moving towards one that has a very large elected element. I would be surprised if the Lords Spiritual ultimately retain their seats. As I am pressing for a second Chamber that is either largely or wholly elected, I would support their disappearance. There is nothing personal about it; I believe in a powerful second Chamber and that means an elected one.

I make it clear to my hon. Friend that there is no secret agenda; it is public and overt. I want an elected Second Chamber. If this provision makes a small contribution to that, it is another reason for opposing my hon. Friend's amendment. I hope that we shall have no more of this nonsense.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have had a good debate on the amendment. On the point raised by the hon. Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), as the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) made clear, elections to Parliament have been an issue on many occasions in the past. The right hon. and learned Gentleman referred to two examples, one of which was obviously close to him because it concerned his father. From time to time, people have been sent from this House to the other place and a by-election has been necessary. We do not take the view that particular restrictions should apply to anyone who might be sent to another place.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) made exactly the right point. He said that the amendment makes a meal out of something that is barely worth a bite. I agree with him entirely.

Amendment No. 4 is contrary to the view taken by the Select Committee on Home Affairs in its report, "Electoral Law and Administration". At paragraph 127 of volume 1, it recommended that

"all restrictions on ministers of religion standing for, and serving as, Members of Parliament be removed; the exception would be in respect of all serving bishops of the Church of England who, for so long as places are reserved for the senior bishops in the House of Lords, should remain ineligible to serve as Members of the Commons."

The secret agenda that the hon. Member for Sevenoaks fears appears to be the secret agenda of the Conservative party rather than that of the Government. I do not know whether the support of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) for the Bill is part of a secret agenda, but the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham got it right. There is no secret agenda: it is overt.

There are 42 Church of England diocesan bishops, of whom 40 could qualify to sit in the House of Lords as Lords Spiritual. At any one time, only 26 are summoned to be Lords Spiritual and those bishops will be disqualified from House of Commons membership because they already have a voice in the Lords.

The proposal is broadly in line with the Home Affairs Committee recommendation, but it goes slightly wider. Although we consider it extremely unlikely that bishops—whether or not they are Lords Spiritual—would wish to become MPs while performing the duties of a bishop, it seems right in principle to relate the disqualification to those who actually have a voice in the other place. We therefore consider it right to remove all statutory restrictions, thereby enabling anyone—save for those bishops who are Lords Spiritual—who so wishes to become a Member of Parliament if elected.

I do not think that a queue of bishops wish to stand for Parliament, so the fears of the hon. Member for Sevenoaks are unfounded. I hope that he will withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Fallon: I shall not pretend that the amendment has widespread support across the Chamber and I shall certainly reflect on what has been said. However, the Home Affairs Committee supported it, saying that all serving bishops should be excluded. The Minister described that as going slightly wide of what he intended, but the Home Affairs Committee agreed with me that no serving bishops should be in the House. It is important to put that on record, but in view of the fact that the amendment did not attract quite as much support as I had originally anticipated, I beg to ask leave to withdraw it.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

SHORT TITLE, COMMENCEMENT AND EXTENT

Mr. Fallon: I beg to move amendment No. 11, in page 1, line 17, at end insert—

'(1A) This Act shall come into force on the day after the general election for the Parliament after that in which it is passed, and shall apply only to persons elected to the House of Commons after that date.'.

I hope that I have better luck with this one, Mr. Lord. The purpose of the amendment is very simple. It is to delay the implementation of the Bill until after the election. Let me immediately put on record that I have nothing against Mr. David Cairns or his ambition to serve as a Member of Parliament. In the fullness of time, I hope to welcome him to the House. If he finds a safer seat than the one for which he has been selected, we will all be ready to welcome him.

I made the point on Second Reading—and the amendment gives it effect—that introducing the Bill in order to support a candidate discriminates against those who might have put their names forward for selection by either party during the years in which candidates were selected, but did not do so because they knew how the law stood. We would be discriminating against all those people if we changed the law to benefit one individual.

On a more general point, I do not think that we should change the law governing elections either to suit a particular candidate or in the weeks running up to a general election, or to do so without widespread cross-party support. That is why in the old days, when these things were done properly, we had Speaker's Conferences where such matters could be discussed between the parties and then put on the statute book, so that at the beginning of the next Parliament everyone would be absolutely clear about where they stood.

Mr. Bercow: I put it to my hon. Friend and to the House that his argument is certainly unsustainable and possibly disingenuous because it would have been perfectly open to other individuals, knowing the law as it stood, to put themselves forward as prospective parliamentary candidates, to be selected as such and then to seek by democratic pressure to change the law. The fact that none of them apparently did so is really not a good reason to fail to do the right thing now.

Mr. Fallon: We could not know whether other candidates wanted to take advantage of a change in the law. To his credit, from the outset the Minister has been honest about the fact that the Bill has been introduced simply to facilitate the candidature of one individual. I think that it is bad law to legislate simply to assist one person. Perhaps it should have been a personal Act—we do not get many of those.

Mr. Gummer *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I am being challenged by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). I hope that he will not damage my case as much as he did on the previous amendment.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that, looking back over history, the law of the House has been changed in response to the situations of individual Members. Bradlaugh changed the law of the House for his own good, in a sense. With the election of Wilkes, the law was changed for one man. The law was changed for Rothschild to allow Jews into the House. It has to be the individual case that concentrates the mind and enables us to take such decisions. My hon. Friend really ought to allow this to be in the great historical tradition of freedom.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Fallon: I am being pressed to give way again.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The measure would come into effect the day after the general election, so deals only with Members being able to take up their seats. It would have no practical effect on an individual case. The law prevents people not from standing, but from taking up their seat. What is the point of the amendment?

Mr. Fallon: It avoids the situation that the hon. Gentleman outlined on Second Reading—

It being Five o'clock, THE CHAIRMAN *put the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Orders [7 November and 6 February].*

Amendment negatived.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Miss Widdecombe: On a point of order, Mr. Lord. Can you explain what just happened? A number of hon. Members shouted "Aye" when you put the Question on amendment No. 11, but we did not have a Division. This is for my guidance only; I would not dream of challenging you.

The Second Deputy Chairman: The right hon. Lady is, in a polite way, challenging me. I believe that we followed the correct procedure.

Bill reported, without amendment.

Order for Third Reading read.

5.1 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

In commending the Bill to the House, I should say that I am grateful for the very constructive way in which it has been considered. I am also grateful for the strong support that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) has given the Bill and for other Opposition Members' support for the principles behind it. I also express my gratitude to my hon. Friends, in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh). She has been trying to bring the issue before the House for some time and to convince me that it is right to change the law, and I agree with her.

We have had a good discussion on some issues. The Bill was introduced because of the particular injustice that might have been done to an individual. However, there have been injustices in the past. Had we allowed this injustice to take place, it would have affected not just the

person involved, but a constituency Labour party and a whole constituency. They would not have been given the choice, which they may, or may not, accept.

The debate has shown that there are still strong feelings on religious issues in this place, and it is right that we discuss them. The main Churches in this country have been consulted. They agree that the restrictions are no longer required—if they ever were—and that they can be removed. The Government share that view. It would be absurd if Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims and other religious groups, including most nonconformist denominations, were able to become Members of the House, but that serving and former ministers of religion of some faiths were not allowed to do so. That is a particular hardship for people who are religious but who, as in the case of Mr. David Cairns, no longer wish to practise as a priest. The existing law hits those people hard, for they are not free to exchange one way of being in service to the public for another. It cannot be right that a former priest is denied the right to sit as a Member of Parliament solely on the grounds of his former calling.

As I said on Second Reading, I do not consider that there is likely to be a long queue of clergy pressing to become Members of Parliament. That will be a matter for Churches and individuals to consider, but I believe that it is for the individuals and for their constituents to consider, not for the House of Commons to dictate to the Churches involved. The Catholic Church does not consider that practising Catholic priests ought to be Members of Parliament, but I think it right that the House sends a message that, if the Catholic Church were to change its mind, no law of the state would prohibit a Catholic priest from sitting as a Member.

This small, but none the less somewhat controversial Bill—at least with some right hon. and hon. Members—will remove what I regard as an archaic restriction that has been in force for 200 years. A potential injustice will be avoided thereby. The repeal of existing legislation is timely and I hope that the House will give the Bill its wholehearted support.

5.6 pm

Mr. Bercow: I rise to speak in support of giving the Bill its Third Reading. Its principles were thoroughly and rigorously debated on Second Reading and it is right and proper that we should have had the opportunity today further to consider the issues involved and proposed amendments in Committee. A Report stage was possible, but in the end—although obviously a matter of nip and tuck—it did not come to that, and we now have the pleasure and responsibility of engaging in what I hope will be a serious and constructive debate on Third Reading.

Much earlier, my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) drew attention to his secular motivation, if I may so describe it. He emphasised that he was not a member of the Church of England, or of any other Church. I think that I do not misrepresent him in saying that he is not a religious person, and it might even be said that he is an irreligious person. Other right hon. and hon. Members who have spoken have either admitted or openly professed that they have a religious motivation, at least in part; therefore, I think it right that I put my own cards on the table.

I practise no religion and I have no plans to do so. My late father, bless his cotton socks, was Jewish; my mother converted to Judaism, although I suspect that she would be first to concede that she did so out of convenience, not conviction. I was brought up in a Jewish household—I had a bar mitzvah and so on and so forth—and I have always strongly identified with the Jewish people. I have never apologised for or felt embarrassed about being Jewish—rather, I have been proud of it; and I have an especially strong identification with the state of Israel. However, I am not a religious person. I cannot get hung up about religious considerations.

None the less, I respect the fact that many people are motivated in their lives by a commitment to religion. I certainly recognise that religion can be a source—perhaps, for some people, the source—of civil obligation and personal morality, but I would argue that religion is by no means the only source of civil obligation or of personal morality. That is the vantage point—that of an irreligious person taking a secular interest in an important subject—from which I approach the Bill.

In supporting the proposition that the Bill be given its Third Reading, I emphasise that—as today's debates have made clear—I speak on my own account and in no sense on behalf of the Opposition. I repeat what has been said by others, including my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary: it is deplorable that the Government have not allowed Labour Members a free vote on the Bill. It should be a matter of conscience for them, but it is assuredly a matter of conscience for us. Liberal Democrats have contributed to the proceedings of the Bill, and I think that they, too, have a free vote. Unfortunately—*[Interruption.]* The Minister is chuntering from a sedentary position to the effect that there is only one Liberal Democrat Member in the Chamber, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell).

Mr. Forth: It is a very free vote.

Mr. Bercow: Indeed.

Mr. Stunell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Yes. The hon. Gentleman is provoked.

Mr. Stunell: Perhaps not for the first time in the debate, I should remind the hon. Gentleman that size is not important.

Mr. Bercow: I can rally to that proposition with enthusiasm and alacrity. I should be grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I have always and everywhere argued that size is not everything. I go so far as to say that height is not everything either.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is particularly important for the Liberal Democrat party to have at least one other Member present so that it may, as usual, vote on both sides of the case?

Mr. Bercow: That is right. However, with the self-effacement, modesty and characteristic understatement that we all associate with my right hon. Friend, he has not made the case as strongly as he could have done. To suppose that Liberal Democrats tend to divide in only two

[Mr. Bercow]

directions on a piece of legislation is markedly generous to them. Ordinarily, we see a four-way split among Liberal Democrat Members—those in favour of a Bill, those against it, those who abstain and those who do not turn up or were not aware that the debate was taking place.

Mr. Stunell: This is a great deal more fun than the proceedings in Committee. Those who want to examine objectively the evidence that is being put to the House would want also carefully to examine the Division list for the only Division on the Bill that we have had so far today. The facts will speak for themselves. I do not believe that the Division list will show a united Conservative party on the issues that were facing us.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Michael Lord): Order. Before the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) responds, I shall bring him back to Third Reading.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to be brought to heel, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Your exhortation is absolute as far as I am concerned.

I emphasise that we did not regard the Bill as a party matter. There are genuine differences of opinion among Conservative Members. In endorsing the call for a Third Reading, I am speaking for myself and not for the Conservative Opposition.

There have been some good exchanges on Second Reading and in Committee, and I hope that there will be good exchanges on Third Reading. By way of illustration, I pay tribute to the many Members who have spoken in the debate, generally in a good-natured fashion and representing a variety of different viewpoints. There have not been significant differences of opinion among Labour Members, but those who have spoken in support of the Bill have done so with clarity, with commitment and, in a number of instances, with passion. That is respected. I say that to the Minister and to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh), who has introduced a ten-minute Bill on this important subject. I refer also to the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan).

I had originally intended to say that I was totally, utterly and unreconstructedly unrepresentative of my right hon. and hon. Friends. on this subject. I was not planning to say that apologetically, but by way of frankness and candour. As things have transpired and the debate has evolved, it has appeared to me that I am at least marginally less unrepresentative of my right hon. and hon. Friends than I originally supposed and anticipated.

I am delighted that I am in the company of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg). As far as I can tell—it seemed pretty clear from his ferocious eloquence—I am effectively in the lobby of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer).

I thought originally that I would have to say that I was virtually in a minority of one—my hon. Friend the Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) is not with us today—but that is not the case. Several Opposition Members see a good and powerful case for the Bill. Nevertheless, there is no denying that there are Conservative Members who think that the Bill should not be given a Third Reading.

Mr. Forth: I hope that in this part of his analysis, my hon. Friend will make it clear that there are those who support the thrust and principle of the Bill, as I do, but are against its taking effect neatly in time for a general election, to bail out one Labour candidate, and that my hon. Friend will recognise the fact that I, and perhaps others, may have to vote against the Bill on Third Reading, even though we support its principles.

Mr. Bercow: Not for the first time, and I imagine not for the last, the symbiotic relationship that exists between my right hon. Friend and me has re-asserted itself. His remarks anticipate what I had intended to say. I wanted to draw attention to the different motivations of Conservative Members for refusing to give the Bill a Third Reading.

Mr. Swayne: I hope that my hon. Friend will acknowledge the body of opinion on the Conservative Benches that is wholly opposed to the principle of the Bill, but would have gone to some practical length to accommodate the problem in Greenock and Inverclyde.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I had been planning to speak in complimentary terms about him—he is one of the great parliamentarians of our time. I mean that. I said it in his constituency, so there is no reason why I should not say it in the House. I do not resile from that tribute, but I am bound to say that my hon. Friend's views on the matter are antediluvian.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Pre-historic.

Mr. Bercow: Indeed. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) might be described as a parliamentary troglodyte. He is living in the cave-man age. I richly enjoyed his historical exegesis and the development of his argument in opposition to the Bill, but I believe that he is profoundly mistaken. Listening to his speech, I was reinforced in my conviction that my hon. Friend was born in 1956 at the age of 140.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that I was not the only Member who was unaware of the precise definition of the word "symbiotic" as my hon. Friend used it about our right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth). If he explained it in detail, it would help us a good deal.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That may or may not be true. It certainly would not help the deliberations on the Third Reading of the Bill. I should be grateful if the hon. Member for Buckingham would return to those directly.

Mr. Bercow: Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I would otherwise have been enormously keen to refer to the precise page in the Oxford English dictionary, but on the basis of your guidance, I shall not make the attempt. I am grateful for your restraining influence.

Of all those who oppose the Bill, the person who has done so with the greatest passion and intellectual consistency is my right hon. Friend the Member for

Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe), the shadow Home Secretary. It is important to emphasise that her view is perfectly legitimate. She is motivated by an intellectual conviction that the Bill is unjustified, and by her sense of the ethical, as well as the practical, incompatibility of serving priests continuing to serve as priests while being practising Members of the House of Commons.

I happen to believe that my right hon. Friend is mistaken in her conviction, but she adheres to that conviction tenaciously and powerfully, as she adheres to every other conviction that she holds or has held in the past. I do not criticise my right hon. Friend at all. We take different points of view.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West is in a broadly similar category. He is opposed to the Bill in principle. He thinks that it constitutes a form of parliamentary and possibly even religious vandalism, so he cannot bring himself to support it.

It is only fair to record that my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst has a different motivation entirely, as he helpfully reminded me. He made it clear in his contribution that he can see a case for the Bill. He thinks that it ought to be stated much more explicitly that the Bill is not just about the protection of one category of religious person, but that it extends much more widely—indeed, universally—to accommodate people of all faiths.

In that respect, he made what might be called the conservative politically correct case for an all-embracing, deregulatory measure.

There is nothing remotely surprising or unusual about that. In a sense, my right hon. Friend argued for the equivalent of what Dr. Erhard argued for in the immediate aftermath of the second world war regarding a bonfire of economic controls. In the light of his zealous commitment to deregulation, allowing the market to make decisions and leaving matters to the populace to judge for themselves, it was to be expected that he would not get hung up on a point of ecclesiastical doctrine or liturgy. Sure enough, he has done nothing of the sort, but he is motivated by one other factor: he believes that the Bill is cynically motivated, that it should not be introduced now and that it is unacceptable that, unless any last-minute developments occur, it will benefit only one individual, who has put himself forward as a prospective parliamentary candidate at the forthcoming election.

I want to deal briefly with those points, but before I develop my argument, I remind the House of what the Under-Secretary said at the commencement of Second Reading. He pointed out that two principal measures confirm in statute the discrimination to which there is now such widespread objection: the House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act 1801 and the Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829. On Second Reading, there was some debate and dispute about whether one might be obliged to refer to as many as seven or eight items of legislation to say whether a minister of religion could be elected as a Member of Parliament and then take his seat. The hon. Gentleman said that he would not dilate on all those measures because he had been advised by Government lawyers that the two Acts did the trick on their own. However, there is widespread objection to that legislation and clear, strong and spontaneous support from the different Churches in this country for the relatively modest reform that the Government now wish to take through the House.

I think that the Government are justified in seeking to introduce the Bill, but a recurrent question in all the debates on it is why they did not do what they are now proposing some time earlier. The argument that they should have done so is not entirely without merit. Many references have been made to the Home Affairs Committee report produced in the 1997–98 Session, which, as the Under-Secretary reminded the House, called for the removal of these antiquated restrictions on the entitlement to sit in the House of Commons.

We can argue the toss about how many opportunities the Government have had in this Parliament to introduce in legislation that has since been enacted the change proposed in the Bill. On my reckoning—I feel sure that I will have the eager and earnest attention of the Under-Secretary as I make this point—there were at least three opportunities earlier in this Parliament to introduce the measure that they now commend to the House, even though they were not very much earlier. The first opportunity—I think that I have got the right chronological order, although I cannot be certain—was the Representation of the People Act 2000. The Government could have constructed or amended that measure in Committee or on Report to make the changes that they now commend.

Siobhain McDonagh: On a point of information, I asked the Chairman of Ways and Means whether I could table such an amendment to either the Representation of the People Act 2000 or the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. Both times, I was told that such a proposal was outside the scope of the legislation.

Mr. Bercow: That is very interesting, though I am bound to tell the hon. Lady and the House that I in no sense retire hurt on the point. What she has said is not necessarily conclusive, not because there is a qualitative distinction or a distinction of status between her and a Front-Bench Member, but because the terms, purpose and architecture of a Bill are, in the first instance, matters of Government intention and Government inspiration. Therefore, although it may have been impossible for her to table an amendment of the kind reflected in this Bill, I am not at all persuaded that it would have been impossible for the Government so to have crafted the Representation of the People Act 2000 to admit of the change that they now commend. She may not be convinced, but that seems to me to be perfectly credible.

The hon. Lady referred also to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The same argument applies. Similarly, we undertook a lengthy, albeit hurried debate—the two are not incompatible—over a day and a half when we considered the Disqualifications Act 2000. It suited the Government to make a particular and narrow change, which was of interest to Members of the Dail, and they took that opportunity very much at the behest of Sinn Fein. The Minister would be hard pressed to prove that it was legislatively impossible to introduce a measure of the type that forms the basis of this Bill. Perhaps he is about to enlighten us.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Certain things are possible, but they may not be desirable, and there were two good reasons why

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

such a measure may not have been desirable. First, accepting an amendment would have significantly widened the ambit of that legislation to include matters of this sort. A large number of other issues would have been introduced and there would have been potential to make further amendments to the measures, both of which were broad enough.

Secondly and much more importantly, we wanted fully to consult with the Churches, which took time to draw up their responses. As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the previous cardinal regrettably died and a period elapsed before a new cardinal was appointed. We were concerned to ensure that the consultation was carried out properly and that we gave all the various Churches the time and opportunity to reach a view on the matter. They have done so, and we are grateful to them for that. Had we rushed into introducing an amendment to the legislation to which the hon. Gentleman has referred, we would not have allowed the time for consultation that the matter required.

Mr. Bercow: I always stand to be corrected or persuaded, but I am afraid that the Minister has not succeeded. It was a nice try. He advanced a poor argument as forcefully as he felt able to do in the circumstances, but it was not remotely persuasive. He should not be unduly troubled by what I am saying, however, because the Home Affairs Committee report was published in the 1997-98 Session and the three Bills to which I have referred were considered in the 1999-2000 Session.

Ministers have an extraordinary attitude to time. When it suits them, they hurry matters through at a ferocious rate of knots, admitting of minimal time for debate or objection. However, when they want to doff their hat to leisurely consideration and full consultation so that all points of view may be aired over an extended period, that is the course that they invariably take. Whatever justification the Minister might advance, it is not credible to argue that the consultation needed to take two years.

My view—shared by a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends—is that the Government could have made the change earlier. However—this is where I suspect the Minister and I agree—the fact that we could have done the right thing earlier, but did not do so, does not obviate the need to do the right thing now, when we have a further opportunity. That is, if I may say so, the lacuna in the arguments of a number of my right hon. and hon. Friends. They say "They could have done it before and did not bother to do so; why should we indulge them now?" I do not consider that to be a credible and sustainable position.

If we are fair—it irks me to be fair to this ghastly, crass, burdensome, irritating, smug and patronising new Labour Government—we must accept the reality that all Administrations have legislative priorities, and judgments to make about them. They are able to introduce some Bills in a Session, but not others. It is not possible for them to introduce every measure that is desirable, and that they would like to introduce, in a given Session. The fact that a Select Committee report has called for a measure does not mean that that measure will immediately be presented, and it is the height of absurdity to suppose otherwise.

Mr. Forth *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: My right hon. Friend is clearly becoming upset, so I shall give way to him.

Mr. Forth: I simply wanted to remind my hon. Friend that the Government found legislative time for—indeed, gave legislative priority to—Bills as important as the Royal Parks (Trading) Bill, which concerned people selling hamburgers, and the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Bill, which sought to make illegal the living of a limited but important number of people.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the right hon. Gentleman that we are discussing this Bill, not previous Bills dealing with entirely different matters.

Mr. Bercow: You are absolutely right, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am exceptionally grateful to you for your reminder, and for the guidance that it contained. My point, however—in support of giving this Bill a Third Reading—was that the fact that the right thing had not been done in the past did not prevent us from doing the right thing now. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst suggested that there was an alternative point of view. There is an alternative point of view; it just has the demerit of being mistaken.

I believe that when we have an opportunity to do the right thing, we should do it. The Government have introduced a number of foolish measures that they should not have introduced, and for which it would have been much better not to find time, but that is a reflection of the legislative priorities of the Administration by whom we are currently and, I hope, only temporarily belaboured. I still say that if we can pass this Bill now, we should do so.

Let me now deal with another argument advanced by my right hon. and hon. Friends who oppose Third Reading. It is a slightly different argument, or at least a variant on the theme of "They could have done it before but they did not, so they should not be allowed to do it now". My right hon. and hon. Friends argue that this ghastly, risible—gosh, I had better not be too rude—Government were motivated by consideration of the interests of just one individual, and that it is not right for a measure of this kind to be taken through Parliament simply to facilitate the ambition of that one individual.

It is as though the argument for the Bill were in some way sullied by the fact that there is, at least in the immediate term, only one possible beneficiary. I am sorry to have to say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, and to my right hon. and hon. Friends who agree with him, that I do not think that that is right either, ethically or in terms of historical precedent.

In regard to ethics, my feeling is that if the argument for reform is compelling, the fact that only one person will benefit is not a good reason for not passing legislation. I was not persuaded by the argument of my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon), who said that it was all frightfully unfair on people who could otherwise have been perspective parliamentary candidates at an earlier stage in the Parliament but declined to do so, because they knew that under existing law they could not take their seats.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I shall in a moment.

As I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks and to the House, it would have been perfectly open, at an earlier stage, for other individuals who aspired to sit in the House of Commons to get themselves selected as prospective parliamentary candidates and then to seek to change the law so that they could take their seats if they were elected. The fact that they chose not to do so is a matter for them. However, I do not think that that should prevent us from doing the right thing for the individual concerned in the present case. Before I develop the argument further, I shall give way to the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke).

Mr. Clarke: I am very grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who is speaking with his customary eloquence. On this occasion, he is also speaking with much more logic than he may have used in some previous debates. I think that he is making an excellent point. I am puzzled by the argument that setting right an injustice on the basis of an individual case is not the right approach. Many precedents fly in the face of that argument. The hon. Gentleman will recall the case of the then Mr. Anthony Wedgwood Benn and the consequent legislation—which, remarkably, led to the election of one Alec Douglas-Home as leader of the Conservative party and as Prime Minister. Does the hon. Gentleman therefore agree that, if a turbulent priest should come to lead the Conservative party, the day may come when Conservative Members even bless this day?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The only down-side of my giving way to him is that he has thoroughly stolen my thunder—I was going to make precisely that point. Implicit in the arguments of some of the Bill's critics is that we are behaving in an unprecedented manner. That is not true. History is littered with examples of measures taken by the House because of the pressure and immediacy of a given case. There is nothing remotely ignoble about that. It does not discredit the argument for a measure; nor is it an argument in favour of postponing or delaying that measure.

One could say, "There is an ethical argument and an intellectual case for the Bill. We will not do anything about it now because there is no particularly pressing case that requires its passage and there are other matters in the Government timetable. However, we will in due course consider when we can accommodate it within our legislative programme. When a particular case comes along that gives it an added piquancy, the Government of the day will introduce it." That seems to be perfectly reasonable.

The historical recollection of the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston is, as far as I am aware, absolutely correct. The legislation that he mentioned is the Peerage Act 1963. It did indeed facilitate the re-entry into this place of the right hon. Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn). It is also true that when Lord Home of The Hirsel became leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister in—if memory serves me correctly—October 1963, he had to come into the House of Commons and was a beneficiary of that legislation.

As the right hon. Gentleman will know, those are not the only historical precedents that can be adduced in support of the Government's proposals. There are other cases. Although it may not be entirely convenient to refer to them, it is justified to do so. For example, in arguing the case for the Bill's passage, I have in mind the Defamation Act 1996. The previous Government passed that legislation without, I think, opposition, and possibly with assistance from the then Labour Opposition, on the grounds—I am trying very much to relate the matter directly to Third Reading of this Bill—that the then hon. Member for Tatton would thereby be able to use extracts from parliamentary debates in pursuing his legal actions. It seemed extraordinary that, by an historical anomaly, he had been unable to do that. Passage of the 1996 Act enabled Mr. Neil Hamilton to use parliamentary proceedings and the parliamentary record to make his case. So there is also that example.

There is also a more recent example. Admittedly, it does not concern the passage of a piece of legislation, but it does concern a judgment made by the House of Commons. There is a particular appropriateness about the presence of the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are debating the Third Reading of the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill. I ask him to confine his remarks to that.

Mr. Bercow: Of course. I am arguing that one reason why this Bill should be given a Third Reading—I know that this is what you were jogging me along to reach, Madam Deputy Speaker—is that it will enable a prospective parliamentary candidate fully to exercise his democratic rights. The Bill is principally for that purpose.

The only other measure that I had in mind was one of the Government's, which was intended to protect the rights of Members of Parliament. That was taken with the support of Government Front Benchers to enable the legal costs of a Member of Parliament sued by one or more of his constituents to be defrayed. That decision was taken in order to assist in the particular case of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), but it could of course apply much more widely. I do not remember Members objecting—not in large numbers or vocally—that we would not be justified in passing such a measure simply because it helped only one person. It could help more.

Mr. Swayne: The measures to which my hon. Friend has drawn attention were mainly cost-free, in that enacting them achieved the aim intended but with no unforeseen consequence. We are being asked to enact a Bill to provide relief for someone who is no longer a clergyman. The problem is that the consequence will be that any number of clergymen will be able to populate these Benches.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is engaging in a certain amount of crystal-ball gazing. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal suggested, it is very unlikely that any significant numbers of religious individuals—men or women of the cloth—would seek to enter this House. However, we have a duty—in this respect, my hon. Friend has a point—to anticipate that outcome. It could happen. Several people who are priests or former priests could stand for Parliament. That is obviously anathema to my hon. Friend; it is not anathema to me.

Mr. Stunell: Will the hon. Gentleman express an opinion on whether the House would be better or worse if it were stuffed full of priests or stuffed full of lawyers?

Mr. Bercow: That challenge is pretty unfair because, as the hon. Gentleman might know—if he does not, he is

[Mr. Bercow]

about to discover—I regularly make the point that I am not a lawyer and that I say that as a matter of pride. There are many lawyers in this place, and that gravely incommodes me. I am very unhappy about it; I find them irritating individuals. If one gathers together three lawyers, one invariably encounters no fewer than five opinions. I do not know that we are especially well served by a large complement of lawyers, but I share some of the anxieties of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal about members of the Church of England and, indeed, of a number of Churches in this country. It is not always readily apparent that they are as preoccupied with preaching the religious message that it is their duty to preach as with the pursuit of secular matters that should properly be considered and considered by them outwith their remit.

I am not enthusiastic about having a great many churchmen or churchwomen in this place. Moreover, I even go so far as to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald that, simply in terms of practicalities, it is difficult to see how a practising minister of religion can also find time to be an assiduous and effective Member of Parliament. That leads me to the final and most compelling argument in support of the Bill: public opinion. Just before I dilate on that point, I shall give way

Ms Ryan: I acknowledge that the hon. Gentleman has been a sterling ally in trying to see the Bill through, but he has been speaking for some 38 minutes. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House who have played a part in the Bill's proceedings would like to contribute to the debate. When will the hon. Gentleman allow them the opportunity to do so?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Lady makes a fair point. I shall very shortly bring my remarks to a conclusion. I think that I have a good excuse for not knowing that all that many people on the Government Benches want to speak. On Second Reading, the House was not exactly replete with Labour Members wishing to contribute. However, the hon. Member for Enfield, North has played an important part in the Bill's proceedings, and of course she should have an opportunity to contribute to the debate, if she is able to catch your eye, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I conclude with the point about democracy, which, ultimately, is the kernel of the argument for the passage of the Bill through this House today. There are those who say "once a priest, always a priest"; they believe that the priestly vocation is incompatible with secular public service and, in particular, with the performance of parliamentary duties. I was about to say that I do not think that that is true. However, I am not sure that I know whether I think that that is true. As I said at the outset, I am not religiously motivated in these matters. I would not presume to compete with the religious commitment of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald or with the extent of her knowledge of religion. I do not know whether they are compatible, but whatever my right hon. Friend and other right hon. and hon. Members who are opposed to the Bill think about the compatibility or otherwise of a religious ministry with a parliamentary career, they should not seek to foist those views on the country as a whole via the passage of a statute. That is the point. It is a matter of what the public want.

If a churchman stands for Parliament, makes it clear that he intends still to practise his ministry and to combine it with parliamentary service, the voters can decide. If the voters think that the two vocations are incompatible on ethical or practical grounds, they have a very simple recourse—not to vote for, and perhaps even to vote against, such a candidate. The matter should be determined by public opinion.

The existing statutes of 1801 and 1829 are archaic, antediluvian and indefensible. It is time that they went. The Bill might be a relatively modest measure. Perhaps a more far-reaching Bill could, and should, be introduced at a later stage. However, even those Members who are not convinced that what is being offered is the full cake and who suspect that it might be only half a cake will, I hope, if they are hungry for change, prefer to eat a slice than to be deprived of any nutritional sustenance at all.

This is essentially a good Bill. It deserves to be passed, and the fact that it was not introduced before does not mean that today we should not take the opportunity to wish it godspeed and give it a Third Reading. That is what I want to do; it is what I intend to do when the House is divided, as it will be, and I hope that I will be joined by a number of right hon. and hon. Members from both sides of the House.

5.48 pm

Dr. Godman: I promise to be brief. I will certainly not take as long as the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), although his was a powerful and eloquent speech. I think, if I heard him aright, that he said that when we have the opportunity to do the right thing, we should take it. I agree.

The hon. Gentleman also said that the Bill's objective is to remove antiquated restrictions. In the eyes of many of my constituents, the Bill is concerned with the task that the House has undertaken for many years of dismantling the wall of discrimination against Catholics and many others.

Let me give an example. We have come a long way since a Conservative Member of Parliament, one Howard Vincent, representing Sheffield, Central, said in 1904:

> "While over 260,000 people emigrated from the United Kingdom last year, their places were taken by no less than 82,000 of the scum of Europe."

He was referring, in that dreadful speech, mainly to Jews. However, my Scottish colleagues could tell the House of the discrimination suffered by many Catholics who emigrated to Scotland from Ireland, including my wife's grandparents. In the early 1920s, her grandfather was one of many Catholics in Govan who had to stand watch over the building of a church which, once the contract workers left, was progressively demolished by people deeply hostile to Catholics in that area.

The shadow Home Secretary speaks with great fervour and conviction. I am one who left her Church many years ago—long before she entered it, although there is no connection between the two facts—and I suspect that she deeply regrets the lack of compatibility between her Church's canon law and the civil legislation of the United Kingdom. The Catholic Church, while upholding

canon law, nevertheless wants an end to institutionalised discrimination against its members. Last year Ms Gay Catto of the Home Office constitutional and community policy directorate received a letter from the Right Rev. Monsignor Arthur Roche, saying:

"it would appear that there is no reason for the Catholic Church to oppose such a change in legislation, although it is necessary to point out that priests exercising their ministry and in good standing with the Church would come under the prohibition of Canon 285#3. It is also noted that this would remove what might seem to be discriminatory legislation from the Statute Book."

Cardinal Thomas Winning said something similar in his letter to an official at the Home Office as part of the consultation process.

I shall not mention local matters, as this is not a pre-election speech. My seat, however, is one of the safest in Scotland, and is a lot safer than it was when I took it on a few years ago.

Institutional discrimination is being dismantled in the United Kingdom. We can see that at its clearest in Northern Ireland. I know many Catholics there, and I am chairman of my party's Northern Ireland committee. I have spoken to many members of the nationalist community who say that they have seen dramatic change in recent years in what the House of Commons has done about the discrimination that they had suffered for generations. Moderate Unionists would say the same.

We are dealing with a form of discrimination. I may be charged with being a Leninist in this matter, but I believe that the ends justify the means. We should put aside the points about an individual candidate and continue to dismantle all forms of discrimination. If we want to live in a tolerant society that honours, protects and promotes the needs and concerns of its minorities, we must persist with legislation such as this so that all groups—recent incomers to the United Kingdom, or whoever—can say, "Yes, this is a tolerant society, and I am proud to live in such a nation."

5.55 pm

Mr. Gummer: This is an important Bill, and I am pleased that we are to pass it, because it is clear from the debates that we have had so far that is the will of the House of Commons. The Bill is important because it rids the statute book of an attitude to a section of the community—an attitude that was steeped in prejudice and discrimination. We have to remember why the disqualification exists. At the time of Catholic emancipation, the House of Commons could not rid itself of the fear of Catholic priests. It could just about imagine that Catholics should not be locked up, but it could not quite bring itself to think that Catholic priests could be treated like other human beings. So, in order to satisfy the most revanchist views, it excluded Catholic priests from public life. That was the effect and the intention. To reverse that position by passing the Bill must be a valuable step. For that reason alone, we should support its Third Reading.

It is not rational to argue that it is improper to give the Bill a Third Reading simply because it applies to the case of a Labour candidate in Scotland. It has always been true that individual cases make law. That is how law is often made. If one presents to the House of Commons a possibility or a for instance, the House often says, "Well, it may not arise. We have lots of other things to do. Why should we apply ourselves to that?"

It is only when a Bradlaugh comes and says, "I cannot take the oath in good conscience," that the House of Commons has to decide what to do about people who cannot take the oath in good conscience. It is only when someone such as Wilkes says, "You may not like me, but I have been elected," that change is made. Three times he had to say that before the House of Commons was prepared to let him in. It is only when a Lord Stansgate says, "I do not want to be Lord Stansgate any longer. I insist that my electorate has elected me," that we change the law. It is only when an individual says, "I am the case that proves that the change is necessary," that we can no longer say that the problem is merely hypothetical, and the House does its proper job and gets rid of legislation that is no longer appropriate.

Mr. Fallon: My right hon. Friend has made again the point that he made earlier today, and very eloquent it is. However, in each of the three cases that he has put before the House, the process took some considerable time. The arguments made on behalf of the individual were rightly tested either in the courts or through successive attempts to change the law. We are being asked to consider making a one-off change very quickly just before a general election.

Mr. Gummer: My hon. Friend's case would be weightier if during the debate anyone had made an argument that even began to stand in real opposition to the central purpose of the Bill. *[Interruption.]* I will come to my hon. Friend's arguments in a moment. Even my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) began his argument by saying that he was in favour of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) is not against the Bill; he simply raises questions about the speed of the measure, and says that we do not have enough time to think about it.

We have had enough time to think about the measure—

Mr. Fallon: No, we have not.

Mr. Gummer: We have had nearly 200 years to wonder whether the proposal is sensible.

I am a Conservative; I am a believer that what has been is not necessarily bad, and that that which has stood the test of time may well be taken into account. I certainly believe that what is new is not always good, but 200 years—or at least that part of the last 200 years during which I have been able to think—have given me enough time to realise that there is no basis for such arguments.

This Third Reading reminds us of the central issue: Parliament cannot properly enter into discussions about the validity of holy orders. I am very committed to the importance of the validity of orders—indeed, like at least one other Member of the House, I have proved my commitment; it is the reason why I ceased to be an Anglican and became a Catholic. I did so because of the nature of authority and its effect on the orders of the Church, so I think that I have a right to speak on that issue.

The validity of orders is a matter of faith; it is not a matter of secular jurisdiction. The idea that that matter of faith should inform the discussion as to which persons should be allowed to stand for and sit in Parliament seems odd.

[Mr. Gummer]

It would be much better for us to recognise, first, that the matter is one of enormous importance—more so than almost all the things that we discuss in this largely secular assembly. Secondly, however, the fact that it is important does not mean that it is relevant to the discussion about who should stand for Parliament. Its importance is eternal, but its relevance is minimal to that issue. That is why we should give the Bill its Third Reading.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) expostulated when I suggested that no reasonable case had been made against the Bill. I do not want to do him a disservice. I should certainly not go as far as my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who sits on the Front Bench and who referred in uncharacteristically uncomplimentary terms to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West. I do not call my hon. Friend antediluvian, although I think that many of his views are not up to date. For example, his views on Europe are very, very out of date. However, that is proper for him; he can carry on as he is and let the world go by. That is up to him. He can be a Member of the House and make those points.

Let us imagine, however, that at some distant point my hon. Friend is ordained as a clergyman of the Church of England—not in Wales, but just over the border in the diocese of Hereford. After serving for a year or two, he decides that he has mistaken his vocation. At that point, he could become anything from a brain surgeon—if qualified—to a lorry driver or a taxi driver. He could represent the Rotarians at an international conference. There is no vocation that he could not follow—except that of Member of Parliament. The argument for that is difficult to uphold. Why could he do anything but be a Member of the House of Commons, even though he might have managed to persuade a large number of people to choose him as their candidate and to vote for him? That is manifestly barmy, and I cannot understand the logic of it, which is why I do not believe that a strong case has been put for retaining the current law.

A better case relates to clergymen of the Church of England on historic grounds. Once upon a time, Church of England clergymen owed their living to the state. The issue was tied up with ensuring that the House of Commons was not stuffed with placemen. Therefore, it is perfectly reasonable to say that that original prohibition was not discriminatory; it was a proper reflection of the need to keep the House independent. So in deciding whether to agree to Third Reading, we must ask ourselves whether that situation now obtains. The answer is no; it is no longer true that a member of the clergy of the Church of England has so close a relationship to the state, through payment, that he would be unable to act independently in the House.

The office of profit—in so far as a clergyman's salary today can be referred to in those terms—is no longer under the Crown in the direct sense that it once was. Perhaps, in an indirect sense, the livings in the hands of the Crown as patron are of that kind, but they are disgorged, shared or whatever in a wholly different way than they were in the past. It would be extremely difficult to show that a Church of England clergyman was a placeman in that sense, and thus should be denied entry to the House. The argument relating to Church of England clergymen is stronger; none the less it can no longer be upheld.

It is also true that it is more proper for the House to deal with Church of England clergymen than with those of any other Church, for that is the established Church, and its establishment means that we in the House can properly deal with such matters. I do not suggest that that that is universally accepted, but given the constitution of the House, we can properly deal with the Church of England in a way that is different from our dealings with any other denomination. In our role as guardians of the wider public interest as affected by the established Church, we must ask ourselves whether it is proper for us to exclude its ministers from standing for election and sitting in Parliament. The answer is that no basis for such an exclusion exists.

The Bill's Third Reading cannot be held up on the grounds that we think that the wider interests of Her Majesty's subjects might be affected if clergymen were allowed to stand for election and to sit in the House. I can think of no way in which that would happen. Although you have not had the luck to be present throughout the preceding debates, Madam Deputy Speaker, I can say that I heard no argument to suggest, in that narrow sense, that in our role of defending the general public from the activities of the established Church, we should make an exception for its ministers. That brings me to the rights of others.

We have laughed about the curious anomalies that might be introduced if we were to make a distinction between the episcopally ordained and the non-episcopally ordained. I take the nature of episcopal ordination very seriously. Indeed, at the heart of my disagreement with the Church of England was my belief that it had forfeited its ability to talk about its episcopal ordination as it once could. Unlike my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham, I think that an important matter. I speak from an entirely religious point of view, but the suggestion that being able to dispense the sacrament validly should exclude someone from becoming a Member of the House of Commons seems very odd, especially as that exclusion does not apply to Baptist ministers, or to those who do not believe in the priesthood or in the sacraments in the same sense as Catholics do.

We are a curiously heterogenous House, but our ability to prognosticate on the detailed matters of theology and canon law has not hitherto struck me as being very obvious. I have listened carefully to the debates and I have heard people use words that suggest that their familiarity with the precise details of Thomist philosophy is at least distant. Therefore, if I were looking for a body to prognosticate on the nature of valid ordination, it would not be the House of Commons. I would go somewhere else, and that somewhere else would be the Church concerned.

The Holy Catholic Church has made its decision and it says that its priests cannot stand for Parliament. That is perfectly right and I agree with it. However, it is right that it, and not the House, should say that. It is right that I should support the decision in my capacity as a faithful Catholic, but not in my capacity as a Member of Parliament. That is the proper distinction for me to draw.

I shall say something that will upset a number of my colleagues, but I wish to say it none the less. We would be placed in a very difficult position vis-à-vis the

European human rights legislation if we were not to give the Bill a Third Reading. *[Interruption.]* Before my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham says anything, I remind him why the European convention on human rights was introduced. It was established by many countries, including the United Kingdom, to defend many minorities in the rest of Europe, particularly those behind the iron curtain and those who needed protection from persecution. Many of them were Jewish. I do not like the way in which some people take lightly a convention that was entered into in all good faith by this country to ensure that people were protected.

Mr. Forth: Will my right hon. Friend give way on that point?

Mr. Gummer: I shall return to my right hon. Friend in a moment.

I wish to make another point that is pertinent to the Bill. We British are inclined to believe that the only people who discriminate are people abroad, and that we are always perfect. In fact, we have a long history of pretty bad discrimination. I do not wish to associate myself with a whole range of things that we, like so many others, have done in all sorts of places. We happen to have done some pretty good things as well. The rule of law has been much enhanced by the fact that Britain took it to many parts of the world. There is no doubt about that, and I am not for a moment underestimating the huge contribution that we have made.

However, this Bill is in some part an acknowledgement that we have discriminated in many areas. Northern Ireland provides an example that we live to regret. Let us not easily believe that this is an unimportant issue. We should place ourselves in the proper ambit of the standards to which we should all adhere. In a sense, being willing to adhere to those standards through the Bill will allow us to have the right to say to other people, "You, too, should adhere to those standards."

We should abhor discrimination. The fact that the issue is properly covered by the European convention on human rights, which is referred to in the Bill, is a matter that we should be pleased about. My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham might support that view when I remind him that it has nothing to do with that institution with which he is not altogether happy—the European Union.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he is not as alone among his right hon. and hon. Friends as their comments about the European convention might have suggested. When the Human Rights Bill was considered on Third Reading, the Conservative Front Bench spokesman wished the Bill well and there was certainly no Division. In fact, the Bill received broad support from all parties.

Mr. Gummer: I agree with the Minister. I wish to conclude my speech, but I have an awful feeling that I promised to give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst, and I would not want to miss what he has to say.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I simply wanted to suggest that in exactly the same way as the Bill seeks to put right something that happened a long time ago, the European convention was a creature of circumstances 50 years ago, and the world has moved on. The fact that its provenance was European is irrelevant for these purposes, but we now live in a different world, and constantly to be told that we have to give obeisance to a 50-year-old convention that was created in very different circumstances is about as relevant as this Bill is to the Act that it seeks to repeal.

Mr. Gummer: If we are behaving properly as regards these matters, we need not worry about the European convention. If we are not, it is pretty disgraceful. So I do not consider that to be a sensible argument. In large measure it is otiose, and bringing it into our law was not a high priority for me because I do not think it matters very much, and because certain peculiarities of the common law make it quite difficult to deal with. However, it is a pity to object to the European convention on human rights in a rather offhand way when we are debating the removal of discrimination, which is the proper thing to do and something of which I approve.

Mr. Bercow: Of course I am aware that the European convention on human rights is not related to the European Union, but can I put it to my right hon. Friend that many Conservative Members—I suspect a very large number—opposed the Human Rights Bill on Second Reading, and that many Conservatives are motivated by belief in the Burkean doctrine of rights, which is not a doctrine of natural rights, rather than by the highfalutin declarations of abstract principle that tend to be reflected in the European convention?

Mr. Gummer: I shall not be led away from the Bill that we are discussing, which reflects a view of human rights that seems perfectly compatible with Conservative beliefs. I say that as someone who has a difficulty with the word "rights" in any case. I happen to believe that we do not have rights, but obligations. I do not believe that created human beings can have rights, but that we owe our creation to the Almighty and therefore owe obligations to him and to our fellow creatures. Our rights inhere in other people's obligations rather than in anything that is selfishly held to ourselves. That happens to be my view. I think that Thomas Paine did a great deal of damage, and that we would have done much better to follow a much older tradition in terms of rights and obligations.

I am not sure that that gets us anywhere when we come to discuss the European convention on human rights. I am pleased that the House will be passing a small Bill with a small effect; but it is a proper effect and it removes yet again another piece of discrimination against the Catholic Church.

On Third Reading we have to confine ourselves to what is in the Bill, but let me say to the Minister that this Bill reminds me of one of those new office buildings in which the largest part of the space is made up of an atrium, otherwise known as an empty hole. I feel that we ought to have had a better Bill. It ought to have got rid of all those things that suggest that being a Catholic makes one a second-class citizen. I do not understand why that opportunity was not taken, and I wish it had been. I shall vote for the Bill, but my vote is cast on the basis that the Government know that the next Conservative Government will do what this Government should have done.

6.20 pm

Siobhain McDonagh: Almost four years after getting elected, I still cannot attempt to be as eloquent as other hon. Members have been on this issue and I have not learned the ways of the House enough to want to repeat what other people have said.

For my part, supporting the Bill is about saying that we should not discriminate against people of any religion or no religion. A Methodist minister, an imam, a Catholic priest and a Greek Orthodox Church priest should have an equal right to stand for Parliament, to be selected, to get elected—if the voters so wish—and to take up a seat in the House. As a Back Bencher, it has been an amazing voyage to see a tiny issue, which affects few people, create such interest and concern and generate understanding in hon. Members. That process has strengthened the House. It has shown that we do not only debate huge issues that involve millions of people, because this matter involves the rights of the individual.

I thank Professor Robert Blackburn of King's college for his help. He was mentioned several times on Second Reading. Without him, I would have had no knowledge that such discrimination existed. I believe that he has also been a great help to the Home Office and my hon. Friend the Minister in particular, whom I also want to thank. My small insight into how much it takes to get a Bill this far makes me even more amazed at the amount of work that Ministers and shadow Ministers do. The forces of conservatism are strong and it is very difficult to achieve change. The proposal that we are debating today is right because it is wrong to discriminate. The proposal is right not because a Labour candidate will be discriminated against if the law is not changed, but because it is right in itself.

My interest began because a constituent would not have been allowed to take up his seat were he elected. However, it has become a wider issue because people of my faith and others are discriminated against, which is wrong in the 21st century. We should change the law as quickly as possible. I am sorry that that did not happen two years or 18 months ago, but it was not for the want of trying. Many issues affect the Government, and I am glad that this small issue has reached the top of their list. The change will benefit not only David Cairns but everyone else who wants to stand for election and is disbarred because he previously decided to become a member of the clergy of an episcopally ordained faith.

We should pass the Bill because it is right. It is to the benefit of the House that we care about such matters.

6.23 pm

Mr. Stunell: I thank my hon. Friends who were gracious enough to allow me to speak on their behalf in the debate. It has been a fascinating occasion.

I am pleased that the Bill will become law. We should be ashamed that residual acts of religious discrimination are still on the statute book. The fact that one case prompted the change is not a good reason to back away from ending discrimination. Much has been said about discrimination against Catholics, and I certainly oppose legislation that has that effect. I am a Baptist and legislation that applied to Catholics applied to Baptists with equal force. From the different end of the religious spectrum, I feel as strongly as others about the need to withdraw such acts of discrimination. When the Bill is passed, all ministers of religion, whatever their religion, their faith and their standing in their Churches, will be eligible—if their electors grant them success in an election—to represent people in the House of Commons. That is right.

There is no reason to discriminate against people simply because their Church or their employer has a different set of rules. Those engaged in some types of employment are prevented from engaging in political activity—indeed, I spent some years working in that type of employment. I accepted the restrictions of my employment, but I was not prevented by law from doing that which I eventually did, which is change my employment and take up political activity.

We appear to have misunderstood one of the consequences of the existing law: that the law as it stands, unreformed, tends to keep out of the House of Commons those who accept the values of society which we all profess to espouse profoundly, and let in those who do not necessarily share those values. On the pragmatic and rational grounds of trying to get into the House of Commons more people who espouse the values that we all say we share, we should be prepared to pass the Bill.

Widely diverse views have been expressed in our debates—I call the phenomenon the Buckingham consensus. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) made a powerful speech—considerably longer than my own will be—in which he drew attention to the existence of many different views. He attributed four different views to members of my own party, but, on reflection, he might repent of that, especially as he and his right hon. and hon. Friends have expressed five different views during the debate.

Mr. Bercow: That is diversity.

Mr. Gummer: We are on a free vote.

Mr. Stunell: True, so let us examine that diversity. If I understood his remarks correctly, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is in favour of the principle but against the specifics of giving relief in the individual case, whereas the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) is in favour of finding a way of allowing the gentleman in Scotland to stand, but opposed to the principle. The hon. Member for Buckingham is in favour both of the principle and of the mechanism and therefore supports the Bill, whereas the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) opposes the Bill lock, stock and barrel.

Finally, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) is not merely in favour of the Bill, but wants to go further and eliminate all discrimination against religious groups. I make that five categories of opinion within the Conservative party, whose members have a free vote tonight. Perhaps the Buckingham consensus will hold—we shall see. However, I can assure the hon. Member for Buckingham that, in a free vote, we Liberal Democrats will all be in the same Lobby as him.

Mr. Bercow: Who is the "we"?

Mr. Stunell: As is so often the case, I am surrounded by a heavenly host of my colleagues.

Having spoken about the Conservatives, I turn to the Government. I think that they would admit—privately, in the Tea Room, after the vote is over—to a little embarrassment about the way in which the Bill has been introduced. Whatever the Minister says—he has tried to frame it in the best possible light—the truth is that the issue was clearly on the agenda three years ago and there were plenty of opportunities for progress to be made far more briskly than it has. Indeed, if we look for historical precedents, we see that it was on the agenda far more than three years ago.

Instead, the Government jerked into action only when they realised that it was in their best interests to do so. That is not the right foundation for reform. I made that point on Second Reading and I repeat it again today. It is the test of a reformer that he reforms when it is not wholly in his own interest, not that he reforms only when it is solely in his own interest. When I see what opportunities there have been to introduce alternative legislation to fill the slot, it is clear that the Bill is opportunistic in its timing, if nothing else.

One argument against the Bill is that we should not proceed on the basis of particular cases. I do not believe that that is the right approach, and several Members have sought to refute it. I shall briefly add some further refutations.

The legislation that caused all the problems was The House of Commons (Clergy Disqualification) Act 1801. It was put on the statute book following the election of the Rev. Horne Tooke to Old Sarum. I like the name Horne Tooke and I feel the need to wind it into my speech.

The House was scandalised by the election of the Rev. Horne Tooke. He was such a radical voice that the House wanted to find a way of excluding him from this place. Legislation was brought forward, which we are now seeking to repeal. It was designed specifically to exclude someone who was regarded as a dangerous radical from this place. The precedent for the 1801 Act coming into force is hardly one from which we can derive pride. We certainly should not be worried about considering a particular case and repealing the Act.

Another hard case was that of the Rev. MacManaway in 1950. On that occasion, the Home Secretary of the day ran away from the issue. The resulting legal judgment probably left us in an even deeper mess than hitherto.

Much has been said about priests who will be too busy to do two jobs. I do not know about that. The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) said that he is a practising barrister. I remember having a discussion with him shortly after the last general election, when he was no longer occupying a Cabinet seat. He made it clear that he regarded it as an important part of his role as a Member to pursue a wider career and to bring extra experience into the House. No doubt he would say to his colleagues in the legal profession that his membership of this place gave him added insights when it came to working with the law.

I do not support or defend the right hon. and learned Gentleman's pursuit of a second career. I do not pursue one. However, it is difficult to see how the commitment, experience, skill and brain power that is needed to be brought to bear by a priest in holy orders, when coupled with membership of this place, would put the individual in a less favourable position than a QC or other barrister who pursues a legal career at full blast outside the House.

The argument that someone cannot do two jobs does not bear examination, particularly when it comes from the Conservative party, which historically has seen employment outside the House as bringing value to the House rather than taking value away from it.

The case in point involves not a practising priest, but someone who has taken holy orders and, because his Church's discipline does not allow for the relinquishment of those orders, is deemed still to be a priest. If he had been an Anglican—a member of the Church of England in England and an ordained member of it—he would have been able to relinquish holy orders. As a retired clergyman, he could have taken up his preferred career in politics.

Many arguments have been advanced about the special role that priests fulfil, about the necessity of their committing time to it and about conflicts with Church discipline, but when we unpick them we find that they are entirely irrelevant to the central question that faces the House, which is whether we want to maintain discrimination against a religious minority, preventing members of it from entering the House if they so choose and the electorate so chooses, or whether we want to sweep that discrimination away. The answer for me and for many of my colleagues is that it should have been swept away a long time ago, and we should act now.

6.34 pm

Ms Ryan: The House can be proud of itself today if, as we may be entitled to expect, we give the Bill a Third Reading. Ensuring equal rights for all our citizens is an important part of the work of Parliament, which our citizens would expect us to do.

The question of timing has been raised, but the issue was never likely to come before the House unless there was an individual case driving it. That may be a shame, but it is realistic to acknowledge it. Because of that, the issue was always likely to arise a little late in the day. If there is a particular case driving it, that must involve someone who has been selected, and we select candidates not long before a general election.

The timing of the Bill was therefore inevitable. It is not opportunistic simply because the candidate in question is a Labour candidate. I say that for two reasons. First, in his opening remarks on Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Minister was entirely open about the case that triggered the Bill. There is no hidden agenda. Secondly, I believe, although I accept that some Opposition Members may not agree, that a Labour Government would have taken the same action in the case of a Conservative candidate. I believe that because of our commitment to equal rights, human rights and social justice. I do not accept that the timing of the Bill presents a difficulty.

If there has been a difficulty, it has been for only one person—Mr. Cairns. I am pleased that we have removed that difficulty, as he is entitled to the same rights as anyone else in this land. He is entitled to look to his Government and Parliament to ensure that he has those rights. We can be proud that we have taken the necessary action.

In some ways, it is amusing for me, as a woman Member of Parliament, to argue for equal rights for men. Clearly, the Bill may affect women as well, now that there are ordained women priests in the Church of England; it will mainly affect ex-priests, as they do not have the right

[Ms Ryan]

to renounce, wait for six months, and so on. It is a pleasure to argue for the equal rights of men. Many male colleagues in this place argue for the equal rights of women, so it is a pleasure to repay them. I feel certain that any man who benefits from the legislation to enter the House will want to continue the tradition of arguing for the equal rights of all, whatever their gender or former profession.

It is right that there should no longer be grounds for distinguishing between clergy of different religions. That is not the business of the House. Equally, there are no grounds for legislation that applies detrimentally or punitively to all clergy, so it is right that the Bill should become law. The matters with which we are dealing are matters for the Churches and for the electorate.

The question whether there is to be a free vote is a red herring. I cannot be sure, but I guess that it is raised by the Opposition who, as has been said, have four, five or more positions on the matter, so there is a problem of discipline. The reason that there is not a free vote for Labour Members, as I understand it, is that this is not an issue of conscience. It is a constitutional issue, so I do not see why there should be a free vote.

I understand that some Opposition Members view the Bill as a matter of conscience, but I do not think that they are correct or that they have a free vote because of that view. They have one because they cannot guarantee that they will be united in the Lobby. As far as I know, no Labour Member has been up in arms about a free vote. None of my hon. Friends have told me since Second Reading that the Bill is a matter of conscience and that they are being forced through the Lobby on Labour business with which they do not agree.

I think that the Opposition's point about a free vote, which has been made a number of times, holds no water and makes no sense. I reiterate that it is entirely correct for the Bill not to be decided by such a vote as it is Government business and deals with a constitutional issue. Indeed, I am pleased that it will not be decided in that manner, although if it had been, the outcome of Third Reading would have been the same as those of Second Reading and Report.

It is right that we are now in line with the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly.

Mr. Forth: What a shower.

Siobhain McDonagh: It has given you representation in Scotland.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Ryan: My hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) makes a valid point about the success achieved by the Conservatives in Scotland, where previously they had no representation.

In an intervention on the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), I said that he had been a sterling ally in respect of the Bill. However, he made some entirely unjustifiable remarks about what he called the new Labour Government.

Mr. Forth: He has done something right.

Ms Ryan: As has just been indicated from a sedentary position, we still disagree on some things.

It is interesting that every time the European convention on human rights is mentioned, there is a little storm of protest from some Opposition Members. At no time during the passage of the Bill, or indeed at any other time, have they said anything that justifies their opposition to the convention. We await an explanation that makes their view acceptable or even tolerable. I guess that it simply relates to the Eurosceptic views that they often express, so it is clearly a matter of ideology and perhaps of xenophobia.

I have been pleased to participate in our proceedings on the Bill. I have found the experience instructive and have heard some excellent speeches, from which I freely admit that I have learned a great deal. I am pleased that the Bill has such overwhelming support and I am proud to be a part of the House when it agrees to such measures, which ensure the equal rights of all our citizens.

6.43 pm

Mr. Fallon: The hon. Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) spoke about removing discrimination and intolerance, but then slightly spoiled her speech by saying how intolerant she was of those who still had doubts about the European convention on human rights. I do not think that she can have it both ways.

I must tell the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) that I am probably in danger of creating a sixth category—there is definitely a free vote for Conservative Members—because, as I have explained at length, I have reservations and I do not think that the Bill should be promoted in this way and at this time. I hope that that qualifies as a sixth category, which will make the hon. Gentleman even happier than he already seems to be.

As I have already said endless times, I have nothing against David Cairns. I am sure that he will become a Member of this House in the fullness of time and I look forward to welcoming him. I respect the part played by the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) in facilitating such change. I hope that she equally respects the fact that those of us who are worried about the way the change is being made are not necessarily to be accused of favouring the kind of discrimination that she seeks to remove.

There are concerns about the procedure, and our debates have highlighted that. We could create the potential for a new House of Commons, which could be a House of bishops. That would be allowed under the law. It is perfectly possible that the Roman Catholic Church might change its own rules, so we could end up with a House of Catholic priests. It may be unlikely that such events will occur, but when one makes a small change to the constitution it is important to take into account the implications and consequences.

One of my main reservations throughout has been the lack of evidence, apart from the case of Mr. David Cairns, for making the change. The Home Affairs Committee made its recommendation, but it did not take evidence. It took a memorandum in favour from Professor Blackburn, but it did not question any witnesses or consider the implications and discuss them with other professors. Indeed, there was little further support for the change and it was not mentioned in the Labour party submission to the Committee. If the burning injustice that we have heard about really existed, we might have expected the Labour party to refer to it in evidence.

The plain fact is that this case, which, I concede, is certainly a hard one, has not been canvassed particularly widely. It is not right to make what could be a significant change on the basis of so little evidence. I also happen to think that such changes should be made on the basis of extensive consideration and widespread consensus, possibly through a Speaker's Conference or a commission. A limited consultation took place and the Minister was kind enough suddenly to place the results in the Library today. However, the Committee was unable to read them to discover exactly what each Church has said. We have had only a couple of days to consider the matter and we have considered it in the wrong way.

Furthermore, it is a somewhat questionable principle to change electoral law on the basis of one particular case. I know that others disagree. My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) made the eloquent point from history that individual cases have helped to change law, but I am sceptical as to whether that should always be the case. I am also sceptical about making such a change just because of someone's election: the people have chosen, so we should facilitate his or her progress to the House simply because he or she is the candidate that they want—so runs the notion.

That principle could apply to a 20-year-old, for example. The Minister might one day tell the House, "This constituency has chosen someone who will be 21 in a few months. He will not be able to take his seat when he is elected, so there will be a court case and all the rest of it. We must change the law immediately to allow him to take his seat." The same could be argued on behalf of a Dutch citizen. A Dutch minister of some religion might be selected, stand and be elected. The Minister could make exactly the same argument that the law should be changed to accommodate a non-UK citizen simply because that person had been chosen by his constituency.

All I would say to the House is that such constitutional changes almost always turn out to have slightly more impact than we might have expected in respect of the example for which we have legislated. The Bill will help just one candidate, but it raises big questions about the future of the bishops in the other place and further questions about the way in which we should change electoral law. Such a change should not be rushed so late in the day, just before a general election, to help a particular candidate, however deserving he happens to be.

6.49 pm

Mr. Swayne: I did not speak on Second Reading, as I was serving on a Standing Committee so I am most grateful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for affording me the opportunity to contribute. I know that the Minister wishes to respond, so I shall be as brief as possible.

I represent the fourth view to be expressed this evening. I follow the hon. Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan), who spoke eloquently, in holding the view that it is right and proper to take steps to alleviate the difficulty faced by David Cairns. My concern relates to what we have done to alleviate that difficulty. I entirely accept that David Cairns faced discrimination that was unjustifiable—unjustifiable because he was a Roman Catholic. At this point I can answer the question asked of me by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). He suggested in his speech that had I chosen a career as a clerk in holy orders and discovered half way through that career that it was not right for me, I would have been able thereafter to pursue any other career—

Mr. Fallon: It is a vocation.

Mr. Swayne: My hon. Friend is right, but other careers are careers, not vocations. My point is that, according to my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal, I would have been able to pursue any career except one in the House of Commons.

In fact, that is not entirely true. In such circumstances I would have been able to come to the House, were I prepared to renounce holy orders. This is the problem in the case of Mr. Cairns: he is being discriminated against in the sense that he is not able, as a clergyman in the Church of England is able, simply to renounce his holy orders, thereby enabling himself to be elected to the House of Commons. It is entirely right that we have provided a remedy enabling his problem to be alleviated; however, our remedy will enable him to come here, but it will equally enable all who are currently practising clergymen in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England to do so as well.

As far as the Roman Catholic Church is concerned, that is not a problem, because the Roman Catholic Church takes the view that its clergymen—its priests—should not sit in Parliament. The difficulty for me lies in the fact that clergymen of the established Church will, as a result of this measure, be able to come here and take a political stance. We have had the argument, and I think we must simply differ; but still, in my opinion, that is not compatible with the role of a priest.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal identified the historical reasons for excluding clergy of the Church of England, and intimated that those reasons were no longer valid. I accept that, but it strikes me that there are many good reasons—certainly one good reason—for maintaining the exclusion. I consider leadership, in the sense of the role of a priest in the Church of England, wholly incompatible with membership and political leadership in the House of Commons.

The Bill involves constitutional issues that we overlook at our peril. I believe that this should be an assembly for the laity: after all, the second estate has its representation elsewhere. In the past this place has had a more religious outlook, and that is not a happy history. I remind Members of the Parliament of Saints, and the Barebones Parliament; I remind them that we have allowed ourselves to be governed by prelates in the past, not least by Cardinal Wolsey. We have gone beyond that now, and we should remain beyond it.

Mr. Fallon: Do not drag the Lord Chancellor into it.

Mr. Swayne: I would if it were in order, but time is pressing and the Minister wishes to reply.

I would have accepted a measure that simply made things easier for Mr. Cairns in Greenock and Inverclyde, but what we have is a wider constitutional measure with which I profoundly disagree.

6.54 pm

Mr. Forth: What we have learned during the debate on this Bill, small though it may seem and mild though it may appear, is that it contains a number of substantial issues. There is, for example, the issue of history and tradition, which was covered by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) in his usual elegant and knowledgeable way. We need only glance at schedule 2 to see that the repeals go back as far as 1801—as has been mentioned a number of times—and involve six Acts. There is therefore no doubt at all that what is being dealt with in this seemingly small Bill is a substantial part of our history and tradition. From that point of view, it has an importance that perhaps goes beyond its apparent scope.

The matter at the heart of the Bill is whether it is right and proper for the law of this land to seek to determine which members—outside those who have offices of profit under the Crown, as has been mentioned in the debate—of which faith or Church should or should not be able to come to this place. As I have said, I am happy to be in the camp that says that there should be no such restrictions. I have made that very clear and I have no problem with it at all. On that basis, I would be happy for the Bill to proceed. I also think that we all understand why, although it seems paradoxical, the Bill has to provide that Lords Spiritual should continue to be disqualified from membership of this place—obviously because of their position in another place.

Despite the arguments that have been made most eloquently by my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), my difficulty with the Bill remains its provenance. It has been said a number of times and in a number of different ways that surely the mere fact that the Bill would happen to help one individual should not stand in the way of the principle. I do not see it that way at all. If that were the case, the Bill should have been introduced earlier and handled in a different manner, and we should not be under the time pressure in which we now find ourselves. I also regret that the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Sevenoaks (Mr. Fallon) and me could not be dealt with fully and properly.

The Bill, if passed, would take effect on Royal Assent and thereby enable an individual whom the law would previously have debarred to be elected to this place. I believe that that in itself is sufficient reason for the House not to support the Bill in the circumstances in which we are being offered it. That is why, although I favour the principles of the Bill, I shall oppose it if, as I hope, we divide on it. I think that it is the right Bill, but at the wrong time.

6.57 pm

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I ask the House to support the Bill. The Government believe that it is a very important Bill which does have constitutional implications. That is why, in Committee, it was debated on the Floor of the House. It raises issues about the proper role of the state and about the role of the state in relation to the Church.

The Government's view is that we should not tell the Catholic Church or other Churches—I appreciate that there are specific arguments about the established Church—how to run their internal affairs. That should be a matter for them. Today, we are deciding what should be the law of this land. In my view, the law of this land is discriminatory. It provides that a person such as David Cairns—who was a priest, practised as a priest and remains a priest, although he is no longer practising as such—should not be able to stand for Parliament. The Bill will ensure that he can.

There has been much discussion about priests being defrocked and laicised and other such issues. The fact is that David Cairns does not wish to be defrocked. That is really not a course of action that is open to him. Additionally, the Pope takes a particular view on laicisation, which makes it very unlikely that David Cairns could be laicised. At least in religious terms, therefore, he remains a priest although he does not practice as one. In such circumstances, it is wrong that he should be prevented from standing for Parliament.

As the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) has said so eloquently, David Cairn's case is in many ways within a tradition in which the House can have some pride. When faced with the Bradlaugh case, after a while—perhaps it needed convincing—the House changed the law. In the early 1960s, when faced with the circumstances of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Mr. Benn), the House again took the decision to change things.

This Bill is right and I commend it to the House. It is a small Bill and a good Bill. I hope that the House will support it.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 196, Noes 15.

Division No. 140] **[6.59 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Mrs Margaret
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart *(Middlesbrough)*
Benn, Hilary *(Leeds C)*
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Bermingham, Gerald
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bradley, Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brinton, Mrs Helen
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Ian *(S Dorset)*
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Cann, Jamie
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank
Fisher, Mark

Fitzpatrick, Jim
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Godman, Dr Norman A
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Golding, Mrs Llin
Gordon, Mrs Eileen
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Ms Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hutton, John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Jackson, Ms Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Dr Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laxton, Bob
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lock, David
Love, Andrew
McAvoy, Thomas
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Meale, Alan
Michie, Bill *(Sheffld Heeley)*
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Alasdair *(Galloway)*
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Eddie
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Pendry, Rt Hon Tom
Perham, Ms Linda
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Quin, Rt Hon Ms Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Ms Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sedgemore, Brian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Ms Helen
Spellar, John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Temple-Morris, Peter
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wigley, Rt Hon Dafydd
Winnick, David
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Graham Allen.

NOES

Amess, David
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Fallon, Michael
Gale, Roger
Jenkin, Bernard
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Paterson, Owen
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Eric Forth and
Mr. Gerald Howarth.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [28 February],

That the Motions in the name of Mr. Secretary Straw relating to the Electoral Commission shall be treated as if they related to instruments subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) in respect of which notice has been given that the instruments be approved.—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

LIAISON COMMITTEE (SUB-COMMITTEE)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 145 (Liaison Committee) be amended as follows:

Line 31, at end add—

'( ) The committee shall have power to appoint a sub-committee, which shall have power to send for persons, papers and records, to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House, and to report to the committee from time to time.—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [31 January],

That the Select Committee on Science and Technology shall have leave to meet concurrently with any committee of the Lords on science and technology or any sub-committee thereof, for the purpose of deliberating or taking evidence, and to communicate to any such committee its evidence or any other documents relating to matters of common interest—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

SITTINGS IN WESTMINSTER HALL

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [23 January],

That, following the Order [20th November 2000], Mr. Nicholas Winterton, Mr. John McWilliam, Mr. Barry Jones and Frank Cook be appointed to act as additional Deputy Speakers at sittings in Westminster Hall during this Session—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

SELECT COMMITTEES (JOINT MEETINGS)

Motion made,

That Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) be amended as follows:

Line 40, before the word 'European' insert the words 'Environmental Audit Committee or with the'.—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

LANGUAGE OF PARLIAMENTARY PROCEEDINGS

Motion made,

That—

(1) this House approves the First Report from the Procedure Committee, Session 2000–01 (HC 47); and

(2) the Resolution of 5th June 1996 on the Language of Parliamentary Proceedings be amended accordingly by inserting, after the word 'Wales,', the words 'and at Westminster in respect of Select Committees'.—[*Mr. Keith Bradley.*]

Hon. Members: Object.

Metropolitan Police

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Keith Bradley.]*

7.11 pm

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate the terms and conditions of service of the Metropolitan police. Hon. Members are well aware of the fundamental changes that have taken place in the police service throughout the United Kingdom, which have affected every police officer's duties and hours and the structure of their jobs.

We have come a long way after seven years of declining police numbers, and we have finally turned the story round. In the six months to September 2000, we had 444 extra police officers, not fewer. Assaults on police have decreased. Funding for the Metropolitan police has finally increased. There is more need than ever to address the practical realities of being a police officer today.

As we watched the terrible scenes at Selby over the past couple of days, similar to the recent scenes at Paddington, we must have appreciated that our police officers are engaged in the most terrifying of incidents. We must accept that they are individuals, parents and partners. They have families, and when they witness such scenes they must go home to take on their familial roles. That is not easy. Police officers have responsibilities, and if we do not treat them fairly, we will lose their valuable service.

I wish particularly to address the scale of the problem in London. The front-line police officer, normally young and relatively inexperienced, is providing a first-class service to the public of London in very demanding times. Since publication of the Macpherson report, the Metropolitan police have taken great steps forward in their efforts to improve that service to all sections of the London community. It was recently announced that the force had addressed all the report's recommendations.

To coin a modern phrase, a police officer's lot is not a happy one. The conditions of service of the modern police officer have suffered, particularly since the 1994 publication of the Sheehy report, commissioned by Kenneth Clarke, when he was Home Secretary. Michael Howard, the Home Secretary at the time of publication, abolished the housing allowance—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Lady must not refer to right hon. Members by name.

Ann Keen: I apologise, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Home Secretary at the time of publication abolished the housing allowance paid to police officers, which had for many years been seen as an essential part of the remuneration package by the Police Federation, supported by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. In many cases, that led to police officers receiving thousands of pounds less than their counterparts who had joined before September 1994.

For a number of years, there has been a decline in police numbers throughout the country. In London, however, the shortage has been more acute, with the loss of more than 2,000 officers since 1992. The situation may

worsen. At a recent meeting of the Greater London Authority budget committee, Sir John Stevens said that over the next five years one third of London's police officers and two thirds of the support staff will be eligible to retire from the service. He suggested that ways must be found to encourage them to remain and continue to provide a service to the city of London.

I should like to give an example of a long-serving officer in my area, the borough of Hounslow. Police Constable John Collins has given more than 30 years' service and was rightly awarded the MBE recently for his commitment and work in the community. He joined the police force at 19. He will be 55 this year, and he wants to stay on. He really wants to continue his work in crime prevention, for which he is well known. He has a supportive chief superintendent in Mike O'Brien, who values his service. Constable Collins would like to stay on until the age of 60. He would like to know now that he can do so in order to plan his family life and look forward to his eventual retirement. When someone has done more than 30 years of active service in the police force, it is admirable to want to stay on, and his skills are much needed in crime prevention.

We must recognise the skills of experienced officers in mentoring inexperienced young officers. At the moment, younger officers have only a limited time in which they can benefit from mentoring by older and more experienced officers. We must recognise the work of experienced officers if we wish them to stay and we must be flexible in our approach to the work of our police force.

We have all seen the excellent police recruitment advertisements in the past year. People were asked whether they could deal with a violent incident, a road traffic accident or breaking bad news. We have experienced officers who can do that. In this very House, Sergeant Les Lenaghan, an officer with more than 30 years' experience, told me recently of the need for flexibility, especially on pensions. The pension structure is restrictive, and the police officer's pension provides little if any financial incentive to stay on. Morale can then fall, and we need the Government to provide confidence that when the pension review that has been discussed for some time takes place, it will not be divisive and damaging.

A great deal of work has to be done to create confidence among our police officers and make them feel truly valued. In addition, we must find ways to encourage more recruits into the service and, once they are recruited, to retain them. The obvious way is to provide better rewards for front-line duties, perhaps by way of a shift allowance. At present, officers who provide 24-hour policing to the people of London are paid at the same rate as those who protect buildings. Protecting us is serious work, but it is not quite the same as front-line work out on the streets of London.

The return of the housing allowance would at the stroke of a pen boost the morale of today's young police officers. It would encourage Metropolitan police officers to remain in London rather than bring up their families elsewhere. It goes without saying that that would also attract more recruits. Police numbers are rising in London. The last intake at Hendon was 200 and the next is likely to be 250. That follows the introduction of a new London allowance for post-1994 recruits of £3,327 last year, but more needs to be done.

I was pleased to be able to take part in a debate that encouraged people to re-examine retirement. I was pleased that our Minister stated on 14 February that the Government

> wants to encourage more flexibility and choice for retirement, with benefits to employers and employees alike. For employers, a flexible approach can be a means of reducing capacity without losing the people concerned or the qualities and expertise they bring to business".

Well, that is business, and the police service is different. Police officers are not employees; they are appointed as police constables. The regulations governing the police were looked at in 1918 and more recently in 1995. I suggest that they need to be reviewed.

We have been made aware of the haemorrhage that is about to occur in our great capital in the next four to five years. We cannot say that we did not have the time to plan and make changes that could bring about a flexible retirement approach for valued officers who have given so much service.

7.19 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): It is a genuine privilege to participate in this debate, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ann Keen), under your chairmanship, Madam Deputy Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend on obtaining the debate. It is important to focus attention, as she has done, on the state of affairs in the Metropolitan police service.

I take the opportunity that my hon. Friend gives me to pay a public tribute to the officers of the service. She mentioned officers working in her constituency and officers whom she knew, and described their outstanding personal commitment in times of great difficulty and tension. Communities are strengthened and people given confidence by such commitment. It is important to place that on record.

Let me add to that my appreciation of the tremendous and committed work of all ranks—from the Commissioner, Sir John Stevens, and his deputy, Ian Blair, down through the whole force. There is a major drive in the force at present to ensure that we can deliver right across the range of its services.

Because of the responsibility that I hold, it saddens me that many people form their view of policing from descriptions in some of the media programmes, rather than from the police work that they know about. At the beginning of this week, I visited outer London boroughs to the east of the city, where police officers told me that the characterisation of policing in some fictional programmes does not give a fair picture of the life, commitment, experience and solidarity of working police officers. That is true. The Government will do what we can to address the issues in the ways mentioned by my hon. Friend.

The important issues raised by my hon. Friend stem from many of the recruitment difficulties experienced by the MPS in recent years. We have tried to tackle those issues, through initiatives such as the national recruitment campaign—to which my hon. Friend referred—the crime fighting fund and the starter homes scheme. That scheme attempts to address the massive problem that has arisen for all public services and many private industries throughout London as the economy grows and succeeds.

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

There is great tension between the rents or mortgages that people have to pay and their salaries. That is why we have increased the London allowance for new recruits, and for officers recruited since 1 September 1994 who do not receive housing emoluments. We have also provided funding for free rail travel for Metropolitan police officers within a 70-mile radius of Charing Cross; that includes my hon. Friend's constituency.

I remind the House that all matters concerning police officers' hours of duty, leave, pay, allowances and pensions must be considered by the Police Negotiating Board, the statutory body set up to make recommendations to the Home Secretary. Sections 61 and 62 of the Police Act 1996 provide for the constitution of the PNB and for the procedure for reaching agreement on recommendations made by the PNB. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will consider any recommendations that the PNB makes before amendments to police regulations are made.

Related to the terms and conditions of service are the standards with which recruits have to comply in order to be accepted. We are developing national recruitment standards that will remove unnecessary barriers, provide clarity for applicants and ensure that recruitment standards are clearly job related and non-discriminatory. All aspects of the recruitment process are being reviewed, including entry criteria and medical standards for recruitment.

In the light of some of the ill-informed comments in the media about the attempts of the MPS to address recruitment standards, I make it clear that the Met have been correct in their handling of the matter. The service has tried to remove some of the more outdated restrictions and is determined to do whatever is possible to remove artificial barriers to recruitment, which have been raised in the past in some cases. There has been media controversy about some aspects of that initiative, but the MPS is right to take those actions. I hope, moreover, that the national recruitment standards development programme that I described will help to create a national framework for that work.

Police pay is based on national pay scales, which do not vary from force to force. Starting pay for police officers compares favourably with other public service occupations and professions. A police officer will earn £17,133 on recruitment, rising to £19,170 on the completion of initial training and £20,304 after two years. That reflects the serious responsibilities that police officers undertake and the dangers in which they are sometimes placed. However, it has long been recognised that the cost of living in London is high and London officers receive a London weighting, which is pensionable, and a London allowance, which is not pensionable.

In June 2000, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary accepted the PNB's recommendation for an increase in London allowance from 1 July 2000 for new recruits and for those officers recruited on or after 1 September 1994—the post-Sheehy officers, to use the vernacular to which my hon. Friend referred—who are not in receipt of housing allowance.

Metropolitan police officers recruited before 1 September 1994, who are in receipt of either rent or housing allowance, which ranges from £5,126.70 to £9,153—significant sums—also receive a London weighting of £1,713 and a London allowance of £1,011, totalling £2,724. Metropolitan police officers recruited on, or after, 1 September 1994, and not in receipt of housing allowance, receive a total London weighting and London allowance of £6,051, which is comprised of £1,713 London weighting and £4,338 London allowance.

The PNB has also recently recommended an allowance of £1,000 to be paid to those officers recruited before 1 September 1994 who are in receipt of half-rate housing allowance or flat-rate transitional rent allowance, and the Home Secretary will make an announcement on that soon. I am glad that my hon. Friend has been able to secure this debate to highlight the importance of such issues.

The Home Office also funds free rail travel for Metropolitan police officers at a cost of about £2.45 million in the coming financial year.

The Metropolitan police service's arrangement with the Association of Train Operating Companies allows police officers free rail travel within a 70-mile radius of London on production of their warrant card, on or off duty. That came into effect only recently, on 14 February this year, and extends the current arrangements whereby Metropolitan police officers travel free on London Transport buses and the London underground. Police officers will have to buy tickets to cover any rail travel outside the 70-mile limit and the arrangements will not extend to civil staff, the special constabulary or family members.

Free rail travel will provide an additional incentive to new recruits and will help to retain serving officers. I am sure that it will also encourage more officers to use the railways with the result that our trains will be safer for everyone to use—a very important consideration.

Funding for the current financial year will come from central provision. The sum for 2001–02 has been made available from the total provision for policing—£8.495 billion—agreed at the outcome of the spending review. The £2.45 million cost of free Metropolitan police rail travel will not reduce the amounts already announced as being allocated to the police authorities through the police grant and the standard spending assessment. The money for the coming financial year will be met from the £91 million announced in the March 2000 Budget for police modernisation.

The starter homes initiative represents an important Government effort, across all public services, to address issues relating to housing costs. The initiative is expected to help about 10,000 key workers to buy their own homes in areas of high-cost housing. Some £250 million will be made available for that over the next three years. Priority will be given to police officers, teachers and nurses—my hon. Friend's former profession.

Bids in the first bidding round have now been received from those organisations, including registered social landlords, local authorities and employers, that wish to run a scheme under that initiative. Bids have been submitted in respect of 14 police force areas, including several bids that cover the Metropolitan police area. The bids have yet to be assessed and funds will be made available in the summer to successful applicants. A second bidding round will take place in the autumn.

My hon. Friend mentioned the national recruitment advertising campaign. To support forces in meeting their recruitment needs, the national recruitment campaign was launched on 30 August last year. The campaign has two

main aims. First, it is designed to provide forces with high-quality potential recruits, which is its obvious focus. However, I give at least as much importance—perhaps, in some ways, even more—to raising perceptions of the status and professionalism of the police at large. It is important that the community as a whole understands what it is to be a modern police officer. The police's responsibilities and how they carry them out are the types of points that my hon. Friend mentioned.

A campaign website carries information on joining the police and allows individuals to respond online for more information. Calls are handled by a professional call centre. Basic details are taken and an information pack is sent out with an outline of the role of a police officer, along with details of how to take an interest further. Potential applicants complete an expression of interest and the call centre forwards those expressions of interest to forces to progress.

The campaign has been extremely successful. By 4 February, more than 100,000 inquiries had been received through the website and call centre, resulting in more than 22,000 formal expressions of interest. That is a significant proportion and a tribute to the way in which the campaign has been able to convey what the responsibilities of a modern police officer are. The Metropolitan police have received 1,946 expressions of interest and a further 1,115 inquiries have been redirected to the Met's own call centre.

The Metropolitan police recently carried out a full-scale review of their recruiting standards and the resulting changes have been made to ensure that the Met are socially inclusive, non-discriminatory and fair. As I said earlier, the changes have brought the Met's recruitment standards into line with those of other police forces in the United Kingdom.

The Met have been allocated a total of 2,044 recruits from the crime fighting fund. These recruits are over and above the force's existing recruitment plans. More than 500 of the crime fighting fund officers will be recruited this financial year. As my hon. Friend said, there is already evidence that police numbers are rising as a result. Police recruitment numbers are increasing as she stated, and we have every reason to believe that we are finally beginning to make an impact after years of declining police numbers in the Met. We are beginning to turn the curve upwards, which is an important step both for its effectiveness and for the morale and confidence of the force.

In Hounslow, at the end of January 2001, police strength was 398 against a budgeted work force total of 411, which means that the borough was 13 officers—or 3.08 per cent.—down on its budgeted total. Civilian strength was 115, compared to a budgeted work force total of 111, so the figure was above budget on the civilian side.

I am advised that the Metropolitan police service has already recruited 1,130 officers this year and expects to be only 100 officers below its budgeted work force target of 25,600 by the end of March this year. This is very good news. I commend the service on all the work that it has done to deal with its recruitment difficulties.

My hon. Friend mentioned morale. Total wastage in the police force compared with other organisations is very low. The figures for wastage are 5.2 per cent., 4.8 per cent. and 4.7 per cent. in the past three years. The survey of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development for labour turnover in 2000 reported a wastage rate of 18.3 per cent. for all employees in 1999, compared with the figure of about 5 per cent. that I have just given for the police.

Most police service wastage consists of retirements; the number of resignations—at 1 per cent. or less in the past three years—remains very small. I want to place those figures on the record because people sometimes glibly accept the argument that there is a serious morale problem in the force. If we compare it with other aspects of the public service and life, the figures for the force are very good. Of course, the police face greater challenges than most other occupations and that makes things difficult. They also face a challenging media environment. That can be problematic, too. However, the position is good, and I pay tribute to the force for its contribution to morale.

My hon. Friend also mentioned pensions. We have three initiatives on that, and I hope that they will bear fruit shortly. First, in the next few months, we shall publish a consultation document on ill health, medical retirements and pensions. That will have important implications for how we deal with the issues. Secondly, we are considering how pension costs are distributed across police forces. That is rather unfair at the moment.

Thirdly, we are looking at the possibility of establishing a funded pension scheme for new recruits, which would transform the budget structure in that relationship. We have been working closely with the Treasury on that. My right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury and I are meeting to discuss the proposal and to try to deal with some of the issues that my hon. Friend raised. Her point about people's desire to commit in a flexible way at the end of their normal working lives is absolutely true. Many police officers want to find a way of doing that and we are actively looking into the possibilities.

I conclude by congratulating my hon. Friend on securing this debate. I am glad that she has given me the opportunity to be as positive as I think the whole country should be about the work of the Metropolitan police.

In the absence of any Opposition Members, it is appropriate to mention that some of them have been very aggressive and have despaired of what is happening in a way that is dishonest and untrue. I am exceptionally glad to have had the opportunity to try, to set the record straight.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes to Eight o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 13 February 2001

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Regional Economic Development

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Sutcliffe.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Andrew George (St. Ives): I am delighted to have secured this morning's debate on regional economic development, as it is important to my constituency and to many regions throughout the United Kingdom. It is disappointing that so few of them are represented here this morning. The debate provides a good opportunity to review the success of objective 1 in Cornwall—particularly from the perspective of my constituents in St. Ives, west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly—and the progress being made by the regional development agency. It is approaching its second birthday, so this is an appropriate time to review progress.

Credit must be given to many people for the significant progress that is being made. The Government should be credited for the progress being made on objective 1, for having the right idea, which was to establish more regionally based and devolved decision making on economic development, and for the establishment of regional development agencies. However, as I shall explain later, perhaps that was not appropriately executed.

Many people were falling over themselves to claim credit for securing objective 1 status for Cornwall—and, I believe, for the other three objective 1 regions in the UK—including the regional development agency, although it came along rather late in the day. I recollect that the regional chamber claimed credit for having achieved objective 1 status for Cornwall, when in fact it simply promised at a rather late stage not to get in the way. The political process was important, but at the end of the day the credit should go to the people of Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, because they put up with an economy in need of regeneration for many years. The popular campaign mounted by local people raised the temperature of and the pressure on the political process and was key to securing objective 1 status.

It is clear that there has been significant progress since objective 1 started formally in July last year. I strongly congratulate the local community, local partnerships and the local objective 1 office. Last week, in its first year review, it showed that 36 projects had been approved so far, 88 others were advancing through the process and £30 million of objective 1 funding had been allocated so far. There is, therefore, no question of the Cornish level failing to support local initiatives. It is working well, despite obstacles. The purpose of this debate is not for me to say that everything is tickety-boo, as that would be a waste of time, but to draw attention to some of the significant obstacles that affect local people and local businesses. Many of those obstacles are not new—and are not to be placed at the door of the present Government—but have been affecting access to European structural funds for many years.

The first difficulty relates to the complexity that European structural funds inevitably involve, in the case of objective 1 and objective 2 areas and before Cornwall secured objective 1 status it related to objective 5b. Basically, there are at least three Government programmes—the European regional development fund, European agricultural guidance on the guarantee funds and the European social fund—all with different rules, different approaches and different application forms.

In order to draw down the money, one has to secure matched public funds and the responsible Government Department has to identify a range of Government and public sector funds, all with different application forms, deadlines, criteria and rules. That makes the process extremely complex. In addition, the rule on how and when a successful applicant can draw down the money makes the process even more complex and difficult.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I wonder whether my hon. Friend recalls that when we and our colleagues went to Dublin to try and gain from the Dublin Government's experience of administering objective 1 funding, it was apparent that they had found a way through the complexity to which he refers. It became equally apparent that the complexity has nothing to do with the rules set out by the European Commission in Brussels, but has been caused by member states' application of those rules.

Mr. George: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is interesting that both Ireland and France have established systems involving a single point of entry and a single application form. Their purpose in that is to take the weight of complexity and red tape and bureaucracy off the shoulders of local partnerships and businesses and to work out those issues out internally, rather than to weigh down projects with the burden of what is unquestionably a bureaucratic system, bound in red tape. That often applies to matched funding, which can have forests of strings attached. Many projects are weighed down by bureaucracy, red tape and guidance.

The second obstacle involves the appropriateness of Government intervention. In my constituency, that difficulty has been overcome by the development of integrated area plans based on a number of parishes working together on projects, with the support of the Government offices. In the Lizard and Helston area, for example, they had worked for months, if not years, on plans and had established a committee. The project was bringing the community together and those working on it were largely ahead of the game compared with other parts of Cornwall. They had worked well and achieved unanimity as to how they might progress their plans and programmes for the area to kick-start objective 1 and develop appropriate projects.

However, very late in the day, having discussed the issue with the RDA and the Government Office for the South West, the Government office insisted that they change their area, so the whole process had to begin again. That is not an edifying way to help a local community that has been enthused by the opportunities made available by the success of having achieved objective 1 status.

[Mr. George]

Thirdly, many businesses have expressed concern to me, and I am sure to other hon. Members, about the fact that their approaches to the objective 1 process are met in a complex and confused way, and they are not given the help that they need.

One business wrote to me recently saying that last summer it had

"made enquiries about accessing Objective One funds to develop certain parts of the business. The enquiry was passed from one department to another, mainly around the Government Office for the South West. Each department was polite but ineffective; the general tone was 'It's not my responsibility. I'm not sure who deals with that sort of thing. I'll get someone to phone you back later today.' Needless to say, after several days no-one had phoned back and we had to chase them again. Eventually we received an application form for starting a project. This was completely inappropriate to a very small business. The amount of administration, form-filling and reporting would have exceeded the amount of useful work we were planning, so we threw the form in the bin and abandoned the idea."

Despite the fact that the purpose of objective 1 is to help business, that experience is by no means exceptional.

Although the local office has been working effectively to try and make sense of the system and get the best out of it, allocating the money is one thing—the £30 million that has been allocated so far represents excellent progress—but drawing it down is another. While some projects in Cornwall have received European structural fund money, so far not a penny piece of objective 1 funding has gone into any capital programmes there, and that is a matter of great concern. At the end of the day, we will need to judge objective 1 on its fundamental strategic success to Cornwall—not on whether the pot of money has been spent in a first come, first served basis in an unstrategic way—and on what sustainable economic developments have been established through objective 1, that would not have happened otherwise and that have made a significant difference in turning around the depressed Cornish economy.

A significant project is the combined universities in Cornwall, on which there is unanimity that the project must be properly and effectively established within the seven-year period. I would welcome any encouragement that the Minister may wish to give local people that the project will go ahead and that the Government office will take a flexible view when considering the various strands and stages in its development.

Another important project in Cornwall, in which we will invest much effort, is building on Cornwall's distinctiveness. Cornwall does not have a lot going for it, but at least people know where it is. Some like it and some do not, but generally people have a positive view of Cornwall as a distinctive place with a distinct culture and a strong environment. Moreover, Cornwall produces a range of unique products and it wants to develop a unique and distinctive brand image. It does not want Government offices and regional development agencies preventing that.

Cornwall has a number of distinctive features and opportunities. Its maritime potential has been ignored for far too long. It has the busiest shipping lane in the world within three miles of the largest natural harbour in Europe. In the past, the sea has been something to be paddled in or gazed at, but it could be a great economic resource. If only we could get a small proportion of the passing trade to come to Cornwall—that is a realistic prospect—objective 1 could make a very significant contribution. It is important to identify the strengths of Cornwall, rather than consider it to be weak because it is not the same as everywhere else. I will return to that theme later in my speech.

Hayle harbour is another important project in Cornwall. It is important to develop communities where the economy has failed and Hayle harbour is one such example. The project, which has strong local support, involves a multi-million pound development of the harbour and it wants Government backing. I understand that the recent planning application that has been approved by the district is now with the Government. Hopefully, it will not be delayed unnecessarily. Although the use of taxpayer's money should be properly scrutinised, I hope that the plans that are being considered by the Government Office for the South West will move forward swiftly.

The local Federation of Small Businesses has expressed concern about objective 1. It has 2,500 members in Cornwall, but not one has yet succeeded in getting objective 1 money. It makes the rather amusing comment that it is concerned about the

"velocity at which Objective 1 is progressing—it has been overtaken with ease by an arthritic snail".

Whether or not the hyperbole is fair, local businesses are concerned about progress.

There is also the issue of matched funds. Regional selective assistance should provide an important source of matched funds in objective 1 areas, but it is aimed primarily at large projects. The minimum eligible capital expenditure is £500,000. Many small businesses in Cornwall would not be able to afford a project of that size. However, another fund available to small businesses is the enterprise grant, but the total budget throughout the whole of the seven counties region is £450,000 per annum. If Cornwall got its fair share, it might get £50,000 of the money on a pro rata basis. That will hardly make a significant impact on the development of objective 1 projects in terms of matched funding.

Recently, the *Western Morning News* carried out a poll of business leaders in Cornwall and Devon, most of whom had a frequent or occasional contact with the RDA and, according to the newspaper, represented "the cream of business leaders" in Cornwall and Devon. In answer to the question:

"How well does the RDA represent Cornwall and Devon's interest?",

57 per cent. said that it represented their interests badly, 41 per cent. responded "quite well", and 2 per cent. said "very well".

In response to the second question:

"How do you rate the general performance of the RDA to date?",

55 per cent. said "poorly", 2 per cent. said "excellently" and 12 per cent. said "good".

The third question was:

"Are they doing enough to attract inward investment?",

to which 58 per cent. responded no and 11 per cent said yes. The newspaper concludes that the RDA has not delivered for the local business community.

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I am a little puzzled by the line that the hon. Gentleman is following

because, as far as I am aware, the RDA is a business-led organisation. Therefore, is it not a criticism of the businesses in our region? He should be careful about pursuing that line, as indeed should the *Western Morning News*.

Mr. George: I am interested by the hon. Lady's intervention because, as I am sure she will recollect, the RDA was set up by an Act of Parliament and its board members are appointed by the Government and not by business, so it is a Government-led quango. It is important to reflect on that when one examines the success of the RDA, because at present it is insufficiently business led. The hon. Lady might like to take up her other criticisms with the newspaper. I am simply reporting what it said.

Mr. Tyler: Perhaps I could add a point. In addition to being accountable only to central Government and not the local community, despite the presence of the chambers, are not all the RDAs experiencing the same crisis of confidence in their ability to represent not just business interests but regional interests? The Minister may be able to tell us whether the Government feel that RDAs are becoming more accountable throughout the country or whether the south-west is unique in that respect.

Mr. George: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. No doubt the Minister will take note of that question.

Mrs. Gilroy: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. Does he know how many businesses took part in the survey and which ones they were?

Mr. George: As far as I am aware, the *Western Morning News* has not disclosed the identities of the 45 businesses that took part. It consulted a wide range of businesses in the area, but whether they were representative is a matter to which the RDA will no doubt address itself. However, to question the validity of the poll is not an appropriate response for responsible politicians in Cornwall and Devon. The hon. Lady will understand that the survey findings ring true with the experiences of businesses in my constituency. One chief executive said:

"The RDA is bureaucracy gone mad. It is inefficient and is just an organisation that pursues its own ideas for its own sake."

When is it appropriate for the RDA to intervene? I raised that in a letter to the Minister about the South Crofty tin mine, which was recently purchased by Baseresult. Is it appropriate for the public sector to compete with the private sector, raising the hope value of a site and undermining a commercial proposal? The Minister wrongly described it in a recent debate as

"a waste-to-energy plant, using the mine to dispose of the power station ash and debris".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2001; Vol. 362, c. 416.]

Mr. Williams, who is the managing director of Baseresult and a constituent of mine, was not unnaturally very disappointed by those comments. He is bringing forward plans in a new and innovative way to develop South Crofty as a tin mine.

In a statement to me yesterday, the RDA said:

"we will not stand in the way of their development of South Crofty."

But it has already tried to do that. It went on to say:

"We continue to believe that tin mining is incompatible with progress to prosperity."

But turning Cornwall into a replica of everywhere else by covering that site with conference centres, shops and offices closes off opportunities for the future. It is not the appropriate way to respond to a commercial organisation—a private sector body—that is trying to bring forward proposals despite the interference of what is effectively a public sector body.

A further example involves a company in my constituency that needed to restructure. The RDA sought to purchase the factory unit from under its nose, thereby increasing the market value of the factory and almost putting the company out of business.

There is also the issue of unfulfilled promises on a number of projects. The Hypatia Trust in Penzance is an internationally renowned charity. It intends to establish an important project geared at promoting the understanding of women. The project would be based in Penzance, and would offer the prospect of bringing hundreds of thousands of pounds in investment to the town centre. For many months, the trust was convinced of the RDA's intention to support that project, but shortly before Christmas it received a letter saying that the RDA had changed its mind. That has thrown the whole project into serious jeopardy.

The RDA should be playing a strategic role. The south-west continues to go through tremendous turmoil. It is appropriate that we should have an organisation dealing with strategic issues such as transport. To travel to my constituency—which is a five-and-a-half-hour rail journey from London—one has to get off the train at Tiverton or Exeter and take the bus, adding a further hour to the journey, as well as the inconvenience. There has not been a squeak from the RDA on issues such as transport, on which it is appropriate to have a body with a wide-ranging remit. The RDA should be taking the lead on issues such as transport, instead of interfering—as it has been doing—and telling Cornwall that it should not have its own brand image.

Cornwall has a strong brand image. Frankly, the south-west as a region exists only in the minds of people who work on the basis of bureaucratic convenience; it has no brand value whatever. The RDA should not be getting in the way of Cornwall's brand value; it should offer support and allow Cornwall to build on its strengths.

The RDA has the right idea in respect of devolving decision-making power and allowing the Government to let go and enable people in the regions to take decisions that affect them. The problem is that the idea has been wrongly executed. The Government preside over 30 or more regional quangos, and they all take their lead from Westminster or Whitehall—not from the business community. Their members are all Government appointees and are answerable to Ministers and not to local people.

We need a distinctive approach. The Government must let go a little, and give control freakery a holiday. They must marry decision making in Cornwall to the objective 1 region and let distinctiveness flourish. They

[Mr. George]

must also realise that in Cornwall there is genuinely a new spirit and a will to succeed, which is already producing some excellent projects. That initiative does not need to be strangled by inappropriate Government interference, red tape and complexity. The Government must give more control to Cornwall and provide opportunities for more exciting, innovating, cutting-edge projects. That would be risky, but it would be less risky than not letting go—as the Government are still holding on to regional development in Cornwall. There is initiative and drive in the region, but it is being killed off by the dead hand of too much Government interference, placelessness and a lack of recognition of its distinctiveness and identity. Cornwall can compete, but not by trying to be the same as everywhere else; it must be different and distinctive. It needs to get away from the RDA model, which is suffocating that distinctiveness.

9.59 am

Mrs. Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) on obtaining a debate on a key issue affecting all parts of the country, and I share his disappointment that other regions are not represented here today.

Mr. George: Or other parties.

Mrs. Gilroy: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman and I represent the same party yet. The lack of Conservative representation here today is unfortunate.

I want to reflect on the size of the challenges represented by the legacy of the previous Conservative Government to the present Government in 1997. It is ironic that Devon and Cornwall—the part of the country that all hon. Members present in the Chamber today represent—suffered most under the policies of the previous Conservative Government, yet only four of its 16 Members of Parliament are Government Members. Let us hope that the forthcoming general election will change that; it will be detrimental if it does not.

Cornwall qualified for objective 1 status, which demonstrates how seriously it suffered. My constituency contains the poorest ward in England. In common with all regions, our region's economic performance was below the European average. I look forward to hearing the Minister remind us of the importance of regional development agencies to the achievement of growth in all regions.

Mr. Tyler: The hon. Lady referred to the previous Conservative Government. Does she also recall that successive Conservative Ministers failed to recognise that Devon and Cornwall's circumstances were special and refused to apply for NUTS2 status, which would have brought a local dimension to solving economic problems? Only when that obstruction was overcome did Cornwall manage to gain objective 1 status, and parts of Devon objective 2 status.

Mrs. Gilroy: Absolutely. I was about to reflect on the achievement of objective 1 status and to pay tribute to several groups and organisations, some of which the hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned. I did think that he underplayed the role of the regional development agency and was rather unkind about it. After all, it was the first regional development agency in the country to get off the starting block, go to Brussels and present the case just made so well by the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler). I also pay tribute to Mr. Robin Teverson and to my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton), who is carrying out several longstanding engagements in her constituency today.

Many of the groups mentioned by the hon. Member for St. Ives lobbied to ensure that the voice of Cornwall was strongly sounded. Without the energy of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne and the assistance of my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), the ear of the Prime Minister would not have been obtained. Without the Prime Minister's attention, I doubt whether the representations from Cornwall—however strongly made—would have been pressed at the right time and in the right place.

I am sure that the hon. Member for St. Ives would agree that the previous Government left a dire legacy: the role of the regional development agency has probably been more significant than he allowed. I was pleased to hear the hon. Gentleman speak a little more positively than usual about progress made under objective 1. He referred to the annual report. In a news statement, the leader of Cornwall county council, Pippa Englefield, said:

"This is brilliant news which should go a long way to silencing the doubters who have been criticising the Objective One programme. It is clear evidence that Objective One is working and working very well in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly. We have achieved a huge amount in the first year and will now build on these successes in the remaining seven years of the programme."

The hon. Gentleman's speech was in marked contrast to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne in her Adjournment debate on 31 January, which gave a comprehensive account of progress in her constituency, where she has worked hard to enable her constituents to benefit from all the Government's policies that contribute to the region. I was impressed to hear the Minister refer to the progress made in the opening five months and I congratulate those who have been party to making that happen, including those in the RDA who have supported the work.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the difficulty and complexity of working with the many different funding streams, and that is echoed by my own experience. I, too, was fortunate enough to secure an Adjournment debate about this time last week when I drew the Minister's attention to the complexities that my constituents often bring to me, and looked to her for some observations on the role of the local strategic partnerships. I am not sure whether hon. Members know that Plymouth aims to be one of the first local strategic partnerships; the 2020 partnership is a well-established private, voluntary and public sector partnership organisation that is laying the final plans to be in that position, hopefully within the next few months.

I will not rehearse all that I said in that speech, save one fact, of which we in Plymouth can be proud because it demonstrates the success of our economic

regeneration and that we are on the right path: youth unemployment has dropped by 90 per cent. and long-term adult unemployment by 60 per cent, in my constituency. Those figures are a sign that regeneration is happening in Plymouth.

The RDA in Plymouth is working closely with local partners and the community and has investment commitments of some £18 to £20 million, including the Tamar science park, the Plymouth international business park on the former Seaton barracks site and, at long last, the Royal William yard. The Phoenix trust project, which is headed by the Prince of Wales, is at planning application stage. I went to meet members of the local community in the area surrounding the Royal William yard, who are delighted to see the progress that is being made, for which they have waited for many a long year. That progress is in part a tribute to the way in which the RDA has taken up that difficult site in the middle of my constituency, which is of not just regional but national significance.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the *Western Morning News* survey. I looked long and hard for a named business person in my constituency to whom I could speak about the issues that it raised. The survey seemed to reproduce the same anonymous voices that predicted cataclysmic consequences if we dared to introduce a minimum wage when that was being discussed before the last election, telling us that unemployment would escalate and get completely out of hand. The figures that I have quoted speak for themselves and I shall not repeat them. Time is short and I want to let the Minister reply.

I was particularly surprised by the criticism of the Language Energy Centre—criticism which is not borne out by my experience. It may surprise the hon. Gentleman to know that I was not among its original enthusiastic supporters as I had grave reservations on environmental grounds. However, when businesses approached me, I decided to find out what the regional development agency thought about the issue, and received a positive response. The successful outcome of that contact was announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Airdrie and Shotts (Mrs. Liddell) shortly before she became Secretary of State for Scotland. I was accompanied by Sir Michael Lickiss and business partners throughout the region in lobbying for the BAE consortium backing for Airbus. That important investment affects people throughout the country, especially in the south-west, where the supply chain is extremely important to the defence sector in my constituency and in parts of Cornwall.

The sea surrounds the entire peninsula, from Poole to Penzance, from Avonmouth to St. Ives, and the hon. Member for St. Ives mentioned the maritime sector, on which the RDA has a task force. It is a good example of why a bigger, wider RDA has advantages and synergies for the region. I hope that the Minister will remind us how important regional growth and development is for the country's well- being.

In conclusion, I want to say something that may not suit the hon. Gentleman's agenda. The RDA has the unfortunate tendency of topslicing bits of Plymouth's budgets for the single regeneration budget and objective 2 funds for rural areas, but urban areas are the engine houses of the regional economy. I hope that the Minister will keep her eye on any such tendency in future. Plymouth needs a thriving rural area, but the rural areas need a thriving economic engine. In Plymouth, our glass is half full. Our economic policy is set fair to fill the glass gradually, year by year, and to keep it topped up above the half-full level, rather than letting it decline, as it has in the past 20 years.

10.12 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George) on securing the debate on an issue of great importance to the economic well-being of the country, not just to one region. I thank him for his courtesy in letting me know in advance the issues that he intended to raise, which helped me to improve my response to the debate.

This is the second occasion on which I have debated economic development issues in the south-west with the hon. Gentleman. I spent a considerable time discussing the subject in two recent Adjournment debates secured by my hon. Friends the Members for Plymouth, Sutton (Mrs. Gilroy) and for Falmouth and Camborne (Ms Atherton). I do not complain about that because the matter is important.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of the Government's initiatives in tackling economic development in the English regions and their part in the process of securing objective 1 status for the area, which my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton mentioned, and which was long overdue. It was an important milestone in the economic development of the south-west. Despite the content of much of his speech, the hon. Gentleman ended by supporting the principle of devolving decision making on economic matters to the English regions, and I welcome his support.

The crux of the hon. Gentleman's speech was the performance of the South West of England regional development agency. The report in last week's *Western Morning News* highlighted criticisms of that body by some members of the business community in the region, stating that most of the respondents believed that the agency had neglected Devon and Cornwall. I take that report seriously, as does the RDA. RDAs were set up to tackle economic imbalances between regions and, just as significantly, within regions. The particular diversity of the south-west gives rise to some significant sub-regional differences in GDP, as the hon. Gentleman will know. The RDA must take that into account in implementing its programmes.

I do not want to back away from the findings in the survey. They are disappointing, but the picture is not all gloom, as the *Western Morning News* has emphasised fairly. Apart from the fact that there were also positive comments from some of those business people in the article about the RDA, we need to bear it in mind that the point of RDAs was to take regional views into account. The RDA needs to take account of the survey and to act upon it. It has responded by saying that it will do just that.

On a more general point, RDAs represent a long-term investment in our regions. It is still less than two years since they came into existence. The picture will vary between regions, but, overall, RDAs have been an undoubted success in England. The 35,000 jobs that they have created or saved in their first year of operation is one indicator of that.

[Ms Beverley Hughes]

The RDAs are providing leadership and taking a proactive response to issues affecting regional economies. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and I have detailed discussions every six weeks with the chairs of the RDAs about what is going on. All the chairs and board members, including those from the south-west, are committed to the task that they have in hand and want to bring a lot of energy and expertise to that task, as well as to achieve success—not alone, but with other people.

The point cannot be emphasised too strongly that the RDAs are evolving bodies. It has always been accepted that they will develop expertise and build on their achievements over time. We in Government are trying to play our part in assisting them to do that.

From 2002, the RDAs, including the South West of England RDA, will have significantly increased resources and greater freedom to direct those resources to meet regional priorities. The hon. Gentleman must understand that those additional resources and that increased flexibility is a measure of our increasing confidence in the RDAs and their potential role in delivering improved economic prosperity in the regions.

Mr. Andrew George: Interestingly, the Minister has pointed out that she meets the chairs of RDAs regularly, which contrasts with the idea that they might be business-led. They are clearly accountable to Government. I welcome the announcement of additional resources for RDAs, but does she accept that one of the problems—the theme of my opening remarks—is the level of control that the RDA has over local decision making, which in Cornwall is significant and can undermine initiative? After all, the RDA has taxpayers' money and can give advice. Other than its other strategic roles, which I outlined earlier, handing that down to local people is surely the most significant task. The RDA should be delivering that.

Ms Hughes: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands—I put it no more strongly than that—the point of the meetings with the RDA chairs. The fact that we meet them does not mean that they are not autonomous bodies that are business-led. The fact that we have a dialogue does not mean that there is Government control. If he were a fly on the wall at those meetings, he would see that clearly. The fact that we meet does not detract from the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton rightly made, which is that these are business-led organisations. That was a deliberate decision. The people who are running the organisations come from the business community in their region. That point must not be lost.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, the RDAs have money, resources and some powers, but they cannot achieve what they need to in their regions unless they gain legitimacy among other important stakeholders, including the community, local authority and business and voluntary sectors, and work by consent and with consensus. They are trying to do that. It is not a question of a powerful body coming in and laying down the law. If we are to create sustainable change in our regions, the RDAs understand that they need to do that above all by working in partnership. That is the hallmark of the way in which RDAs, including the South West of England RDA, have gone about their business.

The South West of England RDA certainly needs to take on board what was said by the albeit small sample of business people in the south-west. It needs to listen to the survey's verdict and to strive even harder to ensure at the very least that what it does is well known and that it is accessible to the business community. However, without wishing in any way to distance myself from or to disparage the survey, I note that the business sample is small and we do not know who the people are.

The hon. Gentleman cited a number of contentions, which I do not doubt, about what business people have said, but he did not provide any evidence or raise the matters with me previously. He has not written to my Department about any of those concerns. If he can do so now, I invite him to provide me with the detail of some of those stories, and I shall be happy to investigate them. I am not trying to set the survey aside. I am simply saying that, whatever role newspapers want to play in raising issues in the way that they do, we as Members have a role to play. We must ensure that our claims are fair and that we are not allowing an organisation to paint a picture that may not be fair. We simply do not know the extent to which the views of the 45 companies represent those of the business community in Cornwall as a whole.

Mr. George: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Hughes: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, but I ask him to be brief, because I want to make other points.

Mr. George: I called for the debate before I knew about any report in the *Western Morning News*. The Minister is wrong. She must accept that I wrote to her only recently with regard to the case of South Crofty to point out that the RDA's intervention was not helpful. Will the Minister reassure me on the matter?

Ms Hughes: I am happy to confirm that the hon. Gentleman wrote to me last week about South Crofty, but I was referring to the core of his speech, which was a claim that the business community in the south-west had lost confidence in the RDA. That claim arose partly as a result of a newspaper story and partly from one or two of his experiences with people who made claims or statements to him. First, we do not know how far the views of the 45 companies represent those of all the companies in the south-west. Secondly, if the hon. Gentleman has specific instances of business people's experiences that I can investigate, I will be happy to do so. So far, however, he has not given me the details.

Mr. Tyler: If we can persuade the *Western Morning News* to bring to the Minister, on a confidential basis, the information available to it as a result of the survey, would that satisfy her?

Ms Hughes: I, and others, would be interested to know who replied to the survey, but my basic point relates to the number involved and how far their views are representative. I make no bones about the fact that

those views, even from only 45 companies, are worrying. I am not putting them aside, but we simply do not know whether they represent the views of the wider business community. People who have had more contact with the RDA may have said something rather different—we just do not know. Certainly, those views are of concern. The RDA is rightly concerned and has more work to do in making links, building bridges and getting across more clearly the work that they are doing.

The hon. Member for St. Ives has written to me about his concerns that the RDA has not given a fair hearing to the Baseresult company's proposals to re-open tin mining at South Crofty. I will reply in detail to his letter, which I received at the end of last week. He may be aware that Baseresult has now accepted the RDA's offer to present its proposals to the Camborne, Poole and Redruth partnership board, which also includes the local authorities and the Prince's Foundation. The partnership is working to plan strategically the future regeneration of that area, which is the RDA's first priority area in Cornwall. So there is dialogue about that.

Mrs. Gilroy: Does the Minister agree that that is an important development? My hon. Friend the Member for Falmouth and Camborne made the point that it is the people of Cornwall who should have a say in what happens to the mine.

Ms Hughes: I agree with my hon. Friend, who has anticipated my next point. That is why that is an important development, and without making any comment on the merits of the proposals, it is right that the views of local people on the alternative possibilities for the area are fully canvassed and should form part of the final decision as to what happens at South Crofty.

The hon. Member for St. Ives also talked substantially about objective 1, which was long overdue in Cornwall. The fact that Cornwall now has objective 1 status is testimony to the commitment of many groups and individuals mentioned by both the hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Sutton. However, as my hon. Friend said, it is also testimony to the legacy that Cornwall has inherited and the serious economic and associated issues that need to be addressed.

I know that the hon. Member for St. Ives is concerned about the speed with which he feels that Cornwall's objective 1 programme is proceeding. Public grant schemes of this size rightly have conditions that must be met. Care is needed to ensure that the money is spent properly. We are accountable for those funds, and it is essential that we do not compromise the need to ensure that public funds are spent in an efficient value-for-money way. That may sound like a bureaucratic answer, but it needs to be stated. Large sums of money are involved and we have to account for them and make sure that they achieve our aims in the most effective way.

The progress that has been made in committing money is more than reasonable in Cornwall. The Cornwall and Scilly programmes made a good start. A total of £29 million in grant has been approved since the programme started in August 2000, and programmes to a grant value of £36 million are under appraisal. Together, that represents more than 20 per cent. of the programme's total allocation in its seven-year programme. That is a fairly rapid implementation, compared with other areas of the country that have benefited from EU funding.

The hon. Member for St. Ives is right to say that we need to cut unnecessary bureaucracy to an absolute minimum. However, we need to strike a balance between probity and value for money, and ensuring that the money gets spent and drawn down.

The hon. Member for St. Ives cited some specific examples of problems. If he writes to me with the details, we will certainly investigate whether they raise more general issues about where we could improve the process. I agree with a point that the hon. Gentleman made later in his speech, which to some extent cut across some of his other contentions. The proof of the pudding is not in the spending of the money or how quickly we spend it, but in getting the spending of the money right and being committed to programmes that will create sustainable change. Given that we are not much more than six months into a seven-year programme, I am not concerned at the moment that the process is far too slow.

The hon. Gentleman raised some points that I do not have time to deal with on the Hayle harbour and other issues. If he writes to me about them I will certainly reply as fully as I can.

In short, we are committed to helping every region, particularly the south-west, to address their long-standing economic problems. I believe that Cornwall has a lot going for it.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. We now move to relations between the United Kingdom and Libya.

Libya

10.30 am

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): This is the 16th Adjournment debate that I have initiated on Libyan matters since 1989. The sixth was answered by Douglas Hurd as Foreign Secretary. Incidentally, I am told by senior Clerks that it was the only occasion since the war that a senior Cabinet Minister replied to a Back Bencher's Adjournment debate. That afternoon he happened to see me chatting with my parliamentary neighbour, my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), now the Foreign Secretary. My diary entry for 1 February 1995 reads:

"Douglas swooped down on Robin and myself in the corridor by the window opposite the Clerk Assistant's Office. He said, 'I really do ask you two to believe that as Foreign Secretary I cannot tell the Crown Office what to do, nor does the Foreign Office have detailed access to evidence which they"—

that is the Crown Office—

"say they have. You must understand that the law officers really are a law unto themselves.'"

My diary entry continues:

"Robin and I agreed that Douglas Hurd was not unfriendly towards us, and was probably correct in outlining the rules. Robin said that he guessed that Hurd was being honest with us and did not know the full story. I shrugged my shoulders, and told Robin he was probably right."

I put all that on the record because I am aware that the most sensitive questions should be addressed to the Crown Office and to Lady Thatcher and her innermost advisers at the time, rather than the Foreign Office and the ministerial successors of Douglas Hurd. I am also conscious of the sub judice ruling set out in yesterday's *Official Report* at column 35.

First, I think that I would be wrong not to mention the dignified reaction of the British relatives who still seek truth and justice and are honouring an undertaking to hold a full independent inquiry after the conclusion of all legal processes. I have permission to quote from the letter to the Foreign Secretary dated 5 February from John and Lisa Mosey of UK Families Flight 103. The Minister has a copy of that letter. It states:

"Dr Swire put it well when he said that we must deal with the Libyans where they are today—not where they were in 1988. We hope you will stand firm against the pressures from the USA to think that we can bomb people into behaving decently. That is the route to yet more retaliation and suffering. Our daughter is, undoubtedly, dead because of someone's idea of justice based on retaliation."

The letter ends rather movingly:

"Mr. Cook, I trust that all of this is of some value to you in your very difficult and important job. Our secretary, Pam Dix will be writing to you in due time with more specific thoughts on what we would like to see explored in an independent inquiry. Thank you for your kind comments in the house about Jim, myself and the group. Be assured that we do want to seen as a determined but responsible group of people."

Indeed, Pam Dix wrote on 8 February to the Foreign Secretary:

"Given your statement in the House of Commons on 31 January that of course others in addition to Abdelbaset Al Megrahi were involved in the destruction of Pan Am 103, we would be grateful if you would clarify what further steps are being considered to bring these 'others' to justice. (We are aware that the intention to appeal has been lodged.) The US State Department representative's statements seem unequivocal in their focus on further criminal investigations, yet that is not the impression we gain from the Lord Advocate's public statements."

The difficulty is that the Crown Office is responsible to the Parliament in Edinburgh, but the question asked by the relatives' secretary was a genuine one.

In a subsequent more detailed letter, a copy of which has been sent to the Minister, Pam Dix says:

"We are aware that a great deal of time, effort and expense has been expended on different forms of inquiries into Lockerbie. We are not unappreciative of these efforts. However, each inquiry had its own necessarily narrow remit that did not permit the examination of many of the important questions. The superb technical investigation by the AAIB was confined by statute to establishing how the explosion took place and its effect on the aircraft. The specific purpose of the Fatal Accident Inquiry was to ascertain who died, and how, when and where they died. In addition, the FAI findings established that the disaster was preventable. Since the indictments of the two Libyans in November 1991, the criminal investigation has focused on establishing their guilt or innocence and has not addressed wider issues such as the reasons behind the bombing. The primary focus of the *Report to the President by the President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism* of 1990 was largely on US institutions."

Pamela Dix continues:

"Each one of the above inquiries fulfilled a particular objective. An independent judicial inquiry, however, could draw upon the findings of all these separate inquiries, pulling together the information that has been established, plus examining key areas that have not yet been addressed. This inquiry would provide the means that is needed to understand the overall picture of events leading up to and resulting from the Lockerbie bombing. It is only with this understanding that it will be possible to identify where the failures occurred and lessons can be learned. I know you will share our understanding, and that of many others, that the purpose of an independent inquiry is to establish the facts of what happened and to learn lessons for the future. In his *Thames Safety Inquiry Final Report*, Lord Justice Clarke makes the point that 'the public (and especially the survivors and the relatives and friends of those who lost their lives) has a legitimate interest in learning the truth of what happened without anything being swept under the carpet.' (Page 7, paragraph 5.3.) With regard to Lockerbie and the issues surrounding the disaster, we feel that there are a number of specific questions that need to be answered."

She continues:

"It is clear that while the motivation for the bombing has been endlessly speculated on by the media and others, we remain in the dark as to what the motivation was. This is a matter which causes some of the relatives the greatest concern. 1. What is known about motivation and reasons behind the bombing? 2. What, if any, diplomatic lessons can be learned from what is known and can be established about the conduct of the countries involved in Lockerbie? 3. Is it appropriate that 'legitimate' businessmen can sell timers to organisations, individuals and countries, when it is suspected that the purpose of those timers is to blow up aeroplanes, and not be held to account?"

I shall miss out some passages, but Pamela Dix also states:

"One form of possible inquiry is a judicial review that would come under the Tribunals of Inquiry (Evidence) Act 1921. Again in the words of Lord Justice Clarke, 'In some cases, public confidence may be undermined if there is not a perception that an inquiry is full, wide-ranging and independent of Government; for example, in cases where the regulatory functions of the investigatory body are called into question.' (Page 166-7.) It seems to us that such a tribunal of inquiry would meet these requirements."

She moves on to express the considered view of relatives about the witnesses:

"Whatever the status or position of potential witnesses during the period under investigation, the most important point is that the inquiry needs to be such that it has the power to compel witnesses to come before it to give evidence and produce documents. Where possible, witnesses should come from abroad. We would not wish to see a situation where Public Interest Immunity Certificates are issued, as happened at the Fatal Accident Inquiry. It is essential that witnesses cannot use 'parliamentary privilege', for example, to allow them to escape giving evidence."

I do not expect the Minister to respond to these complex issues off the top of his head today, but having received the letter I hope that he will reflect seriously upon the matter.

I refer, too, to the sterner letter to the Prime Minister from Martin Cadman and his wife Rita, who lost their son, Bill, who was 32, which states:

"Rather than guessing we should have the facts. There are people in the UK and the US Government service who know the answers to all our questions. We doubt if any has the courage to speak out unless made to. So we'd better go for the inquiry you and Robin Cook agreed with relatives could be the way ahead. Robin Cook told us on 15 January that after the trial his would not be the lead Department on Lockerbie. He said he would talk with colleagues about his meeting with us. We have not forgotten that Transport Minister Cecil Parkinson offered us an inquiry in September 1989 subject to agreement of colleagues. He subsequently told us his request was refused at the top level. We now wait to hear from Robin Cook."

I am extremely worried about that. I am sure that Cecil Parkinson offered an inquiry in good faith, and just as the relatives were going out of the door, he said, "Mark you, it is subject to colleagues." There was only one colleague who would overturn Parkinson as Transport Secretary, and the question why she did it bothers many of us.

The letter continued:

"What sort of inquiry, and who would run it? I doubt if a US inquiry could be trusted given the US is so involved. In this regard you may know that the US President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism (with special reference to Pan Am Flight 103) recommended on 15th May 1990 that government resources should be prepared for active measures—pre-emptive or retaliatory, direct or covert—against a series of targets in countries well known to have engaged in state-sponsored terrorism.

Would a UK inquiry be trusted and would it have the power to subpoena witnesses from the US Government services in particular? We doubt it. We need an international inquiry with powers to subpoena, backed by UN sanctions. It should be a UN inquiry set up by and reporting to the General Assembly and not involving the Security Council."

Martin and Rita Cadman deserve an answer. They state in their letter to the Prime Minr dated 6 February that they

"cannot put the case for an inquiry better than the *Daily Mirror* last week: 'An incident which results in a single death is often fully probed. An atrocity that kills 270 people demands a full, open and public inquiry. There must be one and it should explore every avenue, every question, every suggestion. That may raise issues that the Government does not want aired, but that is no reason for not holding one. The quest for the truth must go on.'"

That expresses the urgency with which the relatives want the matter to be pursued.

I suppose that the British and United States Governments have no control over Lee Kreindler, the New York lawyer who is asking for $10 billion for the American relatives, but I should like an assurance that neither Government will make demands for $700 million or any other compensation figure until the appeal has been heard. If the issue really is sub judice, are not calls for compensation from Libya at this stage out of order? We should not be quick on the draw.

I again ask the Foreign Office to approach the Swedish Government for the facts about the significant quantity of clothing that could have been bought in Malta, Cyprus or 101 other places in the Mediterranean in the flat of Abu Talb in Sweden. I sat in the court at Camp Zeist and heard Abu Talb being questioned by Bill Taylor, QC and Richard Keen, QC. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said:

"In the fullness of time, this...may produce other leads".—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2001; Vol. 363, c. 311.]

This is another lead that was not discussed in court.

Will the Government ask the Libyan Government for a candid account of how members of the strategic centres in the 1980s used agents with coded passports and other complex documents to obtain spare parts for Libyan Arab Airlines, which bought planes that had been manufactured in the US or UK and had been subject to sanctions?

I also asked the Foreign Office about its answer to President Mandela on sanctions. President Mandela was as responsible as anyone for getting a trial in a third country. I quote from *The Independent*:

"Tony Blair and Nelson Mandela are locked in a diplomatic stand-off after the former South African president complained yesterday that Britain had reneged on its undertaking to press for the final lifting of sanctions against Libya.

Mr. Mandela told *The Independent* yesterday that Britain and the US had 'moved the goalposts' on the issue of lifting sanctions, after he played a vital mediation role with Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan leader, to secure the handover of two Libyan suspects wanted for the Lockerbie bombing.

One defendant, former intelligence agent Abdelbaset Ali Mohmed Al Megrahi, was sentenced to at least 20 years jail...

Mr. Mandela said that he found Mr Blair's letter 'encouraging and very reasonable' and was responding to the Prime Minister yesterday. But he is concerned that the British may be under pressure from the US to maintain sanctions. After the verdict, Washington and London demanded that the Libyan Government pay compensation to the victims' families"

—which I think was slightly premature, in view of the appeal. Is President Mandela being contacted and, if so, what is the outcome? President Mandela sent his secretary to the Cabinet, Jakes Gerwel, on a special mission that made possible the trial in a third country.

I would also like to ask the Foreign Office about a matter that has never been raised. Will it ask the US Government in what circumstances Richard Stirwell in 1991 was sent to Togoland to examine and acquire timing devices made by Ulrich Lumpart and why the CIA and Mr. James Thurman thought it necessary to replicate such timing devices for American use? We are entitled to wonder whether the timer at the centre of the whole argument was ever on "The Maid of the Seas" and whether it was replicated by someone in the United States for his own purposes.

Will the Government obtain an explanation from Colin Powell of why CIA officers cultivated a Libyan traitor, Mr. Majid Jiacha, for nearly two years, reaching serious decisions in respect of his credibility, honesty

[Mr. Tam Dalyell]

and motivation, yet were prepared to pass him to the FBI and the Department of Justice without apparently passing on their serious doubts and questions?

I also ask the Foreign Office to contact the Government of Jordan for a CV of Marwan Khreesat, including the years when he was not in the service of those favourable to the west.

Will the Government ask the retired bomb expert Peter Gurney, George medal and bar, for his opinion of the skills of Marwan Khreesat?

I refer to the Foreign Secretary's statement:

"I particularly mention the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, who worked very hard to secure the terms under which the two men were handed over for the trial. I hope to speak to Kofi Annan by telephone tomorrow, and we shall see how we can follow the matter up in the United Nations."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2001; Vol. 363, c. 312.]

I do not want to delve into private conversations, but any information about that crucial telephone call would be extremely interesting. In particular, may we have a clarification of the agreement or secret annex in which Kofi Annan apparently gave an undertaking that it had been secretly agreed in the west that if either of the accused were found guilty, no attempt would be made to implicate or indict the Libyan leadership and that there would be no other prosecutions? I genuinely do not know about the background to that, which must be clarified.

Will Her Majesty's Government seek a meeting with the Government of Malta about the security set-up at Luqa airport and in particular ask officials with knowledge of baggage reconciliation systems to discuss procedures with Mr. Immanuel Darmanin, the head loader in charge of operators? As he was not called by Crown or defence, I am entitled to ask that question, which was never asked at the trial. Many people find it concerning and confusing that, some years ago, following the transmission of a documentary made by Granada Television wherein it was alleged that an unaccompanied bag had travelled on Air Malta flight KM180, Granada Television was successfully sued by lawyers representing Air Malta, and an out-of-court settlement was reached.

Will the Government try to confirm with the Government of Malta a story that the Maltese Government applied, before 1988, for financial assistance from the United States Federal Aviation Authority to improve the security at Luqa airport, but were turned down on the basis that Malta was not a third-world country and it was believed that security at Luqa airport was satisfactory?

Another issue about Mary's House was never raised in court and needs to be clarified. Megrahi was present in Malta on 7 December 1988 but not on 23 November 1988—the only other date on which the clothes and umbrella could have been bought. Having bought the clothes, the purchaser left the shop to engage a taxi. It was raining at that time, which is why he bought the umbrella. The meteorological evidence—

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but I would feel much happier if he kept away from constant references to the evidence given at the trial. I remind him of yesterday's ruling by Mr. Speaker. The case is sub judice. It is difficult to interpret what might be in transgression of a sub judice ruling, but I must err on the side of caution. I therefore ask the hon. Gentleman to refrain in the remainder of his remarks from any reference to the trial or to where the appellant might have been at any time. I hope that I have made myself clear.

Mr. Dalyell: You have been very patient, Mr. Benton, and I, too, am extremely conscious of the appeal. Having been through the huge 81-page judgment with a fine-toothed comb, I have deliberately not asked a number of questions and have kept out of anything that was referred to in that judgment. To the best of my knowledge, the matter that I am raising was not raised in evidence to the court. It was not raised in the judgment. My question is to the Government of Malta and about geography and meteorological conditions. It was raining at the relevant time on 23 November 1988, but there was no rain on 7 December or, at most, a few drops, which would not have proved sufficient to wet the pavements.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. I honestly accept the hon. Gentleman's good will, but I must point out that, if he refers in any way, shape or form during the remainder of the debate to the trial, the appeal or anything of significance to them, I will have to rule him out of order. That will be a final ruling. I am sorry if the hon. Gentleman thinks that that places constraints on him, but we must err on the side of caution. I hope that he understands exactly what I am saying. I assure him that he will receive as much largesse as possible from the Chair, but I must be firm on the sub judice ruling.

Mr. Dalyell: I must be obedient to the Chair. I must leave out questions that I genuinely thought had not been raised. If there is any dubiety about it I am, of course, obedient to the Chair and a respecter of courts. I do not know whether it is in order to ask about American representations in the court itself. I think that I am on delicate ground in asking about Mr. Bhiel and Mr. Murtaugh. If there is any doubt about that, I had better not do so.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is right. I appreciate that it is a difficult situation. We are handicapped by the fact that we do not know what material might be presented in the appeal. I am afraid that once again I must stress that I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would restrain from remarking upon the trial itself and the form that an appeal might take.

Mr. Dalyell: You have been very patient, Mr. Benton. I have had my 25 minutes. I just rest the case on the difficult issues of the civil test of the balance of probabilities and finding murder beyond reasonable doubt. Those are grave issues and we must wait for the appeal.

Part of the difficulty, as I said on a point of order in the House yesterday, is that this is not an ordinary trial. Potentially appalling international consequences hang on this verdict. It must be a matter of general international concern that these questions should be

asked. If one had the assurance that nothing would be done by Britain or the United States in terms of sanctions, let alone military action before the appeal procedure is exhausted, I should be happy. There are various accounts of the meeting on 8 February between Colin Powell and some of the American relatives. Some of those American relatives, if the serious American press is to be believed, told Colin Powell that he should bomb Tripoli. There was also a call from people whose names I know, but will not reveal here, for nuclear weapons to be dropped on Tripoli. That has been reported in the American press. I hope that there will be none of that ever, but certainly not before the legal processes are exhausted.

I thank you for your patience, Mr. Benton, and I look forward to the Foreign Office reflections. I would not criticise the Minister if he did not address these points today, but sooner or later they must be addressed.

10.58 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): I thank my old and honourable Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) for initiating the debate and for his continued interest in Libyan affairs. As he said, this is his 16th debate on the subject and I hope that it is productive for him. Apart from anything else, it has revealed that he has been keeping a diary all these years. I am sure that when the record is read, publishers will be beating a path to his door.

Just as my hon. Friend began with a little historical context to the debate, I should recall the background to the original rupture of diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Libya. As we are all aware, for more than a decade two separate issues prevented us from maintaining normal diplomatic relations with Libya, not just Lockerbie. Diplomatic relations were broken off in 1984 over Libya's refusal to co-operate with the investigation into the killing of WPC Yvonne Fletcher, who was shot while carrying out her duties in front of the Libyan People's Bureau in St. James's Square. The second issue, which prevented normal diplomatic relations, was the Libyan refusal to hand over the two men charged with the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988.

United Nations sanctions were imposed on Libya in 1992 as a result of its refusal to comply with the investigations into the bombings of Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988 and of the French UTA airliner in 1989. As my hon. Friend is well aware, the diplomatic stalemate over the Lockerbie issue was broken by the Government's initiative in offering a trial before Scottish judges, under Scots law, in a third country. Intensive and patient diplomacy produced an agreement by Libya to hand over both suspects who subsequently stood trial at Camp Zeist, and, following the surrender of al-Megrahi and al-Fhimah in 1999, UN sanctions on Libya were suspended.

That agreement did not solve the outstanding bilateral problem relating to the killing of WPC Fletcher. In the weeks following the handover of al-Megrahi and al-Fhimah we engaged in repeated exchanges with the Libyan Government in an attempt to secure their co-operation with the police investigation and that resulted in a joint statement by the two Governments.

In that statement, Libya accepted general responsibility for the actions of those in the Libyan People's Bureau at the time of the shooting and it expressed deep regret to the family of WPC Fletcher for what occurred and offered to pay compensation to the family. The Libyan authorities agreed to co-operate fully with the continuing Metropolitan police investigation and to accept its outcome.

At this point I am sure my hon. Friend will join me in paying tribute to the Fletcher family, who have born Yvonne's loss with dignity, and those police officers who have carried out and continue to carry out this long investigation. I can assure hon. Members that the Government will continue to press the Libyan authorities for their full co-operation.

Mr. Dalyell: I endorse that tribute to Queenie Fletcher who, like the Lockerbie relatives, behaved with great dignity.

Mr. Wilson: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment.

However, the immediate point in this context is the positive one that those two agreements opened the way for us to resume diplomatic relations with Libya in July 1999, and the British interest section in Tripoli was upgraded to embassy status. At the end of 1999 we appointed an ambassador and we have worked to bring the embassy up to full strength. As a result, the 4,000 or so British citizens there had full consular protection restored to them, and full diplomatic representation has the positive effect of enabling us to monitor Libyan co-operation with the police investigation into the killing of Yvonne Fletcher. As I have said, we expect Libya to honour its commitment to co-operate fully with the police investigation at all stages, and that, logically, must include the final stage if any individual is identified by the police.

I come now to the Lockerbie trial, although I am obviously mindful of what you have said, Mr. Benton, and the fact that we are all subject to the constraints that the pending appeal imposes upon us. Again, I take this opportunity to offer my sympathy to the families of the victims and pay tribute to the way in which they have dealt with this devastating tragedy. I remember being in the House of Commons on the night of the Lockerbie bombing. It is something that I will never forget, with which, in one way or another, however tangentially, we have all lived since that night. As we all know, the Scottish judges in the Netherlands—my hon. Friend has as good a reason as anyone to respect Scottish judges—returned their verdict on 31 January, and one of the two accused, al-Megrahi, was found guilty of the murder of 270 people on Pan Am flight 103 over Lockerbie. The second, al-Fhimah, was acquitted.

The criminal investigation into the crime was the largest in British history, and the dedication of the Dumfries and Galloway constabulary and the efforts of the families in their pursuit of justice were admired by all. Without their efforts and the complex diplomatic initiatives, the Lockerbie trial would not have come about.

As Mr. al-Megrahi has appealed, hon. Members will understand if I do not comment on the substance of the legal arguments. It might be worth mentioning, and I

[Mr. Wilson]

am sure that my hon. Friend will welcome the fact, that if Mr. al-Megrahi's appeal is not upheld, we have given an undertaking to Libya that it will be allowed consular access to Mr. al-Megrahi in Scotland.

Following the verdict at Camp Zeist, international attention has turned to the question of whether the United Nations—I stress the United Nations—should lift sanctions in Libya. I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by the Foreign Secretary to the House of Commons following the verdict. The initiative to hold the trial at Camp Zeist was taken by the Government and secured by agreement with the Governments of the Netherlands, the United States and Libya. However, we made those arrangements in accordance with resolution 1192 of the UN Security Council, a resolution that is binding on all member states. Libya has complied with some of the requirements of the Security Council, such as handing over the two suspects. In the light of the guilty verdict, we now expect the Libyan Government to fulfil the remaining requirements.

I can announce that the UK and the USA will begin talks today in New York with Libya. We will focus on the remaining requirements—no more, no less. Those requirements are not fulfilled simply by the trial having come to an end.

Mr. Dalyell: I welcome the fact that there will be talks and urge the Libyans to be as candid as possible on the questions that I have asked about the whole sanctions-busting efforts in relation to Libyan/Arab airlines. They must be candid.

Mr. Wilson: I welcome that constructive response from my hon. Friend. It is clearly right to engage in the discussions that begin today.

I again set out the requirements that remain outstanding. The Security Council—I stress that it is the Security Council that imposes these requirements rather than individual countries—requires Libya to accept responsibility for the actions of its officials and to pay appropriate compensation. Libya also needs to satisfy us that it has renounced terrorism and disclosed all that it knows of the Lockerbie crime.

Hon. Members may ask how the Security Council can expect Libya to accept responsibility for the actions of its officials. If an internationally wrongful act is committed against a state or its nationals by the agents of another state acting as such, that state is responsible, in international law, for the wrongful act. The Scottish court found al-Megrahi guilty of the charge in the indictment that:

> "Megrahi, being a member of the Libyan Intelligence Service ... while acting in concert with others, formed a criminal purpose to destroy a civil passenger aircraft and murder the occupants in furtherance of the purposes of the said Libyan Intelligence Services"

The opinion of the court stated:

> "The clear inference which we draw from this evidence is that the conception, planning, and execution of the plot which led to the planting of the explosive device was of Libyan origin"

We shall be discussing with Libya how we can achieve compliance with all the requirements and I can confirm that, once satisfactory arrangements have been made, we will agree to the lifting of sanctions. It is important that those who wish to see the issue resolved successfully and quickly should not upset the delicate, diplomatic discussions.

To lift sanctions before all the requirements have been met would be premature and it would send a worrying message to countries that are subject to sanctions about the Security Council's determination to ensure that necessary conditions are met before sanctions are lifted.

My hon. Friend referred to the comments of Nelson Mandela and recognised that the Prime Minister had been in touch with him and reassured him that the requirements for the lifting of sanctions had not been changed and were set out in UN resolutions that represented the collective will of the international community. My hon. Friend acknowledged that the response from Nelson Mandela to that letter recognised the Prime Minister's good will.

Mr. Dalyell: I am very glad to hear that the Government are in touch with ex-President Mandela.

Mr. Wilson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

I come now to the demand for an independent inquiry. My hon. Friend fairly referred to that at length, as well as to the views of the relatives on the type of inquiry that they want. The detail is secondary to the fundamental question of whether there should be such an inquiry. As the Foreign Secretary said in his immediate post-trial statement, it would simply be inappropriate to reach a view on an inquiry at this stage. That is because al-Megrahi, the Libyan intelligence official found guilty by the Scottish court, has submitted an appeal, and no inquiry can start until it is concluded. It is right that my hon. Friend has put the views of the relatives on the record, but it is equally right, as I am sure he recognises, that I cannot comment, beyond saying that it would be inappropriate to reach a view on an inquiry at this stage.

Mr. Dalyell: Hindsight is a marvellous thing, but it is a pity that Mr. al-Megrahi was never put in the dock by the defence.

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Order. Any reference to Mr. al-Megrahi and to the previous court sitting is out of order. I have already explained the position.

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend asked for an assurance that the views of the relatives would be the subject of serious reflection. I give him that assurance.

In addition to our engagement with the Libyan Government in international, multilateral forums on issues of international concern, since 1999 we have had the opportunity to conduct a full bilateral dialogue. We welcome the Libyan Government's appointment of a senior ambassador to London, which will allow our exchanges to deepen further. The best way to handle our differences is through such a dialogue—both critical and constructive.

My hon. Friend must also be aware, not least because of his remarks regarding the comments made in the United States, of the criticism of the Government for developing our relations with Libya too quickly,

without due regard for the past. That is misplaced. The restoration of diplomatic relations does not mean that we give up on the difficult issues. On the contrary, on a wide range of issues of concern—UN sanctions, Libya's human rights record and its attempts to acquire enhanced missile technology—we can engage with Libya with greater frequency and to greater effect as a result of the dialogue that those exchanges have promoted. We are convinced that we cannot expect to influence Libya's behaviour without such engagement. That is the context in which it should be understood.

Our long-term aim is to have a Libya that co-operates with the international community and that respects international law. That will not only ensure that there is no return to support for international terrorism, but encourage the emergence of a responsible partner willing to devote its many assets and energies to the positive promotion of prosperity throughout the region. We look forward to a future in which Libya plays a full part in the European-Mediterranean community and in the Barcelona process. As I am sure my hon. Friend will agree, that will be in all our interests.

I shall look carefully at the record of my hon. Friend's remarks to see if there are any matters on which I can usefully write to him. I recognise the diligence with which he has pursued these issues and the spirit in which he has raised them.

11.13 am

Sitting suspended.

London Underground

11.30 am

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): It is a privilege to initiate this debate on the proposed public-private partnership for London Underground. I declare at the outset a deep political interest. My constituency of Ruislip-Northwood contains eight tube stations served by three lines—the Metropolitan, the Piccadilly and the Central. The Metropolitan is a sub-surface line; the other two are deep lines and the underground system is vital to my constituents who want to get to work and to visit the capital, as it is for many people up and down the country.

The proposed public-private partnership for London Underground is an essential element in the manifesto pledges made by the Labour party at the last general election. Many of these have been only partially fulfilled. The electorate understand over-optimism from a political party and condone over-optimism so long as they can see that honest efforts are being made by the party in government to deliver on the undertakings given.

The Government have totally failed to fulfil their promises about the modernisation of the London underground system, promises extravagantly proclaimed in the Labour party's manifesto for London, which urged people to vote for new Labour "because London deserves better".

The London manifesto's slogan is true today, but I doubt very much whether Londoners will be compelled to vote Labour. At the last election, the Labour party received a huge majority of seats in the capital on a swing of some 13 per cent. against the national average of some 10 per cent. Of course, as a consequence, the Conservatives hold only 11 out of the 72 seats in the capital. The electorate obviously believed that, in the Prime Minister's words on the London manifesto, which were proclaimed with his signature underneath, echoing very much his boasts about the Millennium dome, that London would be "a showcase for Britain". Central to the renewal of the capital would be "A modern transport system". London's Labour manifesto stated:

> "Londoners want a clean, efficient, safe and reliable transport system to get them where they want when they want. Other cities in Britain and Europe see modern railways, trams and bus services as vital to their future. London's transport system suffers from a lack of investment and direction. Londoners have no say.
>
> We will change all that. In future, the Greater London Authority, elected by Londoners, will appoint the Board which runs London Transport. Even more important, it will have overall strategic responsibility for transport in London.
>
> The Tories' only answer is a wholesale privatisation of the tube which would be a poor deal for the taxpayer and passengers alike. Most Londoners reject the idea. Yet again, public assets would be sold off cheaply. Much-needed investment would be delayed. The core public responsibilities of the Underground would be threatened. Labour plans a new public/private partnership to improve the Underground, safeguard its commitment to the public interest and guarantee value for money to taxpayers and passengers."

Of course, privatisation of the London Underground system is history. What might have been, we can only speculate about. We can be certain that it would be in place by now, and the modernisation would have been well under way. However, history moves on, and we in politics move on.

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

By May last year, it was clear that Labour's failure to deliver on the public-private partnership for the modernisation of London Underground had already cost the Labour party majority support in London, with the Tories leading Labour by 36 to 34 per cent. in votes for the Greater London Assembly. Labour's official candidate, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who stood loyally by Labour's commitment to the public-private partnership for the underground, trailed lamentably behind the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Livingstone) who, with almost every breath on the hustings, declared the Governments' public-private partnership for the tube to be anathema.

As for the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, his only visible contribution to London's transport system is the notorious red traffic lane from Heathrow, personally designated by him for ministerial Jaguars and the occasional bus.

What about the long-suffering public, whose interest was to be safeguarded by the public-private partnership, and for whom value for money was to be guaranteed as taxpayers and passengers? For them, it is persistent interminable delays, overcrowding, unreliable services, dirty underground trains and stations, disinterested staff and frequent strikes, for which daily horrors they pay fares which each year increase by well above inflation. Annual breakdowns on the London Underground system have been some 20 per cent. higher since 1997 than under the Conservatives. Does the Labour party ditty "Things can only get better" ring ironically in commuters' ears, as they strap-hang stoically towards a late arrival at work or vital personal appointment, trapped in a seething, malodorous, frustrated mass of impotent humanity? One might imagine that the arrival of the people's mayor to office would have changed all that. After all, did not Labour's London manifesto say that he was needed:

"to provide a voice for London"

promoting, among other things,

"a top quality transport system"

Under him, Labour's transport system's lack of investment and direction would be of the past. The manifesto boasted:

"We will change all that. In future, the Greater London Authority, elected by Londoners, will appoint the Board which runs London Transport. Even more important, it will have overall strategic responsibility for transport in London."

The reality is of course very different. The mayor, instead of providing a voice for London, effectively promotes industrial action by the trade unions, which is in itself a remarkable dereliction of duty to the wider public that he was elected to serve. He seems keener to serve a narrow sectarian interest. I hope that you will allow me to make this observation, Mr. Benton. I understand that it is normal to give notice to other hon. Members of an intention to criticise them, but I am not so much criticising him personally. We all like the hon. Member for Brent, East—it is the office of mayoralty that has not lived up to public expectations.

Transport for London, which was to provide strategic decisions about the future of transport in London, has had to become operational without its principal constituent element, London Underground. Its chief executive, Bob Kiley, brought in at great expense from the United States by the mayoralty to institute the modernisation of the tube, found when he arrived that the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions would not give him the full facts and figures on which the Government's public-private partnership for the tube is based. He also found that he was in the crossfire of a publicly conducted war of words between his political master, the mayor, who wanted to fund the tube's modernisation by a bond issue, and the DETR in the rumbustious figure of the Secretary of State, backed by the Treasury, which, conscious of the consequences for the public sector borrowing requirement of a Government-backed bond issue, stuck by the PPP, despite the fears of the Select Committee on Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs, the National Audit Office, the rail unions, countless experts and the anxious public that, without unified management and a clear line of command, the underground system would prove inefficient and less than safe. As for the financial figures, even the NAO seemed hardly able to add them up and came to a clear conclusion. Meanwhile, the clock is ticking, not just towards election day.

There are serious issues at stake. Moneys from the sale of infrastructure leases from the PPP to the infrastructure companies—to the bidders—should have been coming on-stream from April 2001. The Treasury has made no provision from the end of this financial year for grants from the Exchequer to fund the tube system. Instead, because of the delays in instituting the PPP, the underground system will have to remain on drip-feed from the Treasury, while the backlog of improvements to the system grows. Perhaps most important of all, the bidding consortiums for the two groups of deep lines become more financially exposed. The consortiums bidding for the sub-surface lines, which are running behind in the bidding process, are of course also exposed.

Small wonder that the main headline on page 1 of *Construction News*, 8 February 2001, screams "Tube bid teams at end of tether". The article states:

"Teams short-listed to revamp London's Tube network are on the verge of splitting up as privatisation plans descend into chaos."

It is worth putting on record what *Construction News* calls "a countdown to confusion", and the chronology of events as evidence of the horrendous delays and incompetence over the bringing about of the PPP, if indeed it is to come to fruition. On 20 March 1998, the Secretary of State announced the tube's PPP plans. On 5 July 2000, bidders were short-listed for the deep tube lines contracts. On 13 December 2000, the newly appointed Transport for London chief Bob Kiley attacked the Government's PPP and put forward his plans for a bond-funded alternative. On 18 December 2000, bidders for the two deep-line contracts were told to re-price the job, and selection of a preferred bidder was put back until the end of January 2001. On 2 February 2001, the Government and Bob Kiley announced plans to work together to find mutually agreeable changes. Bidders were told that they were likely to have to re-submit revised proposals. On 5 February 2001, best and final offers were handed in by LINC, Metronet and Surface Lines Group for the £4 billion sub-surface lines upgrade.

Bidders need certainty, so that they can cost-effectively deploy their resources up to the end of the contract, which they hope, of course, will be at an early date. When will those contracts be let? I ask the Minister, who has responsibility for London, to state unequivocally what the dates will be. The companies, those who work for them, their investors, shareholders and not least the travelling public deserve to know.

As I made clear in that chronology, the Secretary of State made the first announcement to the House in March 1998. The manifesto was issued in May 1997. The Government must have known, or should have known, what a public-private partnership entailed before putting it in a manifesto. If they did not, it was, in essence, a fraudulent prospectus. There have been estimates that, if the PPP were to fall apart—there is no certainty that the PPP will be carried into effect following the latest concordat that seems to have been struck by the Transport Commission and the Secretary of State—a new system for tube modernisation might take up to two years to put in place.

What are the financial implications of all that? I spoke about the drip-feed from the Treasury, but the Treasury is hardly going to be delighted about further recourse to public funds by London Underground, particularly when its spending plans are under criticism from the European Union and many commentators, not least the Conservative party. The fact is that the Secretary of State was forced to climb down from his insistence on the public-private partnership by the fear that the Transport Commissioner might walk away and return to the United States amid much public acrimony.

Bob Kiley has, in protracted negotiations with the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions, forced on the Government a total rethink of the PPP. There is speculation that the preferred bidders for the two deep-level sets of lines will not be known until after the general election. If so, the Government would have utterly and completely failed to fulfil their manifesto commitment.

What would happen if the delays forced the bidders—I ask the Minister to reply to the point—to make a claim on the Government for the costs of their bids? Presumably, if Bob Kiley has indeed forced a rethink on the Government, the original bids in answer to the original tenders will have to be modified. It will cost them money, as will further delays while those bids are scrutinised and decisions made.

Bob Kylie may want a unified management structure. Surely, it should have been insisted upon at the outset of the bidding process, so that the bidding companies knew how the overall system would be managed before they responded to the tenders. In the words of a bidder quoted in *Construction News* on 8 February:

"Prescott's handling of all of this has been abysmal. What has he delivered on? It's probably easier getting contracts in central Africa."

Perhaps it is. I am not a central African expert. Nor am I an expert on Ugandan affairs, but whether after the next general election, or even after the next mayoral election, I am sure that we Conservatives will have to clear up the mess.

Bob Kiley has the good wishes of the House—any professional should have them—as do the consortiums that have deployed their resources, financial, material and intellectual, to answer the tenders of the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions. The modernisation of the tube system is the earnest desire of our constituents, not least in London constituencies such as mine, but the bidding contractors for the PPP, in current circumstances, also have our sympathy. As for Her Majesty's Government, for indecision, procrastination and sheer incompetence, they win all the booby prizes.

11.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) on securing the debate. I am always delighted to respond to any debate that he secures, even though at our last encounter he described me as a poor imitation of Frankie Howerd.

I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's continuing ability to be taken by surprise at the progress of the public-private partnership. On the occasion of the debate when the hon. Gentleman made those kind remarks about me, he and other Conservative Members excelled themselves by demanding that we enter into discussions with Bob Kiley that were already under way, and by insisting that we provide information—I am tempted to say "titter ye not"—that we had actually supplied some time before. Now they are treating the agreement reached between my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and Mr. Kiley as some kind of unexpected and dramatic development. It shows that the Opposition still have not caught up.

That agreement was, in fact, the result of weeks of discussion with Transport for London, including four meetings between the Deputy Prime Minister and Bob Kiley. We made it clear in the House and elsewhere that the Government welcomed Mr. Kiley's appointment, and that we looked forward to working with him to find the best solution for London Underground. That is exactly what we are doing now.

A further area where the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues are having difficulty in keeping up with the argument is their attitude to the future of the underground. We are, of course, determined to avoid the mistakes of past privatisations, mistakes that the hon. Gentleman seems determined to repeat. In January 1999, he said:

"Sadly, we never had the chance to float London Underground and find out what the market price would be."—[*Official Report*, 27 January 1999; Vol. 324, c. 424.]

But as the hon. Gentleman said in his speech, history moves on. However, I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman has caught up with it because apparently things are starting to change. The *Evening Standard* last Monday said:

"Under the new policy, to be announced later this month, the Conservatives will accept that London Underground should remain state-owned under the control of transport commissioner Bob Kiley."

State-owned—that from the party which gave us rail privatisation, that from the party which, until last week, was in favour of flogging off London Underground to the private sector lock, stock and barrel. The lady may not have been for turning, but her successors in the Conservative party have made so many U-turns that

[Mr. Keith Hill]

they are in danger of disappearing up their own vortex. The noble Baroness Thatcher must be spinning in her seat in the other place.

However, far be it from me to reject the sinner who repenteth. Evidently, the Opposition have finally recognised the benefits, on which we and Mr. Kiley have been agreed all along, of a publicly owned, publicly controlled tube, and I welcome them on board—better late than never. But after taking so long to come to such an obvious conclusion, I have to admire their cheek in saying that the PPP is taking too long to implement.

We have heard plenty of speculation about the agreement between the Deputy Prime Minister and Mr. Bob Kiley, so I shall make it clear. The Deputy Prime Minister and Bob Kiley announced on Friday 2 February that they would work together to develop modifications to the PPP. Contrary to press speculation, those talks are about modifications designed to strengthen the PPP framework, not to replace it. Contrary to the hon. Gentleman's assertion, there is no question of the PPP having been abandoned.

We have agreed that Mr. Kiley will now take the lead in working with the Government in developing mutually acceptable modifications to the PPP. That will involve retaining the key feature of transferring risk through private sector equity in the three Infracos.

The existing tender process will continue with the current bidders; we will, of course, be discussing any possible modifications to the PPP with them. We expect, if there is agreement, that there is likely to be another round of bidding with the existing bidding consortiums being asked to provide last and final PPP bids.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the Minister explain more fully what he means by modifications to the PPP? Are not those bound to lead to revisions of the tenders submitted by the bidding companies, and who will pay the extra costs of that additional bidding process? Will they be reimbursed, and when will the contracts be let?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman has left me with relatively little time, but I hope to deal with precisely those questions in the short time remaining. The Government and Transport for London will jointly evaluate any revised bids to decide whether they are acceptable to both parties. London Underground remains responsible for the PPP and will award the contracts.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but I was struck by his comment regarding the short time left. The debate has until 12.30 am.

Mr. Hill: I am very grateful to you, Mr. Stevenson. Knowing of your inveterate involvement in Adjournment debates, when you entered the Chamber I assumed that you had come for an Adjournment debate, not to chair our proceedings. I am delighted to discover you in the Chair, and to learn that we have more time to deal with the hon. Gentleman's questions. I hope to deal with them as fully as possible in due course.

The key tests that the Government established for the PPP remain the same: is it best value for money, tested against a public sector comparator; and will it maintain and improve safety? In other words, is it the best deal for London?

We have also heard speculation about the safety implications of the proposals. That was ostensibly the reason for the recent industrial action. I reiterate that our approach to safety and the PPP is unchanged. The Government will not contemplate any solution that does not contribute significantly to improved safety. The legal position is that the PPP cannot go ahead otherwise.

Two major revisions to the London Underground's railway safety case have already been accepted by the Health and Safety Executive, and a third is subject to on-going assessment by Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, and further improvements by London Underground. The point of those revisions to the safety case is to ensure that the PPP brings continuing improvement to safety on the tube.

London Underground's safety record is good, but it can always get better. Increasing numbers on the tube have put more pressure on the system, and that led to increases in passenger injuries during the 1990s. Recently, lapses have been noted by HMRI, but that is very much what we would expect. The shadow running of the PPP is designed to test and expose the system with the utmost rigour, so that any problems that emerge can be put right. Safety authorities have consistently made it clear that they will not allow the PPP to proceed until they are sure that that has been done.

In the light of that, claims that the recent industrial action was somehow in response to the compromising of safety are just wrong. I greatly regret any inconvenience to passengers caused by the industrial action, and am glad that the action has been suspended. I hope that London Transport and the unions come to agreement without any more unnecessary disruption.

I come back to the point that the effect of the PPP will be to improve safety. The tube is already running on a safety case that the safety authorities regarded as an advance on previous safety cases. In the longer term, the best way to improve the safety of the system is to ensure that it gets the high and stable levels of investment needed. That is exactly what the PPP will bring.

Mr. Wilkinson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Hill: The hon. Gentleman asked me many questions and I was about to deal with some of those, but with the new flexibility that we discover in our proceedings I will be happy to deal with further interventions.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the competition process. With regard to whether we will have to scrap the old competition and start again, the answer is no. Mr. Kiley will develop modifications to the existing PPP competition. What will happen to the existing bidders, and will we invite new bidders? Let me emphasise again that the existing tender process will continue with the current bidders. We will, of course, be discussing any possible modifications to the PPP with the bidders.

It has been suggested that the bidders are becoming impatient, and that they might be tempted to walk away due to delays and changes. The hon. Gentleman

certainly alluded to some rather dramatic headlines. However, I do not believe that they will. The bidders recognise the benefits in Mr. Kiley and the Government working together to get the best out of the PPP. The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of more guarantees to cover costs. London Underground has already revised the arrangements for bid cost support to take account of the likelihood of a further bidding round. There is nothing unusual there. Arrangements for bid cost support have been revised before as the PPP competition has developed.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the time scale. The process that we have announced is to take forward the three existing competitions. The Government, London Underground, the mayor and Transport for London are all working together to get the deal done without unnecessary delay. Our aim is to agree any modifications to the PPP by the end of February. With regard to the completion date for the competition, we do not intend to allow an artificial timetable to get in the way of ensuring that we get the best deal. There is no change in Government policy on that matter.

Mr. Wilkinson: I am grateful to the Minister for his explanation about the time scale. Will he amplify his remark that the intention of the modifications to the PPP was to strengthen the public-private partnership, not to replace it? He went on to say that the PPP would be examined against the public sector comparator. Is it, therefore, the case that Mr. Kiley has forced on the Government a fundamental re-examination of the principles of the PPP? If the PPP is in the frame against the public sector comparator, and if it will be implemented only if it produces better value for money than the public sector comparator, surely there are still elements in doubt that could lead to an extended time scale.

Mr. Hill: I fear that the hon. Gentleman may be labouring under a misapprehension about the public sector comparator. We have always said that we would submit the final proposals and bids to a public sector comparator. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman referred to the work of the National Audit Office, which we asked to come in precisely to test the robustness of the public sector comparator. The public sector comparator will go forward and test the bids against conventional funding. Only if the bids stand up to that test with the public sector comparator will we go ahead. That has always been unequivocally a central element in the Government's approach to the matter. We have always said that the essential criterion will be that the PPP contributes to enhanced safety.

I repeat that there is no question of an abandonment of the PPP. Mr. Kiley is now engaged in examining, with the Government and London Underground, modifications within the structure of the PPP. It is too early to say what exactly those modifications may be. Mr. Kiley will focus on what changes will be necessary to give Transport for London the degree of control that it needs to ensure that the PPP delivers the best deal for London.

I must conclude my remarks. However, it is worth going back to the beginning and reminding ourselves why the London Underground PPP was necessary in the first place. It arises, of course, from the miserable legacy left to us by the previous Government, whose years of under-funding of the tube had left a massive backlog of investment, and whose planned cuts at the time they were kicked out of office would have accelerated the decline of the system still further.

It is a cliché to say that a problem cannot be solved by throwing money at it. It would be more accurate to say that money alone will not solve a problem. In the short term, money was what the tube needed, and we, the Labour Government, provided it. We have provided an additional £365 million for London Transport in 1998 over and above existing plans; £517 million of additional resources announced in 1999; and last year a further £65 million for London Underground on top of all that, plus an additional £40 million to deal with claims on the Jubilee line extension—almost £1 billion extra Government support already.

We always said that in the long term what was needed was a stable form of funding, insulated as far as possible from the stop-go annual funding round and the need to compete with claims from other good causes, such as the NHS and schools. That is what the PPP is designed to do, and that is what it will still do, in any improved form that we agree with Mr. Kiley. As I said earlier, the key feature of transferring risk through private sector equity in the three Infracos remains in place.

We are working hard with London Underground, Bob Kiley and Transport for London to settle on the optimum version of the PPP acceptable to all parties. There is still a lot to do, but we share the overriding objective of providing the best possible underground service for London. Once we have settled the matter, we will finally have the publicly owned, publicly accountable and, most important, properly funded tube system for which Londoners have had to wait for so long.

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Because the hon. Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) is present, and I understand that the Minister will reply, we may begin the next debate, which must finish by 1 o'clock, so we have a bonus.

LTS Railway

12.7 pm

Mr. John Cryer (Hornchurch): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce this debate. I also thank the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham, who will be responding to this debate. I have a great deal of respect for my hon. Friend, who was my Whip for a year. I saw a great deal of him then—probably a good deal more than he would have liked, considering my voting record.

Today's debate follows the debate that was introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) two or three weeks ago, to which my hon. Friend the Minister responded, and it draws on the same issues and material. It is concerned with the c2c railway, which was known previously as the London Tilbury Southend railway, the LTS railway. For some reason that I cannot understand, the name was changed to c2c, which is an unfortunate acronym, as it gives rise to all sorts of nicknames. Carriages too crowded is one that circulates in Rainham in my constituency. As well as passing through my hon. Friend's constituency of Thurrock, the railway passes through Rainham in my constituency. I am concerned mainly with that part of the railway, the Tilbury loop.

I travel on the railway regularly—just about every day. I usually travel on the main line and sometimes on the Tilbury loop. The service is not great on either, but I shall concentrate on the service on the Tilbury loop. For many years my constituents who travel from Rainham—and some of those of my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock who travel to Rainham and then catch the train from there—have had to put up with shoddy conditions, delays, cancellations and regular overcrowding.

More than two years ago I was one of the founder members of the Rainham rail users group, which is a fine campaigning organisation. We have met the management of c2c or LTS, or however they prefer to be known, many times, but it has not had an enormous impact. My constituents are enormously patient. They have been patient in the meetings, in their correspondence with the railway company and in putting up with all the delays and overcrowding.

Let me provide an example. One of the founding members of the Rainham rail users group who has chaired the group on more than one occasion recently wrote to me. She is not one of my constituents; she lives in Thurrock, but regularly travels from Rainham. She told me that she often had to travel in the guards van, once with 36 other people. That is clearly unacceptable. It is an anecdote, but it is an example of the conditions that people have to contend with on the railways.

Let me provide some figures. For the period ending March 2000, LTS had timetabled 109,717 trains, of which 13,132, or 12 per cent., were either late or cancelled—an unacceptably high figure. Short formations—when eight carriages are reduced to four, for example—have increased by 486 per cent. in the past few months.

The longstanding reason behind the delays, the overcrowding and the huge increase in short formations is the lack of new trains. Almost since privatisation began, we were promised new trains, and over the past three years, we have heard even more frequently—particularly from the engineering company Adtranz—that new trains are on their way. Brand new class 357 trains were ordered some time ago in preference to models with an existing safety certificate—another serious concern.

The Rainham rail users group was in continuous discussions and correspondence with LTS and was continuously given promises. I received a letter from Ken Bird, the managing director of LTS, on 2 July 1998. He pointed out in that letter, which exemplified the customary verbosity for which he was famous:

> "We are currently investing £320 million in new trains... We are now at the tail end of removing what nationalisation meant for LTS Rail between 1975 and 1990, i.e. no investment. I know, I managed it."

That is a bit rich. At the tail end of public ownership, the only significant investment in the LTS line over the past few years has been the £150 million signalling system. We are still waiting for the new trains. At the end of the letter, Ken Bird said:

> "We are not there yet, but give me another 18 months and judge us then."

That was more than 18 months ago, so it would be churlish not to judge LTS against its own criteria. It is now 18 months later and the class 357 trains are still not in service.

What happened? The trains started running in March last year, but promptly broke down. The software, among other things, went wrong and the trains did not work properly. I recall being stuck behind one for an hour in Limehouse on the way to a meeting in Hornchurch. That was a pretty regular problem while those trains were in operation. They all broke down and were all taken out of service. They may still be experimenting with two or three class 357 trains, but they are not in service, so we are stuck with the old slam-door stock, which is a minimum of 40 years old.

Unfortunately, when the class 357s came into service for that brief period last year, c2c jumped the gun and prematurely scrapped much of its old slam-door stock. It was then left short of trains, because when the new trains went out of service, there was insufficient stock. It has since leased in some more of the old slam-door stock, but it is simply not sufficient. The company admits quite freely that it is well down on the stock that it needs to provide a suitable service for LTS or c2c customers. To give an example in respect of the new trains, c2c is now on software package 10.5. Obviously, it started with software package 1 and is now on 10.5. Apparently, in November all the software went back to its supplier in Switzerland.

I also point out that Adtranz ran out of penalties. In the original agreement between c2c and Adtranz there were obviously penalties in the event that Adtranz was late in supplying the trains. That agreement was so poorly put together that there are now no more penalties, so presumably Adtranz could take from now until doomsday to supply the new trains. There would be no more penalties, so it could carry on in its own sweet way.

The former managing director, Ken Bird, who is no longer in place, consistently promised wonderful improvements to the stations, including Rainham.

I regularly asked him specifically about Rainham and I know that certain other Members of Parliament asked him about improvements to stations in their constituencies. The stations now have automatic ticket barriers. I admit that c2c successfully installed the automatic ticket barriers, but they are simply insufficient to cope with the volume of people going through the station in peak hours, so they are left open. I was talking to one of my constituents two days ago and he said that every time he goes through, the barriers are open. People can wander in and out of the station because the barriers cannot cope with the volumes of people.

There is no public address system at Rainham station, and the waiting room is still awaiting renovation. It has no window, no door and no heating. The toilets are also awaiting renovation and the clock on the London-bound platform is inoperative. One or two of my more cynical correspondents would say that it is so that people do not know when a train is late. I am not entirely sure that that is the case, but that is the local suspicion that exists.

In the summer of last year, National Express decided to take over Prism, the parent company of c2c. The directors of Prism recommended that the takeover should go ahead. Some vested interests may have been involved because certain Prism directors benefited from this takeover to the tune of £37 million. I made a few what I thought were quite mild, liberal and well-judged comments in the local press, as I always do. I then received an interesting letter from the new general manager of c2c, who attacked me in what I considered to be fairly harsh terms for pointing out that these directors had no right to benefit to the tune of £37 million. He took exception to the comments that I had made and continued:

"It is quite wrong and misleading to give people the impression that the income from a sale is some kind of undeserved additional payment that the directors are granting themselves."

Well I though that that was exactly what it was. It was some kind of additional payment. Some of the directors become multi-millionaires overnight simply because of the way in which privatisation was structured when the Conservatives decided to rush it through and turn back the British railway system, not to pre-1948, but to pre-1924—it was broken up to that extent. We are now experiencing rationalisation, which some of our political opponents describe as a very good thing—something that they supported from the beginning. It is funny that they did not do that when they sold the network off. People such as the directors of Prism are benefiting enormously from takeovers, mergers and so on.

I have to say that Mr. Chivers had the grace to apologise for the remarks that he made in his letter. However, it says it all that while the directors and shareholders of these companies make a fortune out of takeovers and the process of rationalisation, the travelling public—my constituents and those of many other hon. Members—continue to suffer from poor conditions, overcrowding and lack of investment. We were always told that privatisation would result in investment and that these wonderful private companies would pour money into the railways.

During all my meetings, and in all my correspondence with c2c, it has always been a case of jam tomorrow. We were told, "Don't worry. There will be new trains, the station will be renovated and it will be like a palace the next time you travel. The trains will be like travelling palaces; they go at enormous speed and they are air-conditioned. They are superb."

Three and a half years after I was elected to Parliament and started taking up my constituents' concerns, we are in precisely the same situation—slam-door stock and very poor conditions.

As a footnote to the National Express takeover, I was recently told by Councillor Harry Webb of Havering council, who has campaigned for a long time for proper cycle racks at Rainham station, that National Express had decided to freeze all capital investment. Perhaps it is because so much money is pouring out into the pockets of shareholders and directors that the company can no longer put money into facilities that people need, such as bike racks. The plan to install secure bike racks at Rainham station has been cancelled because of the freeze on capital investment. It seems that the Government's laudable vision of integrated transport is being undermined by the people at National Express who make these sweeping decisions.

I have campaigned for the new cycle racks at Rainham station; Councillor Harry Webb has campaigned for a long time. He is a well-known and very effective local councillor who is being undermined by people in an office miles away deciding, at the stroke of a pen, not to invest. That says it all about the process that LTS and c2c have gone through over the last few years.

Before I allow the Minister to respond, I would like to thank the Rainham rail users group, which has done a superb job over the past two and a half years. It is a great campaigning organisation and very patient. In particular, I would like to thank Les Bragger, one of my constituents who works in the City and uses the railway line every day. He has put an enormous amount of effort into collating the facts and figures that he sends me. I meet the Rainham rail users group regularly and I hope that at some point there will be some genuine improvements to the service. It is really not good enough that in 2001 people have to travel in slam-door guards vans when they go to work in the City. I look forward to what my hon. Friend has to say.

Mr. Keith Darvill (Upminster) *rose—*

Mr. George Stevenson (in the Chair): Order. I advise the hon. Gentleman that according to the rules, these half-hour debates are restricted to the hon. Member who has secured the debate and the Minister replying. However, as we have extra time, I am prepared to accept an intervention from the hon. Member for Upminster, who may wish to make his point as briefly as possible. I am sure the Minister will take note of what he says.

Mr. Darvill: I intervene on my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) and congratulate him on introducing the debate. Does he agree that some of the problems to which he has referred lead to significant overcrowding in trains from Rainham in his constituency and from Upminster into Fenchurch Street station? Part of the problem that our constituents have

[Mr. Darvill]

in accommodating the problems that we have all experienced during our travels on those lines is that they make travel unsafe.

Mr. Cryer: My hon. Friend raises a matter that I took up with the Health and Safety Executive. We now have such a state of overcrowding on the LTS line that I was concerned that there was some breach of health and safety legislation. I wrote to the HSE which tried to address the problem honestly, but there was nothing much that it could say apart from the fact that it becomes hazardous when there is a crash, which is a fairly obvious statement. It said that c2c was not contravening any health and safety legislation or regulations and that overcrowding became dangerous if the train stopped suddenly, there was a crash or it bumped into something. That is fairly obvious, and I should have thought that prevention was better than cure.

We were told by many people connected with c2c that the new class 357 trains would not be four-car units but only eight-car units and larger. That was part of the plan to encourage people to travel during off-peak times. Many people in the City, for instance, work flexi-time so they can go in later or earlier and can travel when the trains are less busy. There were going to be longer units, but precisely the reverse has happened. We now have more and more four-car units, even during the rush hour. I regularly travel during the rush hour on both routes and the four-car trains are enormously overcrowded.

Interestingly, the new class 357 trains, if they finally appear, will encourage people to stand because they have fewer seats than the old slam-door stock. Their capacity overall is slightly bigger, but that capacity relies on more people standing. That is slightly worrying. I have travelled on the new trains and when they work they are quite nice. They are quite comfortable, but it is worrying that the railway company seems to be encouraging people to stand. We have had some notorious accidents over the past few years on our railways and I should have thought that it was safer for passengers to sit.

My hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill) is quite right. The overcrowding on some of these old stock carriages can be quite alarming and it reaches worrying proportions at times. I have travelled on trains from time to time that are so overcrowded that one wonders whether people will start to faint. The great hope is that at some point the class 357 trains will come into service and there will be improvements. There has always been a history of jam tomorrow with c2c. We are told not to worry and that there will be great improvements, but they simply have not happened.

12.27 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Keith Hill): May I begin, as is usual, by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) on securing this debate and providing an opportunity for the House to discuss rail services in Havering on the c2c network—formerly known as London, Tilbury, Southend or LTS Rail. I should also like to thank him for his courtesy in giving me notice of some of the key issues that he wished to raise in the debate. It was useful also to hear the observations of my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Mr. Darvill), whose constituents have a great interest in this matter.

I am pleased that c2c's performance has improved in recent weeks. Latest figures for the four-week period up to 6 January show that 87.8 per cent. of services arrived at their destination on time. That compares with 74.5 per cent. and 75.5 per cent in the previous two four-week periods. I hope that that upward trend in performance continues. However, as my hon. Friend has made clear today, regular users of the c2c network in his constituency will testify that performance over the past year has been far from satisfactory.

C2c has avoided the worst of the disruption caused by Railtrack's rail recovery programme, but problems with the introduction of new rolling stock have caused widespread disruption, overcrowding and frustration for the many passengers who rely on the service as their main method of getting to and from London. Disappointingly, out of an original order of 44 new units, which should have been in operation by November 1999, only 12 have been operational at any one time. Faulty electrics and software problems have made the trains prone to breakdown and not capable of providing a reliable service.

C2c has withdrawn the trains from service while Adtranz, the manufacturer, carries out the necessary modifications. I appreciate that the replacement mark I trains do not offer the same comfort as the new trains. Indeed, they have their own performance problems due to their age. I understand that c2c's last customer satisfaction survey showed that passengers were unhappy with the cleanliness of the trains, and that c2c has agreed an action plan with the Strategic Rail Authority to address that problem.

My hon. Friend will no doubt be aware that all mark I slam-door stock on the network must be replaced by the end of 2004. For c2c to provide a reliable service, it felt that it had no choice but to withdraw the new trains until Adtranz could show that they were capable of performing reliably. C2c has set Adtranz a benchmark quality target for the new stock, and will not introduce the trains until they can clock up 10,000 miles between significant malfunctions or breakdowns.

Last year, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister asked Sir Alastair Morton, chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, to set up a pan-industry working group to identify and tackle the problems being encountered in bringing new stock into service. Although some progress has been made, episodes such as the c2c saga show that there is clearly much more to do.

I can reassure the House that Ministers will continue to put pressure on rolling stock manufacturers, and will make it clear that their current performance in delivering new stock is not acceptable. Manufacturers must ensure that they provide new stock on time, and that it is reliable from the word go. I am pleased that a package of passenger benefits was negotiated by the Strategic Rail Authority to compensate passengers for the disruption that they have had to endure as a result of the problems with the new rolling stock. The order of

new trains was increased from 44 to 46, and c2c made a commitment to procure a second tranche of 26 new trains to be delivered and in service by 30 June 2002. That will achieve the complete replacement of the c2c's remaining slam-door stock. C2c is also committed to extending booking office opening hours at many of its stations.

My hon. Friend also referred to unacceptable overcrowding on c2c services. I understand that passengers travelling on the line from Rainham have experienced unacceptable levels of overcrowding on some journeys as a result of the problems with the late delivery of rolling stock. The Strategic Rail Authority monitors overcrowding on commuter services into London, and has powers to take action should passenger counts show that contractual levels of overcrowding are being broken. The last passenger counts showed that c2c remained within its contractual limit. However, the results of the autumn 2000 counts will shortly be published by the Strategic Rail Authority, and if c2c is above the limit, it will be obliged to implement an action plan to remedy the problem.

Considering the problems that c2c has experienced over the past year, it will have come as no surprise to my hon. Friend to discover that last year's autumn national passenger survey found that only 63 per cent. of passengers were satisfied with their journey, and 21 per cent. were dissatisfied. When I debated this matter a fortnight ago with my hon. Friends the Members for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) and for Basildon (Angela Smith), they were surprised that as many as 63 per cent. of passengers were satisfied with these services, but that was what the survey found. More to the point, only 33 per cent. of passengers thought that c2c offered value for money. Compared with the 10 other London train operators, only Silverlink scored lower. However, I have been assured by c2c's managing director that it is taking the concerns of passengers highlighted in the survey extremely seriously. C2c has agreed an action plan with the Strategic Rail Authority to address the problem areas, and I hope that tangible improvements will be seen in the near future.

There is some good news. Increases in rail fares are never welcome by passengers, especially when the service delivered falls below their expectations. I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents welcomed the decision by the franchising director to cap c2c's fare increases this year as a result of poor performance over the year to July 2000. The average permitted increase for c2c's regulated fares was just 0.3 per cent., which is 3 per cent. below inflation.

In June last year, further passenger benefits were secured when the Strategic Rail Authority reached an agreement with Prism Rail, then the franchisee of c2c, on the restructuring of the group's portfolio of passenger rail franchises. Prism committed to invest £20.5 million in areas to be agreed with the Strategic Rail Authority, and in addition will fit closed circuit television to the current order of 46 new vehicles. Under the agreement, the c2c franchise is retained through to 2011, and its other franchises are being restructured to facilitate the Strategic Rail Authority's franchise replacement programme.

Shortly after that deal was struck, the National Express group agreed to buy out Prism. The deal was accepted by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 17 January following a consultation exercise in November last year.

My hon. Friend expresses concern about the payments made to Prism directors as part of the takeover deal. Decisions on whether to make such payments are a matter for the companies involved. However, I am pleased that National Express has undertaken to honour the obligations Prism entered into and are currently working with the Strategic Rail Authority, the rail passengers committee for eastern England and other local stakeholders to determine the best use of the committed £20.5 million.

My hon. Friend also criticises Rainham station for its various inadequacies. C2c has an obligation in its franchise agreement regularly to clean and maintain its station, and to ensure that minimum standards of facilities are met in respect of shelter, information and lighting. The Strategic Rail Authority recently secured additional customer information screens at the station to remedy some minor breaches of the franchise plan discovered during an inspection of the station last summer.

As part of an on-going exercise nationwide, the Strategic Rail Authority is considering various options for improving stations, and is discussing with Railtrack possible work at Rainham. I understand that there are no commitments as yet, but I hope that the discussions will lead to real benefits for passengers.

As I said, Prism is now a wholly owned subsidiary of National Express, which is committed to meeting all the contractual commitments that Prism had entered into with the Strategic Rail Authority.

C2c had a commitment to install bike racks at six stations that previously did not have them, but Rainham was not one of the stations chosen. As I have stated, the Strategic Rail Authority is negotiating with c2c over the £20.5 million investment secured as part of the restructuring package. My hon. Friend and the redoubtable Councillor Harry Webb may like to contact the authority expressing their wish for bicycle facilities to be provided at Rainham. We are keen to encourage integrated transport, and I would welcome any improvements for cyclists. However, Ministers are not party to such negotiations.

I accept that the quality of service experienced by passengers on c2c since privatisation, as with much of the rail network, has not lived up to expectations. We inherited a railway system that was suffering from years of under-investment, fragmented by privatisation, and with no framework for the strategic planning of the industry as a whole. Since 1997, we have been working to turn the railways around, but delivering our plans for a rail renaissance will require substantial investment and coherent strategic direction over the next 10 years. We intend to achieve those plans through implementation of our 10-year transport plan, new powers in the Transport Act 2000, new resources and new longer franchise agreements.

We want to deliver a bigger and better railway with increased punctuality and reliability, reduced journey times and higher standards of safety, service and comfort. As we set out in the 10-year transport plan, we

[Mr. Keith Hill]

want 50 per cent. more passengers and 80 per cent. more rail freight. We want longer franchises in return for investment in additional capacity, better performance and better customer service.

I hope that my hon. Friend is encouraged by the planned improvements that lie ahead for the future of rail services nationally and, critically, in his constituency. Once the new rolling stock is fully introduced and the £20.5 million of additional investment comes to fruition, I am sure that his constituents will experience a more reliable and comfortable service.

Not so many years ago, the c2c network was frequently described as British Rail's misery line. As today's debate has shown, we still have some way to go before we can achieve our vision for the railways. The legacy of years of neglect cannot be turned around over night, but we expect the privatised train operating companies and Railtrack to work in partnership with one another and the Strategic Rail Authority to turn the vision of our 10-year plan into reality.

12.40 pm

Sitting suspended.

Anaphylactic Shock

1 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): In 1993, 17-year-old Sarah Reading died after eating a lemon meringue pie in the restaurant of a well-known departmental store. She suffered an anaphylactic shock—an extreme allergic reaction when blood pressure falls rapidly and the patient quickly loses consciousness. The simple dessert that she ate on that day contained peanuts, to which Sarah was fatally allergic. That is an extreme case, but is certainly not rare. In 1995, Louise Westlake was served bread containing walnut butter at a dinner in a Manchester hotel and died. She knew that she was allergic to nuts, but did not expect to find nuts in butter. Laura Thesher was 19 and in her second day at St. Catherine's college in Cambridge in 1998. The menu said:

"strawberry shortcake on red fruit sauce".

The shortcake contained undeclared nuts, and three days later Laura was dead. Ross Baillie was a national athlete, but after a training session in Bath in 1999 he ate a coronation chicken sandwich. Nuts were used in it, but not declared, and he died aged 21.

It is estimated that about 1 million people suffer allergic symptoms that could be life threatening. One in 6,000 cases treated in casualty departments in our hospitals is the result of anaphylactic shock. One in 200 children are affected, and for some the threat to their lives is very real and constant. However, nationally too few allergy consultants are available, and the GPs in my constituency report that referrals for specialist allergy care is overwhelming, yet specialist care packages can make a life threatening condition manageable. Will the Minister tell the House what steps the Government are taking in the NHS plan to recruit and train consultants, and to offer a more rapid and sophisticated service in the treatment of allergies?

Part of the management of allergies is the avoidance of products that can cause anaphylactic shock. Avoidance is not helped by the quality and legibility of the allergen risk labelling. Far too many major United Kingdom food manufacturers fail effectively to communicate allergen risks on their products. The font may be too small, the information is often hidden under wrapping or away from the ingredients list, which is where sufferers will automatically look for information. It is crucial that labelling on foodstuffs and loose ingredients, particularly in restaurants and food chains, is not only mandatory but conforms to strict guidelines laid down by trading standards.

It is clearly nonsense that failure to declare a genetically modified ingredient when there is no proof of harm can result in a £5,000 fine, whereas the display of information about allergens when death is known to occur is an optional extra. Will the Minister tell us what steps are being taken to make food labelling for allergens mandatory, and to ensure that environmental health officers are effectively trained to carry out inspections of food premises?

For adults managing a life style with the possibility of anaphylactic shock, the risk is problematic but bearable. Tens of thousands cope with that problem every day, and most lead perfectly normal lives. They do so often with the help of an epipen auto injector or a similar device that enables a severe anaphylactic shock to be immediately stabilised with an injection of adrenaline until hospital treatment can be secured. The adrenaline epipen is a security policy that gives enormous comfort and security to allergy sufferers. Those at risk always carry their epipen, and a 10-second self-administered dose is usually sufficient to stabilise the condition.

However, failure to carry or have access to an epipen could prove fatal, as it was for Nicola Ratcliffe, a first-year student at Durham university. She ate an Indian meal with friends, and although she knew that she was subject to anaphylactic shock, she had left her epipen in her room. She died aged 18, before treatment could be administered.

The training of first aiders in the use of epipens and their availability when training has taken place could save a person's life in the workplace. It is on a par with a defibrillator. As recently as 5 February this year, the Health and Safety Executive supported work-based training by St. John Ambulance in the use of epipens in the workplace. Will the Department of Health consider extending first aid training to include the use of epipens in the workplace? Although no one would consider making them freely available, surely trained users in large food courts would be of particular value to the public.

The principle reason for seeking this debate is to highlight the problems faced by children subject to anaphylactic shock. It appears that children can and are being discriminated against. Only last month, Martha Atkins, a pupil at St. Paul's primary school in Radlett, was forced to move to another school because staff would not let her use an epipen in an emergency, and they refused to administer it themselves. Although such action by a school is rare, and Martha has now found a place in another school where staff will use an epipen in an emergency, the case highlighted the very real confusion that surrounds the treatment of anaphylactic shock in children.

Department for Education and Employment guidance says that children with medical needs

"have the same rights of admission to school as other children and cannot generally be excluded from school for medical reasons."

Under section 166 of the Education Act 1993, a health authority must provide help to a local education authority and to a school to support the medical needs of a child. That help could include training in the use of an epipen. The Medicines Act 1968 allows the use of prescription-only medicines by injection in emergencies when life is threatened. The Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 places a duty on heads and teachers with regard to the health and safety of staff and children in their care.

However, the first aid at work regulations, which go back over 20 years and have not been amended in that time, do not permit invasive techniques, even in the case of anaphylactic shock, even though they are known to be an effective treatment and a life saver. There is no legal or contractual duty on school staff to administer treatment or supervise children when taking it, although there is of course a common law duty to act as any prudent parent would, and that includes administering medicines in an emergency.

The current state of affairs is totally unsatisfactory. Heads and teachers need to know exactly where they stand in law. Given that the Special Educational Needs

[Mr. Phil Willis]

and Disability Bill is about to enter the Commons, having gone through the Lords, will the Minister consider drafting a new clause specifically to include the emergency treatment of anaphylactic shock and the training of appropriate staff? That in itself would go a long way towards resolving the problem. Such a measure would not only clarify the present situation, but would enable teachers or support staff to be trained in the most simple of procedures and to be insured against any possible claim for negligence. Such clarification would bring huge comfort to thousands of parents and would remove from those children's minds the nagging doubts about the threat of an allergic reaction.

Finally, I want to draw the Minister's attention to the appalling situation surrounding Mathew Johnson, one of my young constituents. Mathew is 10 years old and suffers from a severe tree nut allergy. For the past four years he has been denied access to local authority leisure schemes—not because of his allergy, or because there is anything else wrong with him, but because of his need to use an epipen if he inadvertently goes into anaphylactic shock. The leisure centre staff say that Mathew can take part only if he is accompanied by a parent—both his parents work—or a trained nurse at the cost of £100 to £150 a day. Otherwise, he has been offered a place on a one-to-one scheme for children with learning or physical disabilities. That is totally inappropriate for a young boy who wants to play with his peer group and take part in activities.

Mathew is a normal child. He is not ill. There are thousands of Mathews up and down the country. There are 12 in my constituency alone, and I have been informed of others in Leeds, Birmingham, Croydon and Tonbridge. No child should be discriminated against in that way. It is a betrayal of the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, article 31 of which states:

"Every child is entitled to rest and play and to have the chance to join in a wide range of activities".

The British Government have signed up to that article. Furthermore, Government policy supports an ever more inclusive society for our children. In paragraph 41 of "From Exclusion to Inclusion", David Blunkett is proud to say:

"We owe all children—whatever their particular needs and circumstances—the opportunity to develop their full potential."

How hollow are those commitments if children subject to anaphylactic shock can be so easily discriminated against?

I understand the situation of staff leading leisure or sporting programmes or playgroups. They are placed in an impossible position. I do not object to their trade association instructing them not to use these invasive devices. The law should protect them, and they ought to be insured against negligence. They should also receive formal training. Things could be so different. Extending existing legislation and DFEE guidance to cover all local authority approved leisure and play schemes would help. Including specific regulatory provision in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill to include leisure and play schemes would certainly help. Ensuring that all first aid training includes the administration and use of epipens and similar devices would take away much of the mystery and mystique. Establishing a common code of practice that provides the basis for local authority legal cover for all staff using epipens, provided they have been trained, would solve the problem in a stroke. The outdated first aid at work regulations that do not permit invasive techniques, even for anaphylactic shock, clearly need to be updated.

Anaphylaxis is an increasingly common condition affecting children, and it is on the increase. It is easily managed with adrenaline. Surely a caring Government can manage their responsibility to those children affected.

1.13 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on securing this debate. He has raised a wide range of important issues, and has illustrated them by reference to some distressing deaths that have occurred as a result of anaphylactic shock. He has also talked about the interesting case of his constituent who has not been able to get on to play or leisure schemes because carers are not prepared to administer adrenaline injections for anaphylactic shock. As of today, it is the only case that I am aware of that has been brought to the Department's attention, but that does not diminish its importance and the need to discuss the issues that the hon. Gentleman has raised.

Every parent in the country is apprehensive about how they would cope if a sudden medical emergency, such as an anaphylactic attack, befell one of their children. Our children's health is so precious to us that we want to be reassured that the NHS, schools and others can cope in such a situation. About 1,000 children aged 15 and under are admitted to hospital each year as a result of anaphylactic shock.

Anaphylaxis is an acute, immune reaction needing urgent medical attention that may occur in children who suffer from severe allergies. When such severe allergies are diagnosed, the children concerned are made aware from a very early age of what they can and cannot eat or drink. I am happy to say that, in the majority of cases, children go through the whole of their school lives without incident.

The most common cause of an anaphylactic attack is a severe allergy to food. The hon. Gentleman talked about nut allergies, but certain drugs such as penicillin, and the venom of stinging insects, such as bees, wasps or hornets, can also result in an attack. In its most severe form, the condition is life threatening, but it can be treated with medication. That may include antihistamine, adrenaline inhaler or adrenaline injection, depending on the severity of the reaction. Most patients are normally prescribed a device for personally injecting adrenaline. The device looks like a fountain pen and is pre-loaded with the correct dose of adrenaline. It is not possible to give too large a dose when using this device.

I should like to say a little about food allergies in general, and about what we are doing in conjunction with the Department for Education and Employment and voluntary organisations, such as the Anaphylaxis Campaign, to cope with these attacks in a school setting. I should also like to talk about the work of the Food Standards Agency in increasing our knowledge of the causes of food intolerance.

Food allergy or food hypersensitivity are broad terms that cover a range of abnormal immune responses to foods. Such terms are often misused and can sometimes be confused with other conditions that do not involve an immunological response, such as food intolerance, food poisoning or digestive tract disorders. A wide range of foods has been implicated as causing food allergies, including milk, eggs, peanuts, fish, shellfish, nuts, seeds and fruit. It has been reported that over 90 per cent. of adverse reactions in children can be attributed to four major foods: nuts, eggs, milk and soy.

Nut allergy is an umbrella term given to hypersensitive reactions to proteins found in nuts and peanuts. Oils extracted from nuts and seeds, such as sesame, are sometimes used by food manufacturers in the unrefined form. Allergens may therefore be present in a surprisingly wide and varied range of foodstuffs. Testing for an allergy to nuts will usually be combined with a general allergy test. Unfortunately, many nut allergy sufferers only learn of their allergy when they experience an adverse reaction for the first time. Once the allergen is identified—for example, arachis oil in peanuts—allergy clinics can begin advising on the most effective treatment. Tests are usually carried out in a primary care setting, although allergy clinics can provide more advanced and specific tests.

The Food Standards Agency is doing important work to improve our understanding of food allergy and intolerance. It is concentrating on three areas. The first is raising awareness of the condition among the public; the second is funding research into the causes of food allergy; and the third is encouraging informative labelling.

The FSA is continuing the "Be allergy aware" campaign launched in 1997 to raise awareness of the problem of food allergy among the catering industry. The campaign has taken the form of posters, leaflets and stickers, which were sent to over 200,000 catering establishments, including schools, with advice on how caterers can help those with severe allergies. The FSA also funds research on allergy and intolerance, with particular emphasis on severe allergies. A large programme of research on food intolerance and allergy, costing around £1 million a year, is currently under way.

The Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment published a report in 1998, which addressed some of the issues behind the possible causation of peanut allergy. A further report on adverse reactions to food and food ingredients was published in July 2000. The FSA has welcomed those reports, as they help to raise awareness of the problem among consumers, the medical profession and the food industry.

The FSA has already taken on board a number of the research recommendations outlined in the COT report. It invited proposals for some of those recommendations in its research requirements for 2000-01. That research will help to formulate future FSA policy on food intolerance.

The FSA is also working to ensure that labelling is informative, so that allergy sufferers get the information they need. The UK has been urging the European Commission to bring forward proposals for changes in EU law so that certain named allergenic ingredients are always clearly and recognisably labelled. I acknowledge the point that the hon. Gentleman made, and there is a need to press for effective action in this area. It is also worth recognising the problems that can be caused by the over-use of the commonly seen label "may contain". There is a danger that that may restrict consumer choice unnecessarily, so accurate and safe labelling is important for people who are prone to this reaction.

The hon. Gentleman also talked about allergy clinics and full-time consultant allergists. There are currently about 90 NHS allergy clinics in England and Wales, few of which have a full-time consultant allergist in post. The demand for them is high, and there can be lengthy waits. The process of confirming the source of an allergen is sometimes lengthy and difficult. Clinical immunology and allergy has recently been recognised as a separate medical specialty. Post-graduate training courses on allergic diseases are now available. It takes many years for a senior house doctor or registrar to become a fully qualified consultant. At least that process is under way, and we will be able to plan for an expansion of fully trained consultants in the years to come. That is one of the provisions to which the extra investment in the NHS can sensibly be applied.

I should like to deal with the individual case that may have given rise to this Adjournment debate, and was previously raised by the hon. Gentleman in an early-day motion. If a child has an anaphylactic attack outside school hours, I would expect, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree, that the child's parent or guardian would be the person best able to deal with it. If the attack is severe, the child's own GP or local accident and emergency department should be contacted for advice and, if required, treatment. However, that cannot apply in some settings.

In 1996, the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment issued joint guidance "Supporting pupils with medical needs in schools". The guidance was welcomed by the Anaphylaxis Campaign, and was sent to health authorities and local education authorities. It covers treatment and the development of health care plans for pupils suffering from potentially life threatening medical conditions, including anaphylaxis.

The guidance suggests that if the child is not old enough to carry his own medication, it should be kept in an accessible place. It says that the injection should be given on a purely voluntary basis. Although aimed primarily at schools, the guidance was also recommended to special schools, nursery schools and further education colleges. It was produced after extensive consultation with interested parties, including professional bodies and voluntary organisations such as the Anaphylaxis Campaign.

The guidance makes it clear that each school should have an effective policy for ensuring that those pupils with medical needs receive proper care and support at school. Formal systems and procedures, drawn up in partnership with parents and staff, should underpin the policy. The objective of the policy should be to encourage the child's regular attendance and participation in school life.

Existing practice in schools is good, and is based on good communications and good protocols. Many children with long-term medical needs may not require medication during school hours, and when they do, they

[Mr. John Denham]

can administer it themselves. The hon. Gentleman was a head teacher, so I am sure he agrees that schools should encourage that approach, so that the child does not feel different, or excluded from the normal run of school life.

On the legal issues, as a general rule school staff should not administer medication without having had appropriate information and training. The Medicines Act 1968 places restrictions on dealings with medicinal products, including their administration. There are exceptions for the administration of certain prescription only medicines in life threatening situations.

However, there is no legal or contractual duty on school staff to administer medicines, or to supervise pupils taking them. That is a purely voluntary role. I have some misgivings, which I am sure are shared, about allowing unqualified or untrained staff to administer prescription medicines as a matter of routine, which could be dangerous. That would be a cause for concern. Normally, the local health authority or trust can advise the school of the main contact to provide the necessary medical support to the school. It may be a school nurse provided through the school health service.

If pupils have medical conditions that, if not properly managed, can limit their access to school, it is helpful for schools to draw up individual health care plans. These should give school staff sufficient information to understand and support a pupil with long-term medical needs. Such plans should be prepared in conjunction with parents and the child's medical advisers, and should set out the measures needed to support the pupil in school. As a matter of routine all schools must have a clear procedure for summoning an ambulance in an emergency. In the unlikely event of a severe anaphylactic reaction, immediate medical treatment may be necessary while waiting for the ambulance to arrive. The child's doctor will prescribe medicine—usually in the form that I described earlier—in the event of an allergic reaction.

Many hundreds of children in the nation's schools are at risk of anaphylaxis. The vast majority of them are happily accommodated in mainstream schools. That is largely due to good communication and consensus between parents, teachers, medical advisers and education authorities.

Mr. Willis: Could the Minister address the specific issue of children who are not in school, but who are in local authority play schemes, leisure centres and other settings? It is those staff who need protection under the law.

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman anticipates my next few remarks. Existing practice, albeit within the existing legal framework in schools, is good and seems to work based on good communications and good protocols. There is an argument, as put forward by the hon. Gentleman today, that that practice should be extended to out-of-school and pre-school activities. The Anaphylaxis Campaign is keen and willing to get involved and to help iron things out. In the past, it has intervened when parents have raised an issue. It would like guidance to be issued similar to that issued to schools. I also acknowledge that St. John Ambulance and the Red Cross would be willing to provide training in administering adrenaline shots. They are entitled to do that already, and the Anaphylaxis Campaign is very supportive of that.

One of the purposes of Adjournment debates is to raise issues that may not have otherwise appeared on the agenda. I am unable to commit the Government to taking such a route, but I recognise the arguments that the hon. Gentleman has raised based around that individual case, and I give him a commitment to consider the arguments for extending the guidance, if appropriate, to other settings. I shall write to him in due course when my colleagues and I have had a chance to consider the issue.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Bill is the responsibility of colleagues in another Department, but I shall draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to their attention. I shall write to him on the issue of the first aid at work regulations. I am not clear whether they are the substantive obstacle to improving the quality of provision in the workplace, but I undertake to consider those issues and get back to him.

Licensed Premises

1.29 pm

Liz Blackman (Erewash): May I say how grateful I am to secure this debate? I was contacted and encouraged to take up this issue by the National Association of Licensed House Managers in partnership with the Transport and General Workers Union. It relates to the workings of the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Certain Persons) Act 1980. Pubwatch also flagged up related and slightly different issues.

The common theme has been how violence and threatened violence on licensed premises are dealt with and how the position could be improved. Most types of crime are decreasing. However, it is a timely debate given the general concern about violence and alcohol-related crime. I acknowledge the measures that the Government are already taking in respect of the problem in the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, which is going through the House. That introduces fixed penalty notices for offences of disorderly behaviour. It contains powers for the police to close licensed premises immediately to deal with such behaviour. It prohibits the drinking of alcohol in specified public places and raises the age of child curfews. The police already have powers of arrest to deal with violent individuals.

Violent crime is an issue and a significant number of crimes are committed on licensed premises. There are some dreadful examples in my constituency, as there are in many other hon. Members' constituencies. The result of the independent British crime survey 2000 suggests that 19 per cent. of all violent incidents occurred at pub or club premises, whether inside or in a nearby street or car park. Licensees, staff and customers were the victims and my constituency has seen its fair share of such incidents.

One response at the courts' disposal, when someone is found guilty of violence, or threatened violence on licensed premises, is to make an exclusion order, under the Licensed Premises (Exclusion of Certain Persons) Act 1980. The order can be made in addition to any sentence imposed by a court and be effective for any period from three months to two years. It may exclude an individual not only from the premises where the offence took place, but from any other designated premises.

The application of those orders has, however, been poor. In 1991, 70 orders were issued. In 1992, 62 were issued. In 1993, 47 were issued. In 1994, 25 were issued. In 1995, 28 were issued and, in 1996, 23 were issued. I am unable to obtain more recent figures from the House of Commons Library and wonder if they are still being collected as a way of monitoring the use of such orders. If not, can the Minister say why that decision was taken?

In 1997, a concern was stated in a Home Office circular, describing the orders as little used. It was distributed to the courts and police reminding them of the powers under the Act. It also urged that the order be included in training given to magistrates. I understand from anecdotal evidence provided by the pubwatch scheme that there has been some improvement in the use of orders, but it is not sufficient according to those in the licensing trades, and their use varies from area to area.

Reasons for a slight increase in numbers may be due to the reminder by the Home Office circular, an increase in pubwatch schemes and a greater partnership approach by the police. There is, however, a long way to go before the orders are used consistently and appropriately.

There are several reasons for a possible lack of progress. There is still a lack of awareness of the Act among some licensees, magistrates and police. That is an issue that the Government perhaps need to give more thought to. There is no statutory provision for the hearing of licensees' representatives who want an extension of the order. There is no specified method of application for licensees who want to be included.

There are, however, examples of excellent practice. In Derby, the police have drafted a pro forma statement signed by all licensees in their pubwatch scheme. That is retained by magistrates and Crown courts and is accepted by them as evidence of their support for an exclusion order. Bromley Licensed Victuallers Association has sent exclusion order application forms to all members, so that, if an offence occurs, the application can immediately be handed to the arresting officer. That ensures that the request is on file and will be considered by the magistrates or Crown court at hearing.

In Bradford, the local licensee association urges members to request in any witness statements that magistrates grant an exclusion order. In my county of Derbyshire, officers are encouraged to apply where appropriate and to include a list of premises taken from pubwatch booklets from which the person should be excluded. Magistrates are sympathetic and the record of granting exclusion orders is, unsurprisingly, quite good. In 1995, 28 orders were issued nationally. Nine of those were specifically granted in east Derbyshire. In 1997, out of 23 orders issued nationally, 14 were made in east Derbyshire. I hope that that reflects not a higher proportion of disorderly behaviour in my locality, but a proactive approach by the authorities to ensure the safety of those in licensed premises.

Police information on violence occurring on licensed premises is often not used to good effect. In Bradford, a computer system automatically informs the process sergeant when such an offence is going to court, enabling the sergeant to decide whether an exclusion order should be sought—again, an effective system. Similar good practice exists elsewhere.

Usually, it is the police who recommend that an exclusion order be used, but a court can choose an exclusion order without other recommendations. A duty on a magistrate or judge to consider an exclusion order would be a way forward. I would be interested to hear the Minister's response on that, as it is already flagged up in the White Paper entitled "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws".

More fundamentally, why is an exclusion order not used automatically for anyone found guilty of serious assault or threat on licensed premises, be it on the licensee, other staff or the public? Does that run the risk of not being proportionate to the offence? I would be grateful if some light were shed on that.

On the granting of an exclusion order, no data is available on violent crime on off-licence premises, whose staff often feel intimidated. Does Government thinking remain committed to an extension of exclusion of named individuals from specified off-licence premises, as mentioned in the White Paper?

[Liz Blackman]

On the enforcement of exclusion orders when issued, the licensee or employer can remove any person who enters premises in breach of an exclusion order and a police officer, if requested, must assist. However, refusal to leave is not an arrestable offence, but a report for summons offence. If the person disobeys the order and is summonsed, he can be fined up to £1,000, sent to prison for one month, or both.

I could not obtain any information from the House of Commons Library on how often action has been taken when a breach occurs. The feeling is that action against breaches is infrequent. In any event, a summons can take between two to three months to be heard and numerous breaches of the order can be committed in the interim. Does not a more effective way of placing breaches of the order before the courts need to be looked at? It is intimidating for all concerned when an excluded person re-enters premises and blatantly flouts the law.

Enforcement is hampered by the licensee's difficulty in identifying persons who have exclusion orders placed on them. There is no provision in the Act for use of photographs. A powerful statistic is that 33 per cent. of violent offences on licensed premises are committed by strangers. The use of photographs is therefore essential.

Some forces, such as Derbyshire and Wiltshire, do supply photographs to licensees and to their staff for their confidential use. They are a useful device. Care is taken to return or to destroy them when the order ceases. Others do not use photographs and take the Act literally. I believe that a code of practice was drawn up between the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association and the Association of Chief Police Officers. Can the Minister confirm that that exists and, if so, what status it has? Clearly, forces that do not use photographs are less confident about the existing guidance. What official guidance is given, or is it simply a practice that has emerged?

When exclusion orders for football offences are imposed, section 35 of the Public Order Act 1986 permits the use of photographs. Cannot that power be extended to exclusion orders under the 1980 Act, as the common denominator is violence in the social environment?

Pubwatch, a voluntary community-based crime prevention scheme, aims through partnership with the police and others to deter troublemakers and to reduce the risk of assault on licensees, staff and customers and, in essence, provides a safe social environment for all. Its activities in no small part help to challenge and to reduce violence on members' premises. When behaviour is anti-social, pubwatch operates bans on an individual or individuals, which all its members support.

Some impressive examples of schemes, such as that in Walsall, have dramatically reduced the incidence of violence. My hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell) was instrumental in organising an impressive pubwatch scheme to combat the rising tide of serious assaults in his constituency, where there were 73 assaults in 12 months. In the nine months after its formation, 11 people were banned from its members' licensed premises and there was no serious assault in that period; even now, there are few such incidents. Social exclusion in that context causes isolation and can be most effective, at little cost.

Pubwatch, for all its good work, faces challenges. First, its legality in banning people from pubs in the scheme when exclusion orders have been granted has been challenged under the European convention on human rights. Pubwatch schemes in Gloucestershire and the north-east have been pressurised by solicitors acting on behalf of clients banned from pubs, stating that their actions are in breach of articles 6 and 8 of the convention. In Gloucestershire, a local inspector sought legal advice on behalf of the local pubwatch scheme from constabulary lawyers, who felt that the challenge would probably fall foul of the High Court, but as the legislation was untested, no definitive advice was given. On that occasion, it was not pursued, but the pubwatch scheme has introduced an appeals panel to strengthen its position. In the north-east, two solicitors' letters pressing the convention were sent to local watches, which lifted the bans rather than face court action.

What are the Minister's thoughts on the issue? For example, given that in common law licensees have the right to exclude anyone from their premises, does he think that a pubwatch ban can be construed as a joint exercise of an individual member's right to refuse access? Such matters need clarification because pubwatch, as a voluntary scheme, does not have the resources to fight a judicial review and lifted bans caused by uncertainty impair the effectiveness of the scheme.

In pubwatch schemes with no known policy, the use of photographs of banned persons is even more nebulous. In most instances, the police are unable to provide them, either because such photographs do not exist or because the police are precluded from doing so by the Data Protection Act 1998. The alternative is to print photographs taken from premises' CCTV films. It is unclear how the use of photographs measures up against the issue of civil liberties. Clear guidance is needed, as it is when photographs are used in town centre watch schemes.

Pubwatch is a national scheme, although its coverage is not yet national. Many schemes already have a proven track record and, in the light of increasing responsibility placed on licensees, they should receive Government encouragement— perhaps some financial support. The brewers and most pub companies are reluctant to finance and to support watches, although there are exceptions, such as the Unique Pub Company, which embraces and supports pubwatch.

Pubwatch wants to produce a national database, and more briefing information, co-ordination and training in the light of the Government's partnership agenda to tackle crime. Has the Minister any thoughts on providing such support?

Bans of up to 10 years are flagged up in the White Paper, but they will not be effective if the exclusion orders cannot be improved. Will the Public Order Act 1980 be tightened and included in a new licensing Act? Will the Minr take note of my points about the workings of exclusion orders in that respect? Will his Department collect and monitor both the statistics on orders served and summonses in breach of those orders that result in convictions? Will the Minr ensure that advice on best practice is circulated and co-ordinated to the police and magistrates in support of pubwatch? I look forward to his reply to my questions.

1.44 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Charles Clarke): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) on securing the debate and on the way in which she put her case. As a Government, we have tried during recent years to give a much higher priority to the issue. My hon. Friend set out many of the reasons why that is necessary. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Blyth Valley (Mr. Campbell), who is in the Chamber. He has campaigned assiduously on pubwatch and has raised the matter with me on a number of occasions. He is an energetic advocate of that scheme on the basis of his constituency experience.

Before addressing the specific points mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash, I shall set out a little of the context of the Government's approach. Although most people who drink lawfully on licensed premises do so for entirely acceptable reasons—to relax and socialise with others—there is a minority for whom that is not true. Almost 90 per cent. of the adult population take alcoholic drinks, spending about £25 billion a year on them. The village pub or "local" has been an important feature of life for a number of generations.

We expect the industry to do all that it can to manage premises responsibly and to minimise the risk of lawlessness and disorder arising from alcohol abuse. In a civilised society, it cannot be acceptable that 14 per cent. of people who responded to a Portman Group survey last year said that they had been the victim of violence inside a public house. That figure, albeit from a survey, shows the scale of the problem to which my hon. Friend referred and sits alongside other statistics to show the nature and seriousness of the issue. For example, about 13,000 violent incidents take place on or around licensed premises every week, and 80 per cent. of peak time presentations to hospital accident and emergency units at the weekend are alcohol related. I commend the excellent work done by the accident and emergency department of the University Hospital of Wales in Cardiff—which is spreading to other such departments—on the careful consideration of those presentations and their use to help to map the incidence of crime in particular localities and particular pubs where violent crime has taken place.

The problems are not intractable, provided that the licensed trade, in the first instance, accepts that it has the primary responsibility for properly managing licensed premises to prevent trouble from arising in the first place or to ensure that it is nipped in the bud. It is an offence for a licensee to permit disorder on his or her premises. I am glad to say that the licensed trade and the wider drinks industry are showing that they take their responsibilities seriously and that they are committed to the partnership approach, which I shall set out in a moment.

I have chaired three seminars involving organisations from the licensed industry, police, magistrates, local government and groups such as the Portman Group, precisely to see how we can address the issues in a partnership more effectively. That has led to a number of initiatives, first, to encourage sensible drinking and discourage unsociable drinking that leads to unruly behaviour and, secondly, to take positive action to minimise the opportunities for misbehaviour that might be exploited by those intent on making trouble. Pubwatch schemes, based on good and strong relationships between local police and licensees, show what can be done to keep known troublemakers out of pubs and clubs in a local area.

I shall respond now to my hon. Friend's specific points on pubwatch and deal with exclusion orders shortly. I am familiar with the points that she made on the European convention on human rights, but there is no foundation for concerns in that respect. As a Government, we are keen to promote the pubwatch idea, because there is so much good evidence to support it. The Human Rights Act 1998 came into force last October, and many people are putting to the courts their arguments about a human right being violated by a particular action. My Department monitors the whole range of challenges to practices across all aspects of life that are being made under the 1998 Act. So far, the highest courts in the land have in general sustained our expectations and practices in this country. Obviously, that may not always be the case in the future. However, I will state publicly, in Committee and more widely, that we should continue to develop pubwatch. People should not be frightened of human rights legal action, and we should proceed on the basis that that is the right way to operate. It is not a Minister's role to second-guess the courts if cases are brought in those circumstances, but it would be a mistake if the valuable pubwatch initiative were in any sense derailed or diverted by legal concerns as the result of some hypothesis in those circumstances.

I am prepared to consider funding for the national pubwatch scheme to see that develop further. At one of the seminars to which I referred earlier, we discussed how we could use resources to strengthen the campaign against alcohol-related violent crime. We are already taking a number of initiatives. We have not had a formal proposal from pubwatch, but I am certainly prepared to consider a proposal positively and to see what we can do. We do think that the pubwatch approach is powerful.

The issue of photographs is a difficult one. As my hon. Friend said, in 1994 the trade body—the Brewers and Licensed Retailers Association—issued to licensees guidance about photographs of excluded persons that had been agreed by ACPO. That dealt with such matters as where photographs should be kept and what should be done with them, in particular at the end of the exclusion order, but also more widely. I accept that there may be value in refreshing that document, and the Government are prepared to help do that in order precisely to raise its status.

It is important to note that the Cabinet Office's policy research unit is conducting a detailed survey of data protection issues, and some important data protection issues surround the use of photographs in such schemes. For example, there are schemes for providing retailers with photographs of shoplifters in particular shopping centres. We believe, for the record, that it is perfectly legitimate to do that, and to send photographs of known offenders around pubs in the way described. However, it is important to consider the whole situation. That is why the Government review, which is taking place at the moment and will report shortly, will take the issue forward. Allowing a local pubwatch to use photographs in the event that no legal action had been taken would

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

be a more difficult human rights issue. However, I will consider the use of photographs in the context of our overall approach. I shall deal in a moment with the legislation proposed in the licensing White Paper, to which my hon. Friend referred. Hopefully, that will provide the vehicle for any legislative steps that are needed to ensure that that happens in the proper way.

It is striking that 40 per cent.—a high percentage—of crime and disorder partnerships, which now cover the whole country, have highlighted drunkenness as a crime and disorder issue in their crime audit plans. Nearly 60 per cent. of crime and disorder partnerships related public order problems explicitly to alcohol. Those figures simply reinforce the central thrust of the argument made by my hon. Friend.

A series of measures are being taken in that area, including the Criminal Justice and Police Bill, which is currently in Committee, which address a number of aspects, including drunkenness and disorder on licensed premises, and closure of certain licensed premises. The central context is our White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of Our Licensing Laws" which covers the series of proposals that we intend to make to try to address the issues mentioned by my hon. Friend.

With regard to exclusion orders, which were highlighted by my hon. Friend, I can confirm that the White Paper proposed that the courts should be put under a new duty to consider making an exclusion order in any case in which someone is convicted of an offence involving disorder or violence on licensed premises or in a registered club. Registered clubs have emphasised to me that they are often the recipients of drunkenness rather than its cause. People often go to a club from pubs in the locality late in the evening, and are drunk when they arrive, rather than being drunk as a result of having been in the club. They are keen to point out that the various requirements of legislation should apply to everyone in those circumstances.

The White Paper also proposed that the courts should be able to exclude people for longer than two years, and in the most serious cases involving violence it should be possible to impose a lifetime ban on access to licensed premises, which would be a serious sanction to deal with the problem. We need to develop more rigorous use of these orders, as our figures show. Perhaps I can say a word on the figures to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): The Minister mentioned exclusion and lifetime bans. What happens when someone ignores an order, or when the publican does so by serving a drink? Will there be a law to reprimand the publican or to fine the person who is ignoring the exclusion order?

Mr. Clarke: That issue will be addressed in the White Paper, but I can give my hon. Friend an immediate response. First, if the individual who is banned goes into a pub, he is in breach of a court order, which can be enforced by the courts using the most swingeing penalties. Secondly, it would have to be shown that the publican knew that he was serving drink to someone who had been banned. That is obviously a more difficult issue to address, but we will deal with it explicitly in the White Paper. The particular powers that we suggest are an extension of the current powers, under which people can be excluded for a period of between three months and two years.

The overall issues that my hon. Friend for Blyth Valley has raised will be addressed in legislation. It is the Government's intention to introduce legislation on this matter at the earliest possible legislative opportunity. As always, there is strong competition, but the Government believe that this is a high priority, for a wide variety of reasons.

Since 1996, information has been collected on exclusion orders along with data on other local orders which otherwise are dealt with on conviction. It has not been possible to disaggregate exclusion orders in that time, which is why my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash could obtain only the data up to 1996. We are reviewing the way in which statistics are recorded at the moment across different areas, and I give my hon. Friend an undertaking to consider how we could record this information in a more public way.

However, her fundamental point was not statistical; it was about the relatively low-level use of the orders, and how that can be increased. The key is to develop partnerships between the licensing magistrates, the police and the local licensed trade industry and to establish local crime and disorder strategies to address the issue, informed by proper data on public houses that are not orderly, including data from accident and emergency departments about where violent crime is predominantly occurring. I can assure my hon. Friend that the strengthening of those partnerships, particularly with exclusion orders in mind, will be an aspect of the discussions in our seminar groups. I shall report back to her on that in due course.

Liz Blackman: Could the Minister expand on the strategies that are in place to deal with breaking of exclusion orders that have been served, because that is an issue of concern?

Mr. Clarke: To be frank, we have not done as much work on that aspect as we should have done, but I will guarantee to take that further. I mentioned the role of the magistrates courts, the police, local government and the local licensed industry in enforcing these orders, because they can be more effective if they work together.

I conclude by saying that this issue is of exceptional importance and the Government take it very seriously. We have a great deal more to do to be able to claim that we have addressed it comprehensively, as my hon. Friend set out in her powerful speech, but I can commit the Government to doing what we can to achieve the goals which she has set, not least because of the evidence—which is unquestioned—of the close relationship between alcohol and violent crime.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 14 February 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

AIDS

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Kevin Hughes.*]

9.30 am

Sir Norman Fowler (Sutton Coldfield): I am grateful for the opportunity of this short debate. I raised the prospect of such a debate in business questions two weeks ago and was told that Westminster Hall would provide me with the best opportunity. I am genuinely grateful for being allowed to hold this debate, but I hope that time can be found to hold such a debate on the Floor of the House.

AIDS is a subject of undoubted gravity—almost 19 million people throughout the world have died of it, of whom about 4 million were children. More than 34 million people are now living with HIV and, barring a miracle, most of them will die during the next decade. The most recent estimate shows that in 1999, almost 5.5 million were newly infected with HIV. To put the problem at its mildest, the disease will not go away—it is becoming worse. I hope sincerely that the House of Commons will find time to debate it in full.

In terms of human catastrophe, it is difficult to think of a problem that should cause us more concern. I intend to refer to what is happening in the United Kingdom, although it is impossible to do so and ignore the context of AIDS throughout the world. As each minute passes, four more young Africans are infected. As the Secretary-General of the United Nations said, when he came to London a few months ago, every day Africa buries 5,500 of its sons and daughters who have died of AIDS. A child born in Botswana should have an average life expectancy of 70 years, but thanks to AIDS he will have an even chance of dying by the time he is 41.

The epidemic is expanding in new directions. It has spread to eastern Europe, where even five years ago the virus was still almost unknown. In India, HIV is firmly embedded in the general population. In east Africa and the Pacific, new HIV infections rose by 70 per cent. between 1996 and 1998. This debate takes place against that dire background.

I shall concentrate on the United Kingdom for two reasons: first, we can do something directly about the position here. We have the responsibility to do so. It is no one else's responsibility. It is most important to note that it is not a case of our advising others; it is a challenge for us to act.

Secondly, it is all too easy to say that, because our problem is not on the same scale as that in Africa, for example, it is of no consequence. That way lies complacency and a bigger and ultimately more deadly problem than we have at the moment. It is true that our figures are better than those for many other countries, including many of our European neighbours, and thank God for that. We should only take limited comfort, however, from the figures. The Public Health Laboratory Service estimates that about 35,000 people with HIV live in the United Kingdom. That equates to a prevalence among those aged 15 to 49 years of about one in 1,000. It also estimates that the number of people living with diagnosed HIV infection is increasing by at least 10 per cent. a year. That is one reason why the disease was the highest priority in the recent overview of communicable disease undertaken by the Public Health Laboratory Service. Although HIV is an entirely preventable infection—that needs to be repeated and repeated—in the past two years in particular there have been increases that give real cause for concern. In January, the Public Health Laboratory Service reported that, in 2000, there had been 2,868 new HIV diagnoses. That number is set to rise further as more reports of diagnoses made last year continue to come in. By the time all the reports are collected, it is expected that 2000 will have seen the highest ever number of new HIV diagnoses in the United Kingdom. That follows figures for 1999, which also showed an increase in HIV diagnosis. At that time, they were running at a 10-year high. Dr. Barry Evans, the head of the HIV division of the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre, said that 1999 saw more diagnoses than any year since 1985, when HIV testing first became available.

As it happens, I was Health Secretary in 1985, when we conducted our high-profile health education campaign. The issue was how to respond. There was no cure and no vaccine. Today, the issue remains how to respond. There may be a perception among people at risk that HIV and AIDS are now curable, because of clinical advances. Despite the medical advances, there is still no cure and there is no vaccine.

When I was the Minister responsible, there were conflicting views about what the Government should do in the face of the challenge. Some said, "Don't do anything. People such as drug addicts have brought their sufferings on themselves and should be left to their own fate." Others appeared embarrassed by the whole subject. I remember going to the United States after we launched the health campaign in this country and politicians there who could not bring themselves to mention the word "AIDS". It was not only politicians—I recall journalists in this country who were content to cover wars but preferred not to cover the battle against AIDS. Even the churches tended to be schizophrenic. They wanted to help, but they did not want to give the impression that they were encouraging promiscuity, drug taking and the rest.

As you may imagine, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I received a lot of advice during that period. In 1997, I met the then Chief Rabbi. As I sat down, he handed me an aide memoire, which complimented me on the urgency and boldness of the campaign, but he went on to set out no fewer than 14 reasons why he was disturbed by the general thrust. He said:

> "It tells people not what is right, but how to do wrong and get away with it. It is like sending people into a contaminated atmosphere but providing them with gas masks and protective clothing, or instructing thieves how to escape being caught...Say plainly: AIDS is the consequence of marital infidelity, pre-marital adventures, sexual deviation, social irresponsibility, and putting pleasure before duty and discipline."

Although that was possibly an extreme example, there was a lot of that sort of criticism and advice at the time. Many people thought that we should have been conducting an entirely different sort of campaign.

[Sir Norman Fowler]

All those attitudes have echoes today. They explain in part, and only in part, why some countries respond with positive policies, while others, sadly and tragically, try to ignore what is happening all around them. My attitude was and is that antipathy towards AIDS sufferers is incomprehensible. Disease is disease, whether it is sexual or not. Suffering is suffering. One does not have to condone the conduct to help the casualties, many of whom—children, wives, haemophiliacs—are innocent victims of circumstance. Our first priority for a policy, as a country and Government, must be to prevent the disease from spreading further.

That leads me to one certain conclusion. In the campaign against AIDS, a particular responsibility lies with Governments. Voluntary organisations do heroic work, as I have witnessed in this country and the United States. They deserve enormous praise for the work that they do, especially when one considers the pressure that it puts on them. I pay tribute to the National AIDS Trust in this country and to the work of the all-party parliamentary group on AIDS. Particular tribute must be paid to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), the chairman of that group, who is taking evidence on the subject in another part of Westminster. The churches—in spite of some of the attitudes that they had when the problem was first recognised—also do invaluable work.

It is the Government's responsibility to lead in this area, however, by providing public education and the finance for it and for other necessary policies. If Governments do not do it, others will not be able to do it half as effectively; they may try, but they do not have the resources. If Governments fail to take up the challenge, the problem will not be tackled. That is a lesson for us—and it is a lesson internationally, too.

We should be in no doubt that public education remains the chief weapon at our disposal. Public education campaigns need to be more closely focused than they were in the 1980s; we cannot have the same campaign, 15 years on. We know more about the subject and about the groups at particular risk—homosexual and bisexual men, drug users, and heterosexuals who have visited areas of high HIV prevalence. We know a great deal more than we knew in 1986-87, but the lesson remains the same: public education is the only vaccine at our disposal.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Does the right hon. Gentleman share a certain dismay and disappointment that the excellent television campaign that ran in 1986-87, during his time as a Minister, has not been repeated on an annual basis?

Sir Norman Fowler: I do—and the fact that that campaign has not been repeated is a comment not only on this Government but on the Governments that followed the period when I was Health Secretary. Television is undoubtedly one of the chief mediums for advertising—I am a newspaper man, so I will not say that it is the chief medium. There is no question about the impact that television has. A commercial company that had one big campaign, followed by nothing discernible in the next few years, would be regarded as following an eccentric policy.

The campaign must be different, but the Government must use the resources at their disposal for health education and the message of prevention. That message is crucial, but it does not receive the attention that it might, and is not often enough the subject of public debate.

My short answer to the hon. Lady, therefore, is yes, we should do much more in the area to which she referred, and it is a pity that we have not done more in the intervening years.

I remember one important lesson from my experience: the public will accept sensible, objective advice given by the Government on the basis of the best medical advice from the chief medical officer—I was fortunate in Donald Acheson. Such advice is crucial. The Government are not condoning drug taking or promiscuity by issuing such advice; they are counselling against it. As was shown in the 1914-18 war, when there was an enormous problem not of AIDS but of sexual disease, and again in 1986-87, a campaign is much more likely to be effective if it offers practical advice rather than preaching—however well-intentioned that preaching may be. Frankly, I disagree with the Chief Rabbi on that matter. On balance, Ministers in any Government are not regarded as the fount of all moral guidance.

Ministers in non-health Departments are nervous about public education campaigns. I remember having a fascinating, but ultimately frustrating and delaying, debate about whether using the phrase "to have sex" was a proper description to be used in a newspaper advertisement.

It is also probably true that Margaret Thatcher's Government was not necessarily synonymous in most people's minds with a high-profile campaign on sex education, but that Government set up a special Cabinet Committee, chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and consisting of a good third of the Cabinet, to oversee our campaign, then sent out leaflets to every house in the country pointing out the dangers of AIDS, put up posters on billboards to remind people of those dangers and, as the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) mentioned, promoted and paid for a television campaign on AIDS that meant, according to later research, that 90 per cent. of the public understood something of the dangers. Apart from public education initiatives, that Government organised free needle exchanges for drug addicts, so that at least they would not pass the virus from one to another. Again, that action was enormously controversial at the time, but proved to be literally a life saver.

In parenthesis, perhaps an international lesson from our experience is that if Governments take the issue seriously and act upon it, that can have a real impact on AIDS. If we compare infection rates in the United Kingdom with those in other European countries, let alone internationally, we see that the Government had an impact. Other countries, such as Uganda and Senegal, have also shown that Governments that get serious can have an impact. The nations that do worst are those where Governments, for one reason or another, brush the issue under the carpet.

To return to the United Kingdom, I do not suggest for one moment that the Government are brushing the issue under the carpet; I do not remotely regard this as a party

political issue. Nevertheless, there is a serious question as to whether today's response is adequate to the challenge that we face. I say that for two reasons. First, there is a real danger that we have become complacent. The figures do not justify complacency, and we should listen to people such as Dr. Barry Evans, when he says:

"This is the second consecutive year where we have reported record high levels of HIV diagnoses. We are now two decades into the HIV epidemic but we continue to see new cases of an infection which is largely preventable. We cannot afford to become complacent about safer sex. The basic prevention messages remain the same: use a condom when having sex with a new or casual sexual partner and in the case of injecting drug use never share injecting equipment. As health professionals we have to find new ways of making the risks of HIV clear to the public and in particular to young people."

That is a challenge to health professionals, but it is a challenge to political professionals, too. It is a challenge to the Government—any Government. We must find ways of communicating the risk, and we must find and finance ways of warning people, especially young people, of the dangers, and influencing their behaviour.

The second reason that further action is required is that we have now been waiting a long time for the Government's promised strategy on sexual health and HIV. Perhaps the Minister will be able to say more about that this morning. On 6 February, the Minister for Public Health said in a written reply:

"We plan to issue the strategy for consultation shortly."—[*Official Report*, 6 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 508W.]

"Shortly" is certainly better than "in due course", but it is not as good as "very soon". We—at least, those of us who have been Ministers—have all used those words from time to time, but as the Government now seem to be in a mood to define what they mean by those generalised terms, I should be grateful for the Minister's guidance.

If we were dealing with any other matter, the excuses for delay might not be accepted as easily as they have been in this case. Given the problem, it is the Government's duty to publish now. To provide some encouragement, I need no instruction on how nervous a Government machine can become on entering into the area: I remember the debates. However, in my experience, when it came to publication and the campaign, the public were substantially more mature than all the so-called media experts pointing out the possible pitfalls. "Trust the people" is not a bad guiding policy, even in such an area.

The case for a new set of initiatives is overwhelming. The Government have the responsibility for detailing those initiatives, and I hope that any lead that we give here might have at least a persuasive effect on other Governments with bigger problems who are still strangely reluctant to act. Above all, however, an initiative in this country could help save lives and prevent unnecessary suffering. After 30 years in the House—I believe that you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and I entered on the same day—and having experience of several Government Departments and shadow Departments, I can imagine no greater aim than that—the saving of lives and the prevention of disease.

9.53 am

Mr. Peter Brooke (Cities of London and Westminster): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) for a characteristically magisterial introduction to the debate, and for having arranged it. Mine will be a much less substantial contribution, but I am delighted to speak in support of his interest.

I declare an interest myself. I have a natural constituency interest, given that my part of London is one of the areas in which AIDS has been most prevalent, and more specifically, I am a patron of the La Verna housing association in Paddington, in my constituency.

Apart from La Verna, in which my interest is continuous, I have a continuing interest in developments in Africa, having travelled widely as a young man in South Africa and central and east Africa. However, my direct involvement has been in the United Kingdom and in parliamentary terms had three brief stages. In the first instance, I was, like my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield, in at the beginning, in that I was the Civil Science Minister in 1985. By an extraordinary coincidence, my first wife died in March 1985, and in that same week, between her death and the funeral, Sir James Gowans, then the executive head of the Medical Research Council, visited Sir Keith Joseph, the Secretary of State. I remember the redemptive quality, from my point of view, of attending a meeting about so serious a matter at that moment in my life.

Sir David Phillips, later Lord Phillips, had advised us as chairman of the Advisory Board for the Research Councils that virology was one of the fields in which the United Kingdom had fallen behind—he said that no nation can keep up to date with every field of science simultaneously. When Sir James visited us, he said that one of the disadvantages that we would have in coping with the circumstances would be that inattention to virology in the previous decade. He told the late Sir Keith that it was extremely important from the point of view of those planning the campaign to cope with the epidemic to have the best possible statistical information about where the case load was occurring. However, the Medical Research Council could not fund that out of the resources then available to it, and he asked whether the Secretary of State might provide extra money for that purpose. We were heavily pressed at the time: we had had to introduce the idea of student tuition fees because the science budget was so stretched. Nevertheless, Sir Keith found £2 million for the MRC to set up a statistical database to show where the incidence was occurring.

My second stage was brief. I left the Government for a five-month sabbatical in 1992 and obviously needed to look for new interests. I identified AIDS, and had developed a programme of how to become more expert on the matter, but that was nipped in the bud by my return to the Government.

I subsequently left the Government permanently in 1994 and I have endeavoured to be a regular attender of the all-party group, although following the explosion of all-party groups in this Parliament, diary conflicts do not allow me to attend as many meetings as I would like. I join my right hon. Friend in paying the warmest possible tribute to the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) for the way in which he chairs and leads that group, which is responsible for his absence today because of hearings elsewhere.

[Mr. Peter Brooke]

On a series of mornings in the summer of 1998, the all-party group held hearings because it was anticipated that the Government were on the point of delivering their national strategy. Rather a long time has elapsed since then without our having seen that strategy. Like my right hon. Friend, I am looking forward to hearing the Minister's comments on that. The timing of 1998 related to a seminar that was due to take place involving experts in the field in the autumn—perhaps October—of 1998, and we wanted to have held our hearings. We held them in this Room and elsewhere for three or four hours on three or four mornings and we heard many witnesses.

The timetable required to complete or agree the report before the summer recess, in anticipation of the seminar in October, worked marginally to the disadvantage of the report. We were not a Select Committee; we were operating in necessarily rather improvised circumstances, and we did not pay as much attention as we might have done to what we said in the report. Tell it not in Gath nor in the streets of Askelon, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I would not have signed up to absolutely everything that we put in the report, but we did not have the opportunity to explore such issues in detail.

Having gone to that trouble in 1998, we have obviously been listening carefully to the Government. We have heard noises at intervals since the summer of 1998 that the report was imminent, coming, on the way, or would be with us soon. Each of those dawns turned out to be false and we are still waiting. Rumours suggest that it may, as my right hon. Friend said, be with us in the next month, but after so many disappointments we shall, necessarily, believe it only when we see it.

It would be helpful if the Minister could explain why it has proved difficult to produce the report, given that many people are interested in it and waiting for it. If it does not appear before the end of March, I can only echo the dying words of General Braddock, who was ambushed by the Iroquois in 1763. While propped up against a tree to die, he uttered the memorable words,

"We shall know better how to deal with them next time."

In the meantime, we get a cri de coeur. I received one this very week from the president of the Mildmay Mission hospital, which is to the east of my constituency. The president said:

"I expect you have seen in the press recently that Mildmay Mission Hospital has been forced to close one of its eleven bedded units due to the financial difficulties.

Funding comes from many different Health Authorities, but regrettably due to the lack of resources this is having unfortunate repercussions on Mildmay. It is strange that, when more men, women and children have been treated in 2000, funds are becoming less available.

I have just read in Hansard the debate on hospices"—

on 6 February, the same day as the written answer—

"and how the funding is ad hoc throughout the service. I feel however that Mildmay does come within a different category. It's the only specialist hospice in London (where most of the patients come from) and we are the only place that care specifically for patients with brain impairment, as a result of AIDS.

It is not generally understood that only about 1/3 of the patients can take the combination drugs and recently we have had more deaths than previously, though not as many as when we first opened."

She proceeds to invite me to the hospice, which I have visited in the past.

Finally, like my right hon. Friend I want to say a few brief words about Africa. It is commonplace to quote with praise the example of the Ugandan Government, and such a reference is a much happier one than the usual euphemism for Uganda of which we read in *Private Eye*. Last month, I visited South Africa with the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office briefing included the following ominous words:

"South Africa is one of the countries in the world most seriously affected by HIV/AIDS. Recent estimates suggest that, at the current rate of infection, 25% of the population will be HIV positive by 2005, the most affected group being women between the ages of 15 and 25. Four million South Africans are expected to have died by 2008."

I shall not get involved in the controversy surrounding the way in which the South African Government are dealing with the problem. Of course, it is a further commonplace that the middle classes throughout Africa will be greatly affected by AIDS and that the leadership in Africa will thus be decimated.

We visited townships in East Rand and Natal, where 90 per cent. of children who were fortunate enough to have completed secondary schooling were nevertheless unable to get jobs. Such township areas consist of about 250,000 people, and in that climate of despair it is easy to see how the problems that we are describing could be exacerbated. It would be helpful if the Minister could comment on the work of the Department for International Development on AIDS. The figures that I quoted epitomise the African problem—a problem that the whole of mankind faces. I am most grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

10.3 am

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on securing this debate and I offer my sincere apologies for missing the beginning.

Like others in this Chamber who are members of the all-party group on AIDS, I was torn between appearing at today's evidence-taking session, which is also taking place tomorrow and on 28 February, or contributing in some way, however small, to this debate. Compared with that of more experienced Members of the House, my contribution will be somewhat limited and will relate narrowly to certain aspects and issues, on which I seek a commitment from the Minister.

As I know from speaking to different organisations about health issues and from considering HIV and AIDS in global terms, people in this country are astounded that, without a shadow of a doubt, in 2001 the problem is not going away; if anything, it is escalating. It can even be put in terms of a missing generation in many African states and it is astonishing that such a thing can happen—it is almost unbearable.

One aspect is not talked about as much as it should be—gay men in this country. I am deeply concerned about what is not taking place rather than what is. The Government's approach to HIV and sexual health is at different stages throughout the country. The Welsh Assembly's sexual health strategy was published in draft

form about 13 months ago, the Scottish Executive has prepared, but, according to the information that I have received, not published an HIV prevention strategy and, in England, a sexual health and HIV strategy was scheduled to appear late last year. The Northern Ireland Assembly has not produced a separate strategy. However, the HIV strategy of the London national health service is being produced.

Gay men remain the main group affected by HIV in the United Kingdom and make up the majority of deaths, the majority of those living with HIV and the majority of new transmissions. Paradoxically, concern for their needs and lives has often been low on any list of priorities and on occasions, I regret to say, has received scant attention in national and regional planning.

The level of diagnosed infections in gay men has remained remarkably constant at around 1,400 a year. Data show that the average age of those diagnosed has remained the same, showing that new generations of gay men continue to become infected. According to the answers to two recent parliamentary questions, about 70 per cent. of transmissions of HIV in the UK, as opposed to diagnoses that include people infected in Africa, are through sex between men. However, health authorities report that only 24 per cent. of HIV prevention money is targeted at gay men and even that figure is viewed with suspicion.

In October, the UK gay men's health network launched a document called "Ten Questions for UK HIV and Sexual Health Strategies", in which it argues that, although gay men make up the majority of those infected, paradoxically concern for their needs and lives has been a low priority. For instance, while Ministers have set up expert advisory groups for mother-child transmission, for which there is full justification, and also for infection among health care workers, the same attention has not been paid to the much higher rates of infection in gay men.

The network also argues that the social determinants of health are often ignored and that HIV bypasses the health inequalities debate. In many fields of health promotion, the myth that behaviour can be changed solely by the provision of information and/or medical treatment has been discarded, but that simplistic model has persisted for many years. To make real improvements, the true determinants of health inequalities need to be tackled. The continuing social exclusion, inequalities, prejudice and discrimination experienced by gay men must be challenged and legislative as well as long-term cultural changes are required. It is important to consider that seriously in society today.

Concern has been expressed that HIV in gay men has been marginalised as a voluntary sector issue. If the voluntary sector will not consider it, what real hope is there for it to be considered seriously elsewhere? The voluntary sector has an important role to play and can exert an influence through work in schools and so forth.

I seek some commitments from the Minister this morning. I hope that he will give an assurance, if not a guarantee, that the continuing high rate of HIV infection among gay men is at the top of the priority list and that the forthcoming strategy will reflect that. Furthermore, the report of the social exclusion unit on teenage pregnancy shows that a bold and imaginative approach is possible to tackle the social determinants of health inequalities. I hope that the Minister will extend that approach to HIV and gay men.

I again apologise to the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield for not having been present at the start of the debate and congratulate him on having secured it.

10.11 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I, too, congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler), who is a fellow member of the all-party group on AIDS, on securing this debate. It is long overdue and we are still awaiting the Government's strategy on sexual health—four years is a long time in the AIDS epidemic, which is sweeping the world.

Twenty years ago, or perhaps longer, an Australian medical colleague—a cardiologist—spent a weekend at my house. We were discussing heart transplants and so on, but he said that HIV would be the big news in medicine. He was right, but I did not think so at the time. As the right hon. Gentleman said, sexually transmitted disease was not much talked about 20 or 25 years ago. The clap clinics, as they were affectionately called, were up the back stairs by the mortuary in most hospitals and patients crept in wearing dark glasses and a wig. The terrors of the then known sexually transmitted diseases of syphilis and gonorrhoea had almost been eliminated. I remember whispering and giggling in a corner when I was a student because a grand and pompous old lady was suffering the effects of tertiary syphilis on one of the wards. She did not know that and the consultants would not have dreamt of telling her, nor would they have dared, but that was the way in which sexually transmitted disease was generally dealt with.

That attitude must and is changing and whole departments are now devoted to AIDS alone. A huge amount of time and money in many departments, including cardiology, neurology and immunology, is devoted to patients suffering from AIDS. The rise in tuberculosis, which is a serious public health problem, is largely attributable to the AIDS epidemic. We are discussing a serious business. As the right hon. Gentleman said, 19 million of the world's population are estimated to be HIV positive.

My first trip to Africa was to Uganda, where I naively wondered what type of business was done in the shops that sold different sized rectangular boxes. They were, of course, coffin shops. In the west we have coffee shops; in Africa they have coffin shops. It is a good trade because so many people are dying from AIDS. Furthermore, Uganda has had some success in controlling the number of patients suffering from AIDS because of their excellent education and basic health care programmes. We ignore their experience at our peril because travel is widespread and people go in and out of every country in the world. We are no longer confined to the so-called civilised developed world; people can go anywhere on holiday.

Human beings are, I regret to say, often indiscriminately sexually active, which means that they will pick up sexually transmitted diseases—especially AIDS. We do not know how far AIDS has spread in Asia, eastern Europe and Russia because many of those countries are in denial about the epidemic. AIDS affects the economically active members of the population,

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

which makes it different from any other disease that has affected the world. It affects those people whom their country most needs. In the past, diseases have killed babies, the weak, the elderly and people with other diseases. AIDS kills economically active people, which means that it is a great threat not only to developing countries, but to the world.

We are discussing a public health problem, which is an old-fashioned concept. We used to have medical officers who looked after the public health. They were concerned whether water was clean, whether sewers were sound and whether there was evidence of disease spreading through their communities. However, we have lost that concept in Britain—we have become used to diseases being treated by antibiotics or operations. A major proportion of expenditure in the health service should be on public health and the prevention of diseases that affect the community and the economy of the community.

In the UK, we have concentrated on treatment. The drug firms have gone ballistic and have had a wonderful time inventing new drugs. They have done brilliant work inventing some fantastic combinations of drugs that can prolong fitness in a patient suffering from AIDS, so that he or she can go on working, which is important, and to prolong life. However, there is no cure. The great danger is that many people—especially young people—think, "Ah, there is a cure," or, "By the time I get it there will be a cure, so there is no need to worry." We are wrong if we think that there will be a complete cure in the next 10 or 20 years.

Therefore, we must push home the preventive message. When the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield was speaking, I mentioned television advertising. I am incensed by British television, which shows sex or sexual activity every evening. Whether it is teenagers grappling with one another in "Neighbours" or the full Monty after the watershed, one can watch sex. Human beings are sexually active; it is nothing to be ashamed of. We would not be here if we were not sexually active because we depend on it for our survival. Young people watch television and believe that to be sexually active is the norm, but where are the antidotes or warnings? There are no warnings about sexually transmitted diseases such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea and AIDS on television.

Where are the warnings about getting pregnant? If we want people to take sex seriously, we must be upfront about it and talk about the downside. Yes, sex is great, yes, sex gives us babies if we want them, but it also produces unwanted pregnancies and, dangerously, diseases that can kill. We should use television more to put over that message.

Oxfam recently launched a campaign against TRIPS—trade-related intellectual property rights. That is the convention that protects patents for the pharmaceutical industries that manufacture drugs so that, it is said, developing countries cannot manufacture them more cheaply at home. A test case is being heard in South Africa soon. Again that puts the emphasis on the treatment, and the real message in developing countries must be prevention. It would cost $2 a day to treat an AIDS patient in a developing country if the drugs were made locally and cheaply. The annual budget per person in most developing countries is about $8 a year. Hon. Members will correct me if I am wrong. Where will they get that sort of money? We also need drugs that will prevent vertical transmission from mother to child, but they will be expensive. Wherever one looks in the world, the preventive message is the most important. We must not rely on drugs to solve our problems for us all the time.

Even if the drugs were available in developing countries, where is the basic health structure to deliver them? Those of us on the AIDS group have heard about the complicated business of taking retroviral drugs. The right combination must be taken at the right time of day and then it must be repeated, and this drug cannot be taken with that one. How can we explain that to someone who has had no education, when the nearest health clinic may be 200 miles away? There is no way to deliver the treatment. Again, the preventive message is so important.

I am my party's spokesperson on international development and the Department for International Development is to be congratulated on its work in this area. It took the problem very seriously. I remember as a newly elected Member of Parliament going to talk to it, in 1997, about something that I felt passionate about—the rise of AIDS in developing countries. At that time there was, rightly, an emphasis on malaria: malaria kills millions of people and we had to do something about it. But I have noticed how well the Government have taken that message on board. For example, in 1998 they earmarked a small amount of money for AIDS vaccine research. Now they are putting an enormous amount of money into it, with the international AIDS vaccine initiative, and the Chancellor promised more concessions in his autumn statement last year. I congratulate them on that.

In conclusion, I repeat two messages. First, prevention and the ultimate development of a vaccine against this terrible disease are the only answer, but the vaccine could be 10 years away, which leaves us with prevention, education and the need to spread the message. That is why it is vital that the sexual health strategy is launched soon.

10.23 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on securing this debate on such an important topic. It is also good to hear from him because he brings his experience of government to the debate, and it is important that we hear how difficult it sometimes is in practical terms to persuade the Government machine to move in an area that might be regarded as controversial, but which it is dangerous to ignore. I commend all that my right hon. Friend did during his time in government to ensure that the matter was tackled and that resources were allocated to it. I also add my congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who battled at a time when it was difficult economically to persuade the Treasury to spend money, but important to do so. It is important to nip an epidemic in the bud and to intervene early.

In common with many hon. Members, I have been greatly moved by the documentaries on the AIDS epidemic in east African states in particular, and the

devastating impact on their society, especially on children. The documentary with the greatest impact showed children sleeping under cardboard at the side of a road because, not only had their parents died, but they had no living family of their parents' generation. The hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) emphasised the seriousness of the problem for African society and its economy. The economically active cohort of society is being lost and the African continent is already suffering—it is not attracting the same amount of investment from international corporations and business. Added to that disadvantage comes the dreadful affliction of the AIDS epidemic.

The hon. Lady referred to the impracticality of those countries being able to afford the medication that could help the afflicted. A recent headline case in the newspapers concerned nurses from Kenya coming to work in the west midlands who were found to be infected with HIV. Regrettably, the media did not focus on the right issues. We are taking nurses and trained medical staff from Kenya and other countries that need them. We heard about the role of the Department for International Development and I urge the Department of Health to reconsider. Should we be draining the third world of qualified medical staff? The Government have said that that is not their intention, but it is still happening.

What about some reverse traffic? Should we not provide more assistance to those countries when they are losing their trained professional help? People in their 30s and 40s are dying from this dreadful disease and their hospitals and medical services are being depleted. There must be something that we can do, as the world's fourth largest economy.

Mr. Brooke: Does my hon. Friend share my concern that the announcement last year that special arrangements would be made to provide entry visas for people with particular specialisations has also led to the removal of the condition that those who come here as students should return to their countries on completion of their studies? That also robs the third world of a valuable resource.

Mrs. Spelman: My right hon. Friend has a valid point. Most Members of Parliament meet qualified medical professionals in their surgeries who want to settle here permanently. Members ask themselves whether, by helping them to do so, they are removing a resource from countries that desperately need it. The moral argument should be examined.

The attention of hon. Members has turned from the plight of countries in Africa to the domestic situation. That is important and is doubtless what sparked my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield to secure this debate. Given the fact that the incidence of HIV and AIDS is again rising in the United Kingdom, we should all want to readdress that question. There is certainly no room for complacency. Although the rate of infection in this country has been contained below rates in other European countries—due, I suspect, in no small part to early intervention by the Government of the day—it is once again on the increase.

Like other hon. Members who have contributed to this debate, I want to know what has happened to the Government's integrated sexual health strategy, which was initially promised for spring 2000. After a period of consultation, we were told that it would be available in the autumn. A 1999 Department of Health press release states:

"The Department of Health will publish a short Emerging Findings report in January 2000. The report will set out key facts, principles and issues to be addressed. It will provide an opportunity for a wider audience to contribute informally to the development of the strategy. We will publish an HIV/AIDS Strategy Document setting out the action to be taken in spring 2000."

There must be a good reason why that document has been delayed, given the increasing prevalence of the disease.

There are other problems with the existing programme. My right hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster referred to the Mildmay Mission hospital, and I wish to discuss the practical reality for what is the UK's leading centre for HIV and AIDS. Funding from London health authorities has not been forthcoming, so the hospital has been forced to make 10 people redundant and it faces a year-end deficit of £650,000. On 3 November, the Department of Health announced an extra £41 million for the type of work that Mildmay undertakes. Why is that money not flowing through? Why is that specialist centre in such difficulties? Why is it forced to cut services at a time when the incidence of the disease is increasing? The hospital told me that it is difficult to apportion its limited budget between the high cost of combination drug therapies and the specialist supportive rehabilitative care that it offers. If the extra money has been made available, it should by now be flowing through to an establishment such as Mildmay.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park referred to the role of pharmaceutical companies. Surely the Government can put pressure on those companies to make life-saving drugs available—particularly for AIDS sufferers—at a more realistic price, regardless of wealth or nationality. Many such companies are sited in the developed world and some of the most successful are in the United Kingdom. Surely the Government can do something.

On speaking to professionals who work with these drug combinations, I was concerned to discover the difficulties associated with the delivery mechanism. If the drugs are not taken 95 per cent. of the time, they are dramatically less effective. If they are taken less than 80 per cent. of the time, resistance builds up and a patient can become immune and unable to take them. In the end, there is no other treatment for such patients. It is clear that an AIDS patient needs a great deal of support if drug therapy is to be effective. Given the cost of the drugs, ensuring that they are taken in the most effective way is surely a cost-effective use of medical support. I am sure that we can understand why those conditions will make it increasingly difficult to ensure that the drugs are taken appropriately, especially in the developing world, unless more professional help is on hand.

As hon. Members have said, this is a preventable infection. The most important reason for accelerating the delivery of the sexual health strategy must be the need to highlight what can be done to prevent disease. There is much evidence to suggest that the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases is deteriorating. Established diseases that we thought had been contained, such as syphilis and gonorrhoea, are back on the increase.

[Mrs. Spelman]

Syphilis and gonorrhoea are reappearing throughout the country. There were 30 cases in Manchester in 1999 compared with two the previous year. Taken together, Rochdale health authority and Oldham health authority have seen 54 cases of gonorrhoea in the past year. There is a simple cultural reason to explain those increases—a new generation has begun to experience life. Perhaps younger people think that the predicted AIDS epidemic has not happened and so they have become complacent about the need to use preventive barrier methods of contraception. The rise in other sexually transmitted diseases provides ample evidence that barrier methods are not being used. The increasing use of oral contraception and the Government's recent support for the morning-after pill, which is another oral method, does nothing to stem the tide of sexually transmitted disease.

Dr. Tonge: I think that the hon. Lady will agree that when young people need the morning-after pill it is because they have already had unprotected sex and laid themselves open to the risk of catching a sexually transmitted disease. That is why it is important to attack on all fronts by providing another outlet where education can be made available and warnings can be given.

Mrs. Spelman: Absolutely. The hon. Lady is right to say that the morning after pill is after the event. Unfortunately, it gives the public a reason not to consider prevention before the event. Preventive methods thought through in advance are most likely to stem the tide of infection.

I want to finish by speaking up, as the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) did, for the plight of a generation of young men who, through the absence of a sufficiently vigorous public health campaign, are in danger of losing their lives. I am depressed by the analysis of the Public Health Laboratory Service of the dangers facing that particular group. It states:

"Perhaps most worryingly of all, a substantial number of HIV infections remain undiagnosed. Only about 63 per cent. of gay and bisexual men in 1999 who are HIV positive knew they were infected; among heterosexual men, this figure falls to just 48 per cent."

That lack of information is one of the most worrying aspects of the rising incidence of HIV and AIDS. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield is right to say that we should trust the public with information. As people do not have that information, they may unwittingly infect others simply because they are unaware that they are carriers. We must be grown up about that aspect of the disease, which is something that we have not been in the past.

There is a screening programme for pregnant women. When I was pregnant with the first of my three children, I was asked whether I would be prepared to undergo the test for HIV. Of course, I was glad to do so. I had had a blood transfusion, so I wanted to be sure that I had not contracted an infection that I was about to pass on to my child. I did not know that the test was anonymous, but, although I heard no more and was happy not to know more, women are not subsequently told its result. It is important to help the gay community, to whom the hon. Member for Dumfries referred, to prevent the spread of infection.

The nation has grown up with this debate, as a result of good health education campaigns. The Government must introduce their delayed sexual health strategy and reinvigorate this important aspect of the public health agenda.

10.40 am

Mr. Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I am grateful to the Minister for making it possible for me to contribute briefly to this debate. I am sorry to have missed the speeches of two former Secretaries of State to whom I was Parliamentary Private Secretary. I had to meet a Minister about a vulnerable constituent.

I want to make three points. First, we should base the discussion on the grounds not only of sexual health but sexual activity. Celibacy is something that we cannot inherit from our parents; we can adopt it and it may be forced on us, but it is not an inherited characteristic. How can we reduce the adverse consequences of sexual activity? We must throw away the language of birth control, family planning and saying, "No" to people, although we may be able to find examples in which that policy has been worth while. We must understand that many people in future generations will do the things that we did in our time. For sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV, barrier methods matter more than contraceptive methods. We must be open about that.

Secondly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) said, HIV is caused not only by sexual activity. The blood route is what matters in various countries—some of my friends have been exposed to that danger as haemophiliacs or recipients of emergency blood transfusions.

Thirdly, the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) made a point about the media. Reasonably, it goes on a lot about sex, but it seldom shows people discussing contraception or the use of barriers during sex. It does not mention the embarrassment felt by people in their early years of sexual activity, when looking for contraception of whatever kind—for an act that is more intimate than sharing a toothbrush. Radio might be an important means by which to overcome embarrassment and on which people might be reasonably explicit. It is no good simply for Simon Bates to present chocolate box romances on Classic FM. People need to talk, not offensively but in detail, about how one can get past desire and embarrassment to safe sexual activity.

10.42 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Gisela Stuart): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Sir N. Fowler) on securing the debate, and join hon. Members in paying tribute to his contribution and the lead that he has taken in raising awareness about AIDS, especially in the early years of the epidemic. Some of the quotes that he included in his speech showed just how courageous a stand individuals had to take at that stage, because there was a tremendous amount of hypocrisy and ignorance and a simple unwillingness to face facts. It was easy, in those early days, not to acknowledge the potential scope

of AIDS and HIV. I pay tribute, too, to my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who chairs the all-party parliamentary group on AIDS.

The national plan formulated by the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield to combat AIDS included public health measures, research and service development and very open public education. The campaign of public information was followed by more specific health education directed towards the groups most at risk. The first ever Government-funded campaign, in 1986, had the slogan, "Don't die of ignorance." I am sure that we all remember it, which shows its impact. It broke new ground in raising awareness and providing everyone with basic information on HIV.

The message of that campaign was powerful, as was the scale of media coverage. It included television and posters, and a leaflet containing facts on HIV and AIDS, which was sent to all 23 million households in the United Kingdom. It is widely acknowledged that the United Kingdom remains a low prevalence, low risk country for HIV infection as a result of the early and sustained investment in HIV prevention and health promotion campaigns.

The scale of the AIDS problem in other countries in the new millennium is staggering and of grave concern. The number of people estimated by the joint United Nations programme to be living with HIV and AIDS was more than 34 million at the end of 1999. The vast majority of infected people are in the developing world, which is least able to cope. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa are by far the worst hit, with an estimated 24 million infected. Several Members referred to that, in particular the right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Brooke), who referred to South Africa and the economic impact. When I attended a World Health Organisation meeting in Geneva last year and spoke to a South African Health Minister, I was struck by the economic impact of stripping out a whole generation. As the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) said, the economically active generation is being hit. As a result, we are left with the children, who are still growing up, and the older generation.

The Department for International Development has made a considerable contribution by working not only with the South African Government—part of the development plan last year was an overall contribution of £11 million from the United Kingdom, and a specific project worth £7.5 million—but with India, where the United Kingdom has contributed £37 million to a project. HIV and AIDS remain one of that Department's key priorities. Last year, it spent £100 million on HIV and AIDS. In a written answer, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development said that she expected that contribution to increase.

The right hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster also referred to hospices, which play an important part. He is right to say that the previous funding structure was far too ad hoc and was not strategic. For that reason, an extra £55 million will be available for care by 2003-04. It is also expected that health authorities will enter not merely annual agreements for funding but three-year agreements, to ensure that support is provided where it is most needed.

The hon. Member for Richmond Park was right to say that prevention is the most effective way to tackle the disease. She drew attention to other sexually transmitted diseases, because HIV and AIDS should not be seen in isolation. I fully agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), who said that we should not ignore gay men, maternal transmission and the voluntary sector. I hope to be able to reassure him.

Before I outline the direction in which the Government are moving, I make it clear to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) that, in spite of what she said, the Department of Health does not actively recruit nurses from third-world countries. A strategy is in place, and she knows that in the case to which she referred in Wolverhampton, trained nurses were not being recruited. They were not trained when they came. I want to place on the record forcefully that that case should not be misrepresented. Guidelines are in place, of which we are acutely aware. Overseas recruitment by the Government is mainly from countries such as the Philippines. An agreement has also been reached with Spain. No one should get the wrong impression about that.

Mrs. Spelman: There is no misunderstanding. I understand the Department's guidelines, which are clear. The loophole is through nurse recruitment agencies that do not stick to those guidelines. That is where the weakness lies at present.

Ms Stuart: I do not wish to depress the right hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield. He is right when he says that in campaigns we should trust the people, but as a fellow Birmingham Member of Parliament—I know that the royal borough of Sutton Coldfield has still not come to terms with being part of Birmingham, but it is—he will know that we still face battles to convince the public, not least of the value of initiatives such as the Safe project in Birmingham, in which condoms are handed out to sex workers, which has been extremely effective although sections of the community deeply resent it. That is why it is important for politicians and Governments to stand up and say what is right and to be seen to do so.

On the overall situation and what the Government are doing, in western Europe, the scale of our problem is less than elsewhere, but that is no reason for complacency. We still have an estimated 500,000 people living with HIV. The United Kingdom has fared better than some other countries in Europe: Portugal has seven times our prevalence of HIV infection; Spain has five times; France four times; and Italy three times. Other European neighbours such as Germany and Sweden have managed, like us, to keep HIV infection at a lower level.

Developed countries are more able to afford to take advantage of the development of effective treatments for HIV. Those developments have been both exciting and challenging. Since the arrival of combination anti-retroviral therapies in 1996, people with HIV have benefited from a reduction in debilitating infections and failing immunity, which previously characterised the disease. That may be one reason why public awareness has diminished: the number of people who die from HIV has been reduced. We still have a long way to go—the complexities of following the treatment have been mentioned.

[Ms Stuart]

The effects of such treatment are evident also from the changing epidemiology of HIV and AIDS in this country, which shows a 60 per cent. decrease in the number of people progressing to AIDS last year compared to 1994. That decrease is a result of the fact that people with HIV are not progressing to an AIDS-defining illness as rapidly as before. The mortality figures also tell a story, with a 73 per cent. decrease in HIV-AIDS-related deaths recorded last year compared with 1994.

There are people living with HIV throughout the country, but 60 per cent. of them continue to be in the London area, and overall the gay community remains the largest single group affected. However, in 1999, for the first time the number of new HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals was higher than among gay and bisexual men, and that trend has continued. The majority of those infections were acquired abroad—again, the hon. Member for Richmond Park made this point powerfully—usually by people from, or who have visited, countries of high HIV prevalence or risk, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa. The increase in HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals is probably in part the result of initiatives in the past few years that have encouraged people to come forward for testing.

Into the second decade—I think that my speech should say the second millennium—of HIV-AIDS in this country, we cannot afford to drop our guard. We now need a comprehensive strategy that encompasses prevention and education, treatment and care. New generations of young people need a new approach to make them aware—not merely of HIV but of other sexually transmitted infections. That is one reason why we decided to merge the work undertaken in the sexual health and HIV strategies last year. As the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Mr. Bottomley) said, a combination of the two is needed. That joint approach obviously needs careful consultation with key groups, so that both HIV and other sexually transmitted infections receive the detailed and specific attention necessary if we are to make progress in combating the rise in transmissions.

There is disappointment that the strategy is taking longer than was hoped. I am sure that right hon. Members who have served in government will agree that sometimes Ministers share frustration when work does not progress as quickly as expected. I hope that the phrase "is nearing completion"—the "is" is written in italics—provides an escalated reassurance that we will issue the draft document shortly. We are determined to get the message right and ensure that strategy proposals can be implemented. To answer the question about why it has taken so long, on balance, we would prefer to get it right by bringing the two together in a wider consultation. We hope that it will be introduced shortly.

Sir Norman Fowler: Will the Minister be a little clearer? We have heard the word "shortly" before. Can we expect the strategy document to be published in the next few weeks? We have been waiting for it for a very long time.

Ms Stuart: The right hon. Gentleman is tempting me to put a figure on the time, but I say simply that it will come shortly.

On the important role of HIV prevention activities, it is as important not to exaggerate the risks of HIV for the general population as it is to recognise that those risks have not gone away. Sexually active young people have information and health promotion needs and we continue to deliver new campaigns in recognition of that fact.

The right hon. Gentleman said that the effective campaign of the 1980s was right for the time, but that a simple repetition would not be the answer. The new campaigns must be more focused. The recent "Clem and Lydia" television advertisements, which dealt with chlamydia, put the HIV safer sex messages into the wider context of other sexually transmitted diseases. Chlamydia is more common than HIV among young people and presents a more immediate risk.

The large increase in inquiries to the national AIDS helpline and to Health Promotion England's "Lovelife" website show that it is possible to engage young people with the safer sex message. The hon. Member for Richmond Park pointed out that the situation was different 20 years ago, and referred to dark glasses and wigs. Ten years ago, condoms could only be acquired in gents' toilets or through cryptic messages at the pharmacists; they are now to be found on the shelves in Tesco, next to Lemsip and aspirin.

Effective drug treatments have increased life expectancy and improved the quality of life for many with HIV. They have had an impact on HIV prevention work; for example, for some gay men, the duration of the epidemic may have bred a familiarity with the effects of HIV. There is a danger that prevention messages may lose their impact if they become familiar. The challenge for health promotion planners and providers is to develop and deliver sophisticated interventions that engage target audiences, whatever their experiences of HIV. Those must be relevant and based on research into people's behaviour that accurately identifies how people live their lives in relation to HIV.

We shall ask the health development agencies to review and publish evidence-based, effective HIV and sexually transmitted disease prevention and sexual health promotion. The response to those problems must be local. National health promotion work is designed to respond to the changing nature of the AIDS epidemic. For example, health promotion resources are now available for African communities and we are developing, in partnership with community-based groups, a strategic prevention framework that aims to reduce transmission among those communities.

The sustained financial investment in local HIV prevention since the start of the epidemic has undoubtedly contributed to England's low prevalence. We provide the national health service with some £55 million for local work, but need to ensure that prevention services take account of up-to-date information on successful strategies to identify and disseminate best practice.

We are making headway in the reduction of mother-to-baby transmission of HIV. In 1998, we introduced a policy that offers an HIV test to all pregnant women as a routine part of ante-natal care. Most HIV-infected pregnant women accept the offer of measures such as drug treatments and caesarean section to reduce the risk of their babies becoming infected. In 1999, about 76 per

cent. of pregnant women with HIV in inner London had had their infection diagnosed before delivery, compared with 50 per cent. in 1998. We estimate that that will prevent about 45 infant HIV infections in 1999 alone. Although everyone wants to meet a target of zero children born with HIV, we do not believe that that is possible. However, our aim is to reduce the number of children with HIV by 80 per cent. by 2002.

We have not discarded HIV as one of our major priorities. We are building on the success of some of the campaigns of the past 20 years, particularly the work with mothers and children. I hope that the strategy to be published shortly will reassure hon. Members that there has been no reduction in capital investment or in the Government's commitment to combatting HIV.

Cyprus

11 am

Mr. Stephen Twigg (Enfield, Southgate): I am very pleased to have secured a debate on an important subject of long-standing concern. Cyprus has many friends in all parties at Westminster, as I believe will be reflected in our debate.

Before I begin, I draw colleagues' attention to the relevant entries in the Register of Members' Interests.

One reason why it is a great privilege to represent Enfield, Southgate is that it is a multicultural community, of which the Cypriot community forms a major part. I believe that my constituency contains the largest number of people hailing directly or indirectly from the island of Cyprus—both Greek and Turkish Cypriots, living together—and I pay tribute to their contribution to local life. Yesterday, I was grilled by one of the toughest possible audiences—the school council of my old school, Southgate comprehensive. When I go back there I am struck by the large number of pupils from Cyprus—Greek and Turkish Cypriots studying together.

I want to pay tribute to some of the excellent welfare work done locally—my hon. Friends the Members for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) and for Edmonton (Mr. Love) are both here today—and, in particular, to the work of the Greek and Greek Cypriot community of Enfield and the Enfield Turkish Cypriot Association, which provide welfare advice, information and support for local people, assistance for those for whom English is not their first language, luncheon clubs and other social, cultural and communal activities. Those organisations and others like them, not only in Enfield but throughout the country, provide an important local voice for those who hail from a Cypriot background.

For me, Cyprus is not simply an international issue or a question of foreign policy. It is a real, local issue of direct concern to thousands of people living in my constituency. The question of Cyprus arises every day that I am in my constituency, whether on the doorstep, visiting schools or at meetings, so I am acutely aware that there are differences of opinions and experience not only between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities but within them: they are lively, democratic communities that enjoy the full cut and thrust of debate.

It is a privilege to have this debate, which is timely, as my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe is to visit Cyprus next month, and following the sad withdrawal of Mr. Denktash from the proximity talks. I have no doubt that there is enormous frustration in the Cypriot community at the lack of progress towards a just, peaceful and lasting settlement in Cyprus. Such a settlement should respect the human rights of everyone in Cyprus and create a united, demilitarised island with real devolution for both Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. That would enable people to return to the villages and properties from which they have been separated for almost three decades.

During the general election campaign almost four years ago, I spoke to a teenage boy at my old school who was from Cyprus. He had never been able to go to the village from which his family had come to this country

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

and he could not visit his grandparents' graves. All he wanted was to pay that important respect, and it struck me that it was simply a question of dignity—the human side of the tragic events in Cyprus in recent decades.

If progress is to be made in Cyprus, people must sit down and talk. I am wary of drawing parallels between different international situations, but lessons can be learned from Northern Ireland, South Africa and even the middle east. Discussion, dialogue and negotiation are crucial. It is against that background that I want to express my regret and, I am sure, that of all hon. Members at the decision of Mr. Denktash and the Turkish Cypriot leadership to withdraw from the proximity talks. However, I welcome the fact that that withdrawal has attracted criticism from opposition parties and the media in northern Cyprus, as well as—unusually—from the media, the business community and politicians in Turkey. What action are the Government taking to press Mr. Denktash and the Government in Turkey to return to the proximity talks at an early opportunity?

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this important debate. I apologise that I cannot remain for the whole debate because of another engagement.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the influence that Britain must have on Mr. Denktash. Will he confirm that the new American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, said that the US will remain firmly engaged in seeking a solution? Does he agree that, when the Minister goes to Cyprus next month, he should use his influence—I am sure that he will do so—with the American Administration to ensure that they bring pressure to bear on Mr. Denktash to return to the UN proximity talks?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Gentleman anticipated the next paragraph of my speech. I had a brief opportunity yesterday to speak to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in advance of his forthcoming visit to the United States. I impressed on him the importance of raising the Cyprus question and telling the new Bush Administration that America has a crucial role to play in getting the proximity talks back on track and obtaining the just and lasting settlement to which the British Government and, I am sure, all hon. Members in this Chamber are committed. Does the Minister agree that America has a pivotal role to play? She has not used her influence with Turkey in the past, but it is vital that she now takes the opportunity to do so.

The desire for progress in Cyprus is common to the Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot communities. If there is to be progress, confidence-building measures will be necessary between the two communities. In recent years, there have been several opportunities for Turkish Cypriot and Greek Cypriot people to come together to discuss issues of concern. Two years ago, a group of Chevening scholars—some from the Republic of Cyprus and others from northern Cyprus—who were studying in this country came together in the House to exchange experiences and ideas. I want to pay particular tribute to the Cambridge Cyprus Campaign, which has continued its excellent work to facilitate debate and dialogue among young people from the island of Cyprus who are studying in the United Kingdom. As the example of Northern Ireland shows, such dialogue and debate can play a very important part in promoting reconciliation and securing consensus for the just and lasting settlement that we all seek.

In the past 12 months, events in the northern part of Cyprus have demonstrated that there is a lively debate among Turkish Cypriots. Opinion polls in northern Cyprus suggest not only overwhelming support for the northern part of Cyprus joining the European Union, but strong support among Turkish Cypriots for a federal solution to the Cyprus question. Late last year, a poll showed that that option was supported by 31 per cent. of those surveyed. It has been clear for some time that both Greek and Turkish Cypriots want to be part of the European Union.

I want to consider the very important matter of the current discussions on European Union accession. Being part of the European family confers both rights and duties, and that is an important starting point. It is some time since the European Court of Human Rights judgment in the case of Mrs. Titina Loizidou. As hon. Members will recall, on an important and central question of human rights, the judges found in favour of Mrs. Loizidou and against the Turkish Government by a margin of 15 to two, but there has been little progress in terms of that Government's response. What are the British Government doing to press the authorities in Ankara to implement fully the terms of the decision reached by the European Court of Human Rights?

Despite his being in the British sovereign base area of administration on the island of Cyprus, Mr. Panicos Tsiakourmas was detained by Turkish forces in December and he appeared in court in Famagusta last week. His case has been raised several times by my hon. Friends the Members for Tooting (Mr. Cox) and for Edmonton. What representations are the British Government making in respect of this important case, which appears to involve a fundamental breach of Mr. Tsiakourmas's human rights?

The European Union provides a real hope that progress can be made in meeting the needs and aspirations of all the people of Cyprus, and the British Government's support for the Republic of Cyprus's application for European Union membership is much appreciated by the Cypriot community in the United Kingdom. As has been said many times, all of us would prefer that a united Cyprus entered the European Union, but the Government's commitment to the view that no power can have an external veto on Cyprus's application is an important one, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will reaffirm it today.

President Clerides of Cyprus invited Mr. Denktash several times to provide Turkish Cypriots for the delegation that is discussing European Union accession and several Turkish Cypriot opposition parties have called for Turkish Cypriot participation in those discussions, yet Mr. Denktash has refused. What action are the UK Government taking to press for Turkish Cypriot participation in discussions on Cyprus's accession to the European Union? There is no doubt that, economically, politically and socially Cyprus is ready to be a member of the European Union, and impressive progress has been made in the accession discussions. There is clear majority support for joining

the European Union among the people of Cyprus, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, and membership could deliver enormous economic, political and social benefits for all the people. Does the Minister recognise that Cyprus has made real progress over recent months?

The United Kingdom is a guarantor power of the independence of Cyprus, which is a highly valued member of the Commonwealth. Hon. Members have a duty, and the Government a responsibility, to play an active, positive and constructive role in helping to secure a just and lasting settlement that will enable all the people to live together on a united island that respects both traditions. I hope that the Minister will use the opportunity of today's debate and, more importantly, his forthcoming visit to the island, to reaffirm the priority that the Government attach to support for Cyprus's application to join the European Union and for all efforts to secure the just and lasting settlement that the majority of people in Cyprus want, as do hon. Members of all parties.

11.16 am

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) on securing this debate. I declare an interest at the outset as chair of the Cyprus group of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

As my hon. Friend has said, Cyprus is of great importance to this country. We are one of its guarantor powers, and it is also a member of the Commonwealth. When I look back over the years since the invasion of the Republic of Cyprus by the Turkish army in 1974, I think of the many debates in which I have taken part and the questions that I and many other colleagues have tabled to successive Foreign Secretaries. As my hon. Friend also said, the great strength of this Parliament is that we are as concerned about the rights and security of Turkish Cypriots as about those of Greek Cypriots. Regrettably, many of our hopes for an honourable settlement have not been realised, and in a debate such as this there must be clear speaking.

One has simply to read the reports of successive Secretaries-General of the United Nations. Whom do they blame for the lack of progress? Mr. Denktash and his friends in Ankara. The proximity talks began a year ago. What is their position now? When did the two sides last meet? When are they expected to meet again? I look to the Minister to be open and frank with us. Has Mr. Denktash stopped the talks? I understand that he has clearly said that, unless the state that he has declared in the occupied area of northern Cyprus is recognised, he will take no further part in the talks. If that is true, what is the Government's view of that attitude? Turkey is a close ally of Mr. Denktash, but in recent months, at both Helsinki and Nice, Turkey has sought membership of the European Union. I am not criticising Turkey for wanting that, but if it really wants to be part of the EU, what constructive role does the Minister expect it to play in the Cyprus issue?

Do we accept some of the comments that have been made by prominent Turkish politicians, including the present Prime Minister of Turkey, who said that there is no Cyprus problem because that was resolved by the invasion of Cyprus in 1974? Irrespective of which party they belong to, many hon. Members do not accept such a statement. It would be interesting to know what the Government think about that statement.

The current talks started one year ago, with no preconditions. I believe that the many resolutions that were passed at the United Nations should be the cornerstone of any meaningful discussions on Cyprus. Otherwise, why did successive British Governments and others support them? We are now in the 26th year after the invasion of Cyprus—a Commonwealth country, a third of which is occupied by foreign troops. What does the Minister regard as the basis of a settlement? After 26 years, we must have a vision. What is that vision?

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate rightly talked about the role of the United Kingdom Government and the European Union. We must bear in mind the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, of which the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and I are members. We regularly meet Turkish politicians and we have a close relationship with many of them. They are charming, capable people. When I talk to them about Cyprus, however, they believe that they have no role to play and that it is entirely up to Mr. Denktash to decide what happens.

I do not believe that for a moment. Prominent Turkish politicians repeatedly express their support for Mr. Denktash and describe the system that they support for the occupied area. My hon. Friend the Minister knows that, after all the years since Mr. Denktash set up the so-called independent state, the only country in the world that recognises it is Turkey. When opening the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate said that the Minister is to visit Cyprus shortly. I welcome that, as, I am sure, will the Cyprus Government and Mr. Clerides. The Minister will go to the north and meet Mr. Denktash. I hope that he will convey clearly the views that are expressed, irrespective of party, in this Parliament.

We want a settlement. We do not accept that, after 26 years, there has not been time to achieve one. We want a settlement under which the rights of both traditions are safeguarded and protected. Turkey wants to become a member of the European Union, but it plays no willing role in trying to reach the settlement that the people of Cyprus, both Greek and Turkish, want. The Minister spoke about the disturbances that have taken place in the north. They did not just happen; they have been going on for a long time.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate. It is always a great pleasure to see the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, because he and many other Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members have always been fully supportive of Cyprus. That is a great strength of this group in the United Kingdom Parliament. Clearly, the Minister will have a lot to say, and I hope that he will be frank and tell us exactly what vision the British Government have, what views he has expressed to Turkish politicians, and what views he will express to Mr. Denktash when he visits Cyprus next month.

11.26 am

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): The Greater Bristol area has a relatively small but long-established Cypriot community, which is almost entirely Greek Cypriot with one or two Turkish members. The newly formed Bristol Friends of Cyprus met recently and was concerned to learn that, in some circumstances, the expression of

[Valerie Davey]

thoughts and ideas in the north could lead to five years' imprisonment and a considerable backlash from extreme right-wing groups.

That has been brought to the attention of more people recently, as a result of the publication in two newspapers of an advertisement by the executive committee of the Turkish Cypriot teachers' trade union, KTOS, 30 members of whose executive are facing up to 150 years' imprisonment if they are convicted. The trade unionists gave their testimony about the advertisement, and other trade unionists were there to support them. The advertisement did not question the sovereignty or integrity of the Turkish Cypriot state, but said "No to Ankara." It stated:

"Ankara: we do not want your money, your package or your civil servants. We do not want to be slaves."

The reaction of right-wing groups has been extreme—using verbal abuse and threats against trade unionists. Indeed, Mr. Denktash has called on the Attorney-General to consider laws to ban the trade unionists from teaching in schools. I understand from a more recent e-mail that the head office of KTOS has been ransacked by the secret police, who have taken all the office equipment. I have contacted the National Union of Teachers, of which I am a member, and I hope that we will show solidarity. I mention that before the Minister's visit, so that, if he is able to speak to those in the north—especially Mr. Denktash—he may question such a denial of freedom of speech.

11.29 am

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): I apologise for not being present for the start of this debate. I was otherwise engaged in receiving a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association delegation. I apologise if I make points that have already been made in my absence.

I am worried about the manner in which the press are being treated in the northern part of Cyprus. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Corbett) and I visited the area last autumn. We met journalists and learned at first hand the pressures under which they are placed and the fear that they experience in trying to tell the truth—which is what any journalist worth his or her salt would do naturally. The truth is not something that comes easily to the so-called Government of the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus—a Government whom we, of course, do not recognise. My hon. Friend—if I may call him that in the circumstances—the Member for Erdington and I are both members of the National Union of Journalists.

I listened with great interest to the comments made by my colleague and parliamentary friend, the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who referred to the role of the international community, the Council of Europe and the European Union. I did not want to interrupt him, so I did not intervene, but he did not mention the United States in that respect. The US gives a great deal of succour to the regime in Turkey, both literally and metaphorically—literally, in the form of hard cash, and metaphorically through political support. It seems to think that Turkey is the last bastion between east and west against the rampages of Muslim fundamentalism. Personally, I believe that that is a misconception, and that the United States can and should play a greater role.

The United States of America is not a guarantor power, whereas Greece, Turkey and the United Kingdom are, but if the US brought sufficient pressure to bear, the problem could be solved within weeks or months, if not overnight. So far, the problem has not been solved in 26 years. I hope that the Minister will influence his colleagues to make it plain to the new Administration in the United States that they have a role to play, and that, were they to play it, the problem would be solved relatively swiftly.

Everyone says that the Cyprus problem is intractable, but it is not. We are dealing with two communities—Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots—who fundamentally want to live together in peace and harmony. The problems are caused by people outside the island of Cyprus. The communities may have had their differences—and there have been wrongs on both sides in the past—but that is what they want.

We are discussing a long and gross violation of human rights: 26 years of illegal occupation has been tolerated by the Western world and the world community. That flies in the face of successive United Nations' resolutions, but nothing of any practical substance has been done. There have been trade sanctions, but what sanction is in operation when full-page advertisements are placed in the London *Evening Standard* by British travel companies advertising holidays in northern Cyprus? Citizens of the United Kingdom, who would be genuinely horrified if they understood the politics of the matter, spend good money buying cheap holidays in an area of a country that wants to be part of Europe.

The Loizidou case is well known. Property has been misappropriated and occupied for 26 years. I never enter such debates without remembering my, by now very elderly, constituent George Gerolemou, whose home is still occupied after 26 years. His wife has died and will never see her home again. There are scores of such people in the United Kingdom, dotted throughout the world and on the island of Cyprus. They simply want to go home. That is what we are asking for. When will the Government, the United States and the world community say that we will not tolerate this illegal international action any longer and we intend to do something about it?

11.34 am

Ms Joan Ryan (Enfield, North): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) on securing this debate, which is timely given the Minister's imminent visit.

I want to speak briefly on behalf of my constituents. Like my hon. Friend, I have a large number of Cypriots living in my constituency—both Turkish and Greek. They live together, work together and study together; that does not pose a difficulty. They do not always agree on everything, but they live peacefully together. I am convinced that eventually that can and will be the case in Cyprus. On behalf of many of my constituents, I could echo many of the remarks made in the debate. I talk with elderly Cypriots, who live with the sadness that they cannot return to their homes. They are getting older, and many others have died and will never return to their home. I speak on their behalf, and on behalf of their children who, having lost their parents, want to go back to see their family home and visit family graves.

It is easy to list such issues, but when they comprise the tragedy with which people live as individuals and as a community, they scar people, and we have a responsibility to do something about it. If I did not have a single Cypriot constituent, it would still be right to speak today because, as the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) said, this is a human rights issue, so we all have a responsibility to speak on behalf of Cyprus. When the human rights of one are threatened, the human rights of all are threatened. Many of us here have stood at the green line and seen and felt the tragedy of that division and the deep sorrow of Cypriots. We do not experience it as they do, but we can empathise when we stand there and see the feeling and hurt.

Cyprus's application to the European Union, and the interest that Turkey has expressed in eventually becoming a member, could still be the catalyst for the settlement that we seek. It must be a settlement based on international law, UN resolutions and the policy of the Government. There is nothing wrong with the policy that we have, or with any of the resolutions—we are all signed up to them, and so is Cyprus, which is fine—but the problem is that nothing happens.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate used exactly the right word when he talked about the frustration of the Cypriot population in both north London and Cyprus. We must try to ease that deep frustration as soon as possible. There have been times when it could not be said that everything that could be done was being done. I ask the Minister to ensure that the Government do everything that they can, on the basis of sound policy. When he visits the island, I hope that he will reassure the Cypriots and the Cypriot Government that we are playing our full role, given our especial responsibility as a guarantor power.

The British Government have been supportive of the Cypriot Government's right to apply to join the EU and have made it clear that no external power has the right of veto over the application, and we must continue to be so. Europe would be the gainer from Cypriot entry. Cyprus meets the qualifications and would be a positive advantage to the EU. I would prefer a settlement to be achieved first, but I want Cyprus in the European Union with a settlement or without, if necessary.

Turkey has expressed an interest in getting more involved with the European Union, and that provides the opportunity to ensure that it is aware of the hurdles standing in the way of a closer relationship. A closer relationship would be an advantage for Europe, but if it is to be truly welcomed, Turkey must remedy certain problems both in Turkey and in Cyprus. We must make it absolutely clear at every opportunity that Cyprus is a major hurdle to a closer relationship between Turkey and the European Union. Will the Minister explain the Government's attitude to the Cyprus application and to Turkey's stated aims concerning the European union?

Britain is a guarantor power, and we have a close and long-standing relationship with Cyprus, which is valued on both sides. Many Cypriots live in England. North London has the largest Cypriot population outside Cyprus, and the borough of Enfield has the largest Cypriot population in Britain. Cyprus is a valued trading partner. Many Cypriots speak English as their second language, and for many Cypriots living here, it is their first.

We have a responsibility as a guarantor power, and if we look back over the past 26 or 27 years we cannot say that we have always fulfilled that responsibility. We can do more. The Government have a strong and clear policy on Cyprus that is welcome, but we must move from policy to practice. I know that that does not lie entirely in our hands, and I hear what is said about Ankara, Mr. Denktash and America. However, we have a special responsibility and we are in a unique position in being able to facilitate talks.

It is distressing that the proximity talks have foundered, but that was not the result of action or lack of action on the part of the Greek Cypriot representatives. The Greek Cypriot Government and their representatives have gone out of their way to make progress, to work with Turkish Cypriots and to involve them in the application for entry to the European Union. I pay tribute to them for their work in building trust among Turkish Cypriots for a good working relationship throughout the community. The blame for the breakdown of the talks lies firmly with Mr. Denktash, but we must work to achieve peace, a just solution and recognition of human rights under UN resolutions and international law. We must have a better relationship to lead to agreement between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot communities. I look forward to that and I am pleased that the Government are working to facilitate it.

11.44 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) on securing this debate. He takes a close interest in Cypriot affairs and has a good relationship with the Cypriot community in his constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) said, in north London we have the largest Cypriot community outside Cyprus itself. That is a reflection of the close relationship that has existed between Britain and Cyprus since 1878, and which has continued since Cyprus achieved independence in 1960. We cherish that relationship—indeed, many hon. Members whose constituencies do not contain Cypriot communities take a particular interest in Cyprus and in finding a solution to its continuing division.

I welcome my hon. Friend the Minister's planned visit to Cyprus. Many of us believe that the Cyprus problem cannot truly be understood without visiting the island. On his arrival he will discover that a framework solution has been available since 1974, when the original United Nations resolutions were drafted, and since 1977 and 1979, when high-level agreements were reached. He will also discover that since that time, the UN and the international community have consistently tried to sponsor negotiations. As has been said, the most recent negotiations were brought to a premature end by Mr. Denktash, who refuses to accept the international community's failure to recognise his illegal state.

The Minister will further discover that the sponsored negotiations have not been successfully concluded because the international community has failed to put Cyprus at the top of its agenda. It is undoubtedly true that the international community has not focused on the Cyprus question to the extent that it has focused on numerous other disputes that have occurred in the past 25 or 26 years since the island was invaded. We must

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recognise that the solution lies in Ankara rather than Cyprus itself. In recent discussions with the US Senate, Colin Powell suggested that the United States will take a particular interest in Cyprus. I welcome that because the United States can bring the parties together for fruitful negotiations.

However, negotiations on Cyprus's accession to the European Union can also play a part as a catalyst for bringing together the two communities. As has been said, the main beneficiaries of accession to the European Union would be the Turkish Cypriot community, who have been invited to participate in the negotiations. In the light of the policy that I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will reaffirm today, it is my belief that no third party will veto the final negotiations for Cyprus's accession to the European Community. That will act as a catalyst to bring the parties together to find a solution.

I want to discuss the continued detention in northern Cyprus of Mr. Tsiakourmas, which was mentioned earlier by my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate, and is a matter of great concern to the Cypriot community. My hon. Friend the Minister will be aware that Mr. Tsiakourmas was, in the words of the official investigation, "violently forced" from his car and bundled into another vehicle while driving in the sovereign base area of Dhekelia on 13 December 2000. He was abducted to the Turkish occupied area where he is still being detained.

Mr. Tsiakourmas was travelling in the sovereign base area to pick up Turkish-Cypriot workers who were employed by him on construction sites in the Government controlled area of the island. He has been accused of possession of 1.5 kg of cannabis, for which he was originally remanded in custody for eight days, but he has since been charged with possession with intent to sell. As has been said, a preliminary hearing was conducted on 8 February and his trial is likely to commence on 25 February.

There is additional cause for concern because Mr. Tsiakourmas is a diabetic. Although he has undergone various health checks and was seen by a Hungarian specialist in Nicosia, there remains considerable concern about his deteriorating health. Indeed, he was taken to hospital on 30 January where he has remained. Reports from there suggest that his blood sugar level is dangerously high.

Interestingly, 10 days before Mr. Tsiakourmas was arrested, Mr. Omer Tekugul, a Turkish-Cypriot coffee shop owner, was detained in the sovereign base area on a charge of heroin possession with intent to supply. Mr. Tekugul is currently being tried in Cyprus, and I was interested to note that there have been various attempts by the Turkish-Cypriot authorities to swap Mr. Tekugul for Mr. Tsiakourmas. One must conclude that there was an element of tit-for-tat when Mr. Tsiakourmas was arrested on 13 December.

All attempts to engineer a swap have been wholeheartedly rejected by the Cypriot Government. As my hon. Friend the Minister will know, the investigating authorities in the sovereign base area have interviewed witnesses and staged a reconstruction. Their investigation shows that Mr. Tsiakourmas was taken forcibly, his vehicle was left with its engine running, lights on and door open, and, perhaps more importantly, the incident occurred well within the sovereign base area. The results of the authorities' forensic examination show that there were no drugs in the vehicle at the time Mr. Tsiakourmas was taken. Furthermore, he has an unblemished record and has never been linked to drugs.

Mr. Tsiakourmas was arrested in the sovereign base area, so he has become the responsibility of the British authorities. I know that the high commissioner, Mr. Clay, has made strong representations to Mr. Denktash. Indeed, Sir David Hannay has made representations to the Turkish Cypriots and to the Turkish authorities in Ankara and in London. I am also aware that the Minister met Mrs. Tsiakourmas and has been brought fully up to date with not only the events but the strength of feeling in Cyprus and the United Kingdom about what happened to Mr. Tsiakourmas.

Together with my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate, I want to press the Minister on three main areas. First, there has been some concern about Mr. Tsiakourmas' medical condition. He is a diabetic and has been in hospital since 30 January. We understand from reports from his wife and family, who visit him regularly, that his condition is deteriorating and that he is suffering from considerable depression. What reassurance can the Minister give us that he is being properly cared for?

Secondly, there have been extensive investigations. A report that is with the British authorities goes into considerable detail about the events and about the evidence relating to Mr. Tsiakourmas' innocence. Has that report been made available to the Turkish authorities in order to secure his early release?

Finally, I know that the Government have made strong representations, which I and the Cypriot community welcome, but what further action can the Minister tell us is being taken to ensure that the events that took place in the sovereign base area are followed by the restitution of Mr. Tsiakourmas's freedom and his return to his family in the south of the island?

That case is important because it establishes that the rule of law must apply across the island. It is essential that we, the legitimate authorities in the sovereign base areas, undertake to ensure Mr. Tsiakourmas's release. That will contribute to a better atmosphere in Cyprus. I know that when the Minister goes there he will discover that not only the Cyprus Government but many of the political parties in the Turkish Cypriot community want to foster the good will that exists and develop it into proper negotiations. If we can bring the two communities together with that good will, that could be the catalyst for a process that leads to fruitful negotiations towards resolving the division of the island.

11.57 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): We have had a splendid debate, which has shown an incredible depth of knowledge of the issues from a number of hon. Members with large Cypriot communities in their constituencies. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) for triggering the debate. I know that he has long-held interests in Cyprus, which he referred to in his maiden speech, and his constituents from the Cypriot community should be proud of his continuing efforts to keep raising the issues at Westminster.

An extraordinary change has taken place over the past 15 to 20 years, and many countries are now desperate to join the European Union. It is a tribute to its work and its role that so many countries now want to be part of that community. It is bizarre that, at a time when so many countries want to join, some in this country would rather turn away from it. Cyprus has been on the waiting list for the past 10 years. A number of hon. Members have spoken this morning of their enormous frustration that it is taking so long for new countries to join. Certainly, the Liberal Democrats regard it as a major aspect of foreign policy to speed up EU enlargement. We want to see Cyprus in that early wave of countries, joining as soon as possible.

There are responsibilities not only for the applicants but for the EU itself. We have not said much about the EU's responsibilities in relation to welcoming Cyprus. The EU needs modernising as well as more democracy and less bureaucracy if it is to be able to welcome not only Cyprus but many of the other countries that want to join. As a pro-European, I am frustrated with the mechanisms in Brussels and, just as the EU accessions are a catalyst to help the applicant countries to change, they must also be a catalyst for serious reform in the way in which Brussels operates. Unless that happens, we will end up in gridlock if many more countries join the EU.

The strong principles that the applicants must put in place are set out in the Copenhagen criteria. I want to spend a few moments celebrating the achievements of Cyprus rather than its problems, as it has gone an extraordinarily long way towards meeting many of the criteria. Let us consider some of the requirements, such as satisfying economic and political conditions, guaranteeing democracy, the protection of minorities and a functioning market economy. It is good news for Cyprus.

The progress report on the applicant countries had a great deal of praise for Cyprus. It said:

"Cyprus is a functioning market economy and should be able to cope with competitive pressure and market forces required within the Union."

On administration, it said that

"Cyprus has further strengthened its administrative capacity"

and cited the example of the shipping industry, where much better systems had been put in place to deal with inspection and safety.

Agriculture is a major barrier for several countries that want to join the EU—especially Poland—but the report stated that Cyprus had made good progress. More needs to be done, but it said that Cyprus was going in the right direction. It also said that Cyprus was making progress on the matters of justice and border controls, which are a worry, because it will have an open border with the enlarged community and it is crucial to get that right. We have spoken a lot this morning about difficulties, but it is worth highlighting the progress that has been made.

In its opening assessment of Cyprus, the November 2000 progress report stated:

"The predominant political problem is the continued division of the island, but over the last year important efforts have been made in the search for a political settlement in line with the Accession Partnership. From the fourth round of proximity talks held in September there were encouraging signs that the two sides were engaging in substantive discussion."

Sadly, with the decision to withdraw from the talks, that critical progress seems to have been set back—a matter that several hon. Members have raised this morning. What pressure can the Minister bring to bear to ensure that those talks begin as soon as possible?

A further concern is the progress that Cyprus is making on human rights. Again, the Copenhagen criteria are rightly clear and state the need for the

"stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".

Cyprus has ratified most of the international legal instruments in human rights. We heard this morning about several high-profile problems. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) asked the Minister endless questions about the non-implementation of the European Court of Human Rights ruling on the Loizidou case. I hope that the Minister can reassure us and say how he plans to raise that matter. The hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) has referred many times in the past few months to the case of Mr. Tsiakourmas and again raised the matter forcefully this morning, which is another matter that I hope the Minister will raise in future meetings.

I hope that we can move speedily towards getting the talks set up again. There could be enormous benefits for those who live in the northern part of the region. Their income is a third lower than that of people in the south. The pressure that needs to be brought to bear to make the authorities realise that it is in their people's interests for them to join the European Union is a catalyst that must restart the negotiations. Progress must be made on some key human rights issues. Otherwise, such issues and those concerning the divided nation will set back much of the progress that has been made on economics and infrastructure, on which Cyprus is in the leading pack of countries that could join the European Union. I strongly favour Cyprus's joining, and I hope that we shall be able to make progress as soon as possible.

12.4 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) on having introduced this important debate, and all hon. Members on having made such worthwhile and well-informed contributions. I wish the Minister well on his intended visit to Cyprus.

Given the historical perspective, the question of Cyprus is important for all British politicians and political parties. It has long involved all political parties in the House, and like many other contentious international subjects based on partition or division, it evokes passionate debate.

Cyprus is an island with which the United Kingdom has long historic associations. We enormously value Cyprus's membership of the Commonwealth. Many Cypriots of both communities have settled in Britain and greatly enriched our national life. They are supplemented by many thousands of young Cypriots who come to university here.

Successive British Governments have rightly paid close attention to developments in Cyprus over the past 25 years. We have tried to play our part in Britain in doing whatever we can to promote the interests of peace and stability on the island itself and in the region as a whole. We condemned the invasion in 1974, and we

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drafted and secured the adoption of Security Council resolution 541 in 1984, which declared the Turkish Cypriot declaration of independence legally invalid. That position remains today.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Major), the former Prime Minister, and both his Foreign Secretaries, Lord Hurd and Sir Malcolm Rifkind, specifically raised the future of Cyprus with their Turkish and Greek counterparts. The previous Government appointed the distinguished diplomat Sir David Hannay as our special representative to Cyprus to help bring the two sides together.

We respect the fact that, as guarantors of Cyprus, Greece and Turkey have their own, different views about the status of the island, as do the two Cypriot communities themselves. Our role as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council underlines the importance and dedication of our involvement, especially in view of the personal commitment and involvement of the UN Secretary-General.

The disputes that emerged from the conflict of interests focused attention on Cyprus and the surrounding region. Now, as previously, a settlement is clearly in the interests of both communities on the island. It would also help Greece and Turkey to normalise their relations and would end tragic stories of atrocities and unfairness, displacement from homes and alleged abuses of human rights.

Fortunately, today's debate on Cyprus takes place in a political climate in which there is at least some optimism, in stark contrast to previous parliamentary discussions on Cyprus, which were conducted against a background of discouraging developments. The stand-off over the acquisition of missiles by the Cypriot Government, and the Turkish response, have been succeeded by a new era with greater hope for stability. To some extent, that emerged from the two devastating earthquakes of 1999. The response and generosity of the Greek people to their Turkish neighbours was heartfelt and impressive.

The House has already welcomed the UN initiative announced in September 1998, and resolution 1218, which endorsed it. The UN has begun to try to achieve its aims of reducing tension and promoting progress towards a settlement. President Clerides's decision in December 1998 not to bring the S300 missiles to Cyprus is an example of that, as was the visit of the Greek Foreign Minister to Ankara last year. We now have a series of agreements in the region on tourism, environmental protection, investment and the fight against crime and terrorism. Those are tentative steps, but in the right direction.

In November, the fifth round of the proximity talks was concluded, following a fourth round in New York last September. At that point it was clearly felt that a more substantive phase of the process had been reached with special representative Mr. de Soto. The UN Secretary-General reported to the Security Council that a qualitative step forward had been made. Further progress is now awaited, but we welcome the commitment of the Foreign Minister of Cyprus that the elections in May will be no impediment. We can only continue to urge all concerned to go ahead with the proximity talks—a point made clearly by my hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), who said that it was time to move on.

The Conservative party has strongly supported Cyprus's membership of the EU, and we have also welcomed the decision of the Helsinki European Council in December 1999 to grant Turkey candidate status. More than ever, the EU can have an important role to play, and it would be most unfortunate for the Turkish part of the island if it were to be excluded, as that would not be advantageous to its residents.

The EU is a vessel through which mediation and eventual settlement can be sought between the two opposing sides in the debate. President Clerides has spoken optimistically of the role that the EU can play; he said that he believes that the European factor will play a great role in the achievement of a solution in Cyprus. A settlement will benefit both communities on the island. Everyone wants a resolution to the division, but however desirable that objective may be, it is important that it is not and should not be a condition for EU membership.

Given our close ties of kinship, history and friendship, Britain should continue to do all that it can to ease Cyprus's path into the EU. We welcome the work of President Clerides in this respect, not least his introduction of further market reforms as part of the accession process. The economic success of the Republic of Cyprus has been a remarkable tribute to the entrepreneurial energies of its citizens. It is an extraordinary achievement to have developed the sixth largest merchant fleet in the world. We also welcome the Government's decision to renew Sir David Hannay's mandate as the United Kingdom's special representative in the region.

The British position on Cyprus has been clear for many years. Britain's role remains one of offering advice and providing support for the UN operations on the island and the international attempts to mediate between the two sides. Ultimately, only the two communities can decide what is acceptable and what is likely to last. We encourage all sides to participate actively in the negotiations. We believe that the UN's ideas for a bizonal, bicommunal federal Government provide the best possible basis of achieving a successful united Cyprus, with both communities co-operating freely together with confidence in their future and that of their shared island.

12.12 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Keith Vaz): This has been an excellent and important debate, and I join the hon. Members for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) and for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) in congratulating all those who have taken part—but of course most congratulations must go to my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg) on securing the debate. This is the first time that Cyprus has been discussed in an Adjournment debate for roughly a year.

I was reminiscing about when I first met my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate. It was about 20 years ago, when I saw him at the first Labour party conference that he attended. I never believed that he

would be here and able to speak so passionately on such a subject. He gave a most eloquent speech: one of the best that I have ever heard on the subject. He should be congratulated on the work that he does on behalf of all his constituents—not only those of Cypriot origin—as should all the hon. Members who have spoken.

The hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) sadly had to leave for another engagement; and my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) has always participated in debates on Cyprus. Only Rochford district council separates my hon. Friend's appearances in the Chamber today; he is back again in half an hour to talk about Wandsworth prison. He has a busy day, but he has been able to participate as he always does.

It was good to hear from my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) about the new group established in Bristol. She raised the issue of EU membership, to which I shall also refer.

The hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), who was with me for five years on the Home Affairs Committee, spoke passionately and reminded us of the human consequences of the events of 26 years ago. Sometimes when one reads debates and participates in the Chamber, one forgets that the real issue lies with people with real feelings who have suffered greatly, such as the hon. Gentleman's constituent. He is right to chide the Government and previous Governments; we need him to remind us of the human tragedy underlying global diplomatic issues.

My hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Ms Ryan) mentioned European Union membership, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love). All hon. Members present have a wide knowledge of the subject. I only wish that I could take them all with me when I visit Cyprus in early March. The hon. Member for West Suffolk wished me well, but I cannot even take him with me, because the taxpayer would not understand. I promise hon. Members that I will report back to them on what I have seen, and that I will talk to them all before I go.

The week of my trip to Cyprus will be something of a Cyprus week for me. I will meet the Cypriot community in north London on 5 March, in a meeting organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), which I hope other hon. Members will attend. On 6 March, we will host a reception in the Foreign Office for members of the community to meet Ministers and Members of Parliament, along with communities from other EU applicant countries who are represented in the United Kingdom. During that week, we will give special attention to Cyprus.

I know that you will chide me if I refer to someone sitting in the Gallery, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but the high commissioner for Cyprus is sitting somewhere in this building. She has made an enormous contribution to developing bilateral relationships between Britain and Cyprus. In fact, she is probably in the House of Commons more often than she is in the high commission, ensuring that her country's views are represented at the highest levels. I pay tribute, too, to Edward Clay, our excellent high commissioner in Nicosia, and to the Cypriot community in London.

Cyprus has been an important partner for the United Kingdom, and we have long-standing historical links and strong bilateral ties. The British people have a special affection for Cyprus, as shown by the fact that almost 1 million British visitors regularly choose to go there. Some 50 per cent. of the total number of tourists visiting the island come from the United Kingdom. We have close cultural ties and many Cypriot organisations and individuals choose to study here. We have strong economic ties: this country is the number one trading partner for Cyprus, with approximately 11 per cent. of the market share.

It is an interesting and challenging time for Cyprus, which is engaged in two important processes that will determine its future: the United Nations settlement process and the European Union accession negotiations. All Cypriots have much to gain from a successful conclusion to those processes. I urge hon. Members not to assume that, because those processes are at a crucial stage, the Government can wave a magic wand to resolve a situation that, as the hon. Member for North Thanet said, has gone on for 26 years. That means not that we do not want to try but that there is no instant solution. Both processes depend on careful and patient negotiation. The wrong word in the wrong place could have the wrong effect.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting asked me to outline our vision, which is clear and conclusive. We want to see Cyprus reunited—that is our vision. We continue to believe that the best basis is a bizonal, bicommunal federation. We also want to see Cyprus in the European Union. A just and lasting comprehensive settlement, which reunites the island, remains our central goal, but it is clear that reunification is not a precondition for EU accession, as was set out in the conclusions of the Helsinki European summit of December 1999. The Foreign Secretary reaffirmed that stance when he met Foreign Minister Kasoulides in London last October. When I visit the island in March, I will carry exactly the same message.

Last year, there were signs of real progress in the UN settlement process. The process, which started in December 1999, carried on throughout 2000. The UN Secretary-General has appealed to all concerned to avoid public comment about the delays and details of the negotiation. We shall ensure that the confidentiality of the process is respected. We welcomed remarks made last summer by the Secretary-General's special representative, Alvaro de Soto, that the change of gear for which we had been hoping had taken place, and that both parties had started to address the substantive issues at the heart of Cyprus's problems.

It is disappointing to consider the negative Turkish Cypriot reaction to Kofi Annan's statement at the end of the last session of talks in November, and the subsequent statements by the Turkish Government and Mr. Denktash that the proximity talks could not continue on the same basis. In our view, the Turkish Cypriots have much to gain from a settlement. We regret that they have not yet responded to Kofi Annan's invitation to the parties to meet him again in early 2001.

If there are misunderstandings, or if clarifications are required, those issues are best resolved through a continuation of the process. We have heard nothing that could justify a refusal to continue with those important talks. We have made it clear to all involved that the United Kingdom continues to give every support to the UN process and the efforts of the Secretary-General and his special representative. We hope for a continuation of

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the process in the near future. We also expect both parties to come to the table in a spirit of give and take, prepared to negotiate a just and lasting solution.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work closely with Greece and Turkey, which have important roles to play in the Cyprus settlement process. Relations between them can do much to create a positive climate. We warmly welcome the moves for closer relations between Greece and Turkey. I want to commend especially the efforts of the Greek Foreign Minister, George Papandreou. We hope that the process of dialogue will continue.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton came to see me at short notice to discuss the case to which he drew attention. When I met Mrs. Tsiakourmas in London, in January, I left her in no doubt about our interest in this case, and our concern for her husband's welfare. Other hon. Members have also raised the issue with me. The Foreign Secretary sent a message to Mr. Denktash, and our high commissioner has made strong protests to him about the circumstances of the arrest. The Foreign Secretary also sent a message to Foreign Minister Cem, and we have raised our concerns with the Turkish authorities in Nicosia, Ankara and London. Our high commissioner in Nicosia remains in close contact with the family and the UN concerning the health and welfare of Mr. Tsiakourmas. I understand that the preliminary hearing into his case is currently under way. We will continue to do all that we can to ensure that the case is resolved in a just and satisfactory manner. We share my hon. Friend's concern at the way in which the issue arose, and we have not been silent. We have been very active and will continue to be so.

On the negotiations for Cyprus to join the European Union, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North referred with passion, I can assure her that they are progressing well. Cyprus has now closed 17 of the chapters of the acquis communautaire, and the United Kingdom, and the Prime Minister in particular, continue to champion enlargement. We want to see Cyprus in the European Union as soon as possible. The Prime Minister made it clear during his speech in Warsaw on 6 October last year that the process of accession should be speeded up, and we want to ensure that that happens.

We want new member states to participate in the 2004 European elections and to have a seat at the table at the next intergovernmental conference, but it is for the countries concerned to reach a conclusion in their negotiations with Commissioner Verheugen. Britain's role is to ensure that people understand that we want new applicants to join as soon as possible. That is why I cannot understand the Conservative party's policy. I do not want to make a partisan point, but those who believe that there should be a referendum on ratification of the Nice treaty would delay considerably Cyprus's accession to the European Union. I shall say no more about that, because I see the hon. Member for West Suffolk stirring in his seat.

In December, the Nice council agreed that we should have a road map for admission. The next 18 months are important, and enlargement will be a key issue under the Swedish presidency, which will want to examine progress at the Stockholm European Council in March. When I go to Stockholm next Thursday, I shall certainly raise the points that have been made today.

We all know that the Cyprus problem is one of the most difficult in the world to solve. That does not mean that the Government are not committed to ensuring a solution. I join the hon. Member for West Suffolk in commending the work of Sir David Hannay, who has a difficult task. I urge hon. Members to keep in close contact with Sir David, because he is keen to meet hon. Members to discuss confidentially what is happening, but they will understand that he cannot discuss the details of the process.

A just and lasting settlement would bring immense benefits to ordinary Cypriots and other countries in the area. Cyprus's continued division is a tragedy that must be overcome to secure a future offering lasting peace, security and prosperity for all. The Government remain firm in their commitment to finding a solution to the Cyprus question and to working with all those involved to achieve that. We must remember that, as we were reminded today by so many hon. Members, all of whom spoke with passion, behind the global negotiations and details are the men and women whom we have all met. They should tell their constituents that the Government really care. The pace may sometimes seem too slow, but officials in the Foreign Office and Ministers want to ensure a just and lasting solution. I hope that all hon. Members will encourage their constituents to meet me on 5 March when I meet members of the community. That will provide a unique opportunity to discuss their concerns with them and I hope that many hon. Members from all parties will participate in that meeting.

Rochford District Council

12.29 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): It is a pleasure and an honour—[*Interruption.*] I am surprised that hon. Members are leaving the Chamber, because this is an important and significant issue.

You will be aware, Mr. Winterton, that my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Dr. Clark), who shows great integrity in all his activities, has been a champion of Rochford over the years. Unfortunately, he cannot be here today because he is chairing a vital conference on science and the general election, which aims to ensure that science is given appropriate consideration. He greatly regrets his absence and has asked me to apologise on his behalf.

Adjournment debates are used for all sorts of purposes: to promote a cause, to identify insoluble problems and lay responsibility for them on Governments, and to play at politics and blame the Administration for the bad weather. On hearing my arguments, I hope that the Minister will accept that I am doing none of those things, and that the problems faced by Rochford district council are serious and on-going. There is a genuine need to review the matter and to deal with what is one of the greatest injustices that I have encountered since entering this place some 37 years ago.

When constituency boundaries were changed at the last election, four areas were added to my constituency: Rochford, Great Wakering, Barling and the island of Foulness, all of which fall within Rochford district council in the county of Essex. Southend, of course, is a unitary authority that is entirely divorced from Essex. Such is the strength and commitment of the people of Southend that I am sure that they would rejoice at the opportunity to leave not only the county of Essex but the European Union, particularly in the light of the previous debate.

Rochford, however, is a different kind of place. When Southend was negotiating its independence, informal approaches were made to discover whether neighbouring Rochford would like to come along with us. The response was unambiguous: Rochford did not want to join any other authority, and if ever it had to do so, the last—the very last—place it would join was Southend-on-Sea. Such disputes have gone on for many years. A wonderful and stimulating reformed sinner established a group of churches in Rochford known as the peculiar people. After achieving so much in Rochford, the group embarked on a missionary venture to Southend, which is five miles away. However, on arrival they were stoned by the people of Southend and advised that, if it was sinners that they were looking for, they should return speedily to Rochford.

Even today, there are problems such as disputed territories. I had the pleasure of attending a meeting in Rochford two weeks ago, at which the potential of Southend airport was discussed. I was advised that there was no such place and that I must have been referring to Rochford aerodrome. There is even a political difference between the two areas. In May last year, every seat in the Southend, East part of my constituency elected a Conservative councillor. However, after the constituency was extended I did not have a single Conservative councillor in Rochford, although I did have one in Great Wakering and Foulness, and in a recent by-election we managed to win one seat in Rochford. You will therefore appreciate, Mr. Winterton, that the marriage was not the easiest of enterprises.

However, since the last election I have done my best to get to know the new areas and to assess their problems and the opportunities that they present. I have been glad to co-operate with borough officials and councillors who represent Rochford, Great Wakering, Foulness and Barling, regardless of political party. Happily, we have an excellent chief executive in Mr. Warren, and excellent officials. In fairness, some of the councillors are also excellent. There is the splendid Roy Pearson, who is a Conservative councillor in Great Wakering; Peter Stebbing, who is a Labour councillor and chairman of the parish council; and Mr. Fox, who is a Labour county councillor.

I found that Rochford had a frightening problem with financing. On studying the figures in detail, I was horrified to discover that it was by far the worst financed borough in Essex and one of the worst in the United Kingdom—11th worst by my calculation. Rochford is a large authority. It includes Rochford, the borough that I represent, as well as places such as Rayleigh, Canewdon, Paglesham, Ashingdon and many other areas, which are ably represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh and others.

What are my grounds for complaint? I know that figures can often be stretched and misrepresented if one refers only to direct Government grants and not to the money that comes from the business rates, and if one fails to take account of population changes and talks up the standard spending assessment as though it were a grant. I have done my best to help the Minister obtain the fairest possible figures over eight years, covering Conservative and Labour Governments, to make it abundantly clear that I am not trying to play politics.

Essex consists of 12 local councils, including places such as Braintree, Uttlesford, Castle Point, Colchester, Tendring, Basildon and Harlow. This year, the standard spending assessment per head—the amount that councils are allowed to spend per head of population—is £75 for Rochford, and it is £78.85 next year. In every other part of Essex the figure is much higher. Our £75 this year compares with £124 in Harlow, £100.93 in Tendring, £93 in Colchester and £95 in Epping Forest. Next year, Rochford's £78 compares with £131 in Harlow, £114 in Basildon, £107 in Tendring and so on. Of course, circumstances vary, but why does it cost almost twice as much to provide the identical services in Harlow as in Rochford? It does not seem right or fair.

Let us forget about total spending and look at the grants that are provided—the external support coming to Rochford. That is even worse. The figure for rate support grant— the money that the Government hand out to local councils—is unbelievable. In 1994-95 Rochford received £21 a head. The Government sent a little cheque to Rochford and said, "That's your money". In 1997-98 that was cut to £15.70 a head, in 1998-99 it was £10 a head and next year it will be £6 a head—down from £21 to £6.

In fairness, it would be misleading to mention only those figures because the Government also hand out a share of the non-domestic rate, which used to be known

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

as the business rate. In 1994, the figure was £32.24 a head. What is it now, following the massive cut in the rate support grant and the big increase in prices and inflation? I was shocked to discover that it was £32 in 1999 and that next year it will be £37.55.

If we add up all the money from the Government, the grant and the business rates, the total in 1994 was £53.30 a head. Next year it will be £43.67 a head. I calculate, therefore, that the cash coming to Rochford per head of population over the past eight years has been cut by 18 per cent.

What have been the consequences for Rochford? It has had to exercise the most astonishing caution in its spending. Over the eight years that I have mentioned, under both Conservative and Labour Governments, its budget increased by only 10 per cent., about 1 per cent. a year. During that time, prices have been soaring and the increase in demand for local government services has been astonishing. However, even with a penny-pinching policy on spending, the council has had to force up the rates massively because the money coming from Government has been cut so much. During those eight years, the increase in the rates has been 65 per cent., which is about 8 per cent. a year.

We know that Governments of both parties are never unhappy when local rates go up rather than national taxes, but in the case of Rochford, the ratepayers have been taken to the cleaners. How can the Minister justify an 8 per cent. rise in rates for an area which has had to slash its spending in real terms? Is there any reason why Rochford should be punished in this way? It is not a spendthrift council and it never has been. On looking through the records, I see that it was one of the first councils in Britain to privatise services such as refuse collection, street cleaning, grounds maintenance, leisure management, facilities management and buildings repair and maintenance. It has been so efficient that Lady Thatcher would be proud.

Is it because the residents are fed up with Rochford council? Strangely, despite the miserable treatment that they have had from Governments of both parties, a recent opinion poll showed that it is the highest regarded authority in Essex. In other words, local people think that it is doing a good job despite its difficulties.

Perhaps things have changed for the better with new Labour. I think that the Government will accept that until this year they have not—in fact, they have continued to get worse. In fairness, although this year's grant change is minimal, there has been a 5.1 per cent. increase in SSA, which is the amount that the council can spend.

That sounds good, but the population has increased, so the actual increase per head is only 3.7 per cent. What is most worrying is the extra spending that Government policy is forcing on the local council. Government funding has increased by £168,000, but that must be compared with the additional cost of the council's new responsibilities: £35,000 for the concessionary fares scheme; £30,000 for contaminated land investigations; £46,000 for the benefits verification framework; £69,000 for the external best value inspection and audit; £20,000 for homelessness; £96,000 for recycling, stage 1; and £157,000 for additional staffing to meet those responsibilities. Therefore, we are not only back at square one, but a great deal behind.

The council has survived only by utilising balances, securing savings, forcing up the rates and cutting back services. That is not fair and there is a need for an urgent review. Rochford is in no sense an affluent area. Of course, there are some lovely houses and wealthy families, but there is also a fair amount of poverty, deprivation and social need.

I hope that the Minister will think about what I have said today. I hope that she will check the figures I have quoted and examine the total cost. I hope that she will accept that Rochford has been unfairly hammered and deserves a better deal. You will know from your considerable and splendid experience in the House, Mr. Winterton, that I try to explode only when something is very unfair. I have got into lots of trouble, but I hope that the Minister will accept that I am genuinely not trying to play politics. The problem has worsened under Governments of both parties. Rochford has had an unfair deal and I wonder if the Minister could think about a way of giving it a fairer deal. That would be reasonable and it is something that should happen quickly. I thank the hon. Lady for listening so patiently. I am only sorry that the hon. Members who were talking about the problems of Cyprus did not realise that Rochford has big problems that demand equal attention. I hope that the Minister will think about what I have said.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Ms Beverley Hughes): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir T. Taylor) for giving us the opportunity to debate the local government settlement as it applies in Rochford in the coming year. I pay tribute to the way in which he is looking after the interests of his constituency, particularly those new areas that he has acquired since the general election. He has put a great deal of effort into getting to know them.

I accept the genuineness of the hon. Gentleman's position and the way in which he has tried to pursue the issue as he sees it. I cannot agree with all he said, but I accept that he is approaching the matter in a neutral, non-party political way and that he is concerned for the interests of the people of Rochford. Before I go into any detail—some matters are technical as the hon. Gentleman acknowledged—I must place the issue in the context of the local government revenue expenditure as it has panned out over the past few years.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that, in the context of the 2000 spending review, when considering the settlements for local authorities, we have genuinely tried—and succeeded—to reverse the position of local authorities generally in terms of the amount of cash going in. Our priority has obviously been education and social services. Shire districts, such as Rochford, depend principally on another section of the settlement—the environmental, protective and cultural services block. It does not receive funding for educational services because it does not provide any.

This year's settlement alone provides a real increase of just under 2 per cent. in the provision of services within that block. Local government as a whole—and

Rochford, in particular—will know that provision in that area has stood still because of a lack of funding for many years. In real terms, since 1997, there has been a 14 per cent. increase in funding to local authorities compared with a 7 per cent. cut in the four years before 1997-98. In the overall context, there can be little argument that we are providing greater levels of investment, and there is general agreement that the settlement provides welcome improvements in the money going to local authorities. It should mean that most local authorities can settle their council tax rise at a lower level this year, as they have done during the past two years.

I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman wants to know the details for Rochford. The current position for this year is that Rochford will receive £3.418 million in general grant, which is an increase of 3.9 per cent. The first point to note is that that is comparable with the average for shire districts. Indeed, it sits exactly at the average for shire districts, which is a 3.9 per cent. increase in general grant. The total SSA increase for the next financial year is just more than £6.1 million, an increase of 5.1 per cent. That is higher than the average increase in SSA for shire districts. The average SSA is 4.6 per cent. Rochford's SSA for the environmental, protective and cultural services block, its main source of funding, increased by 5 per cent. compared with the average for shire districts of 4.5 per cent.

In the context of shire districts as a whole, Rochford is not doing too badly for the next financial year. However, I understand that the hon. Gentleman is worried about Rochford's funding over a longer period. It is a fact, as he said, that, from 1995-96 to 1998-99, there was a pattern of decline in the total standard spending assessment received by the district. I will not deal with the pattern before the 1998-99 settlement as it was the province of the previous Government, although I understand that there were methodological changes affecting Rochford and that the decrease was not due to data.

The decrease in 1998-99 occurred because of a methodological change that was undertaken at the request of, and with the consent of, the local government community. In the first settlement that we introduced, we had to change the deprivation indices used in the district services environmental, protective and cultural services block methodology because they were not representative of the amount of deprivation in an area and were widely criticised throughout local government.

Before that year, that block had included two composite indices of deprivation, known as the economic and social indices, which were shown to be statistically correlated with the need for higher expenditure in deprived areas and had, therefore, been used as proxies, to skew SSA allocation towards those deprived areas. Concern was expressed about the validity of some of the variables contained in the indicators in measuring deprivation. Two of the indicators, in respect of homelessness and temporary and non-permanent accommodation, were heavily criticised as being too loosely defined, and more dependent on local authority spending decisions than on actual need in an area.

Extensive consultation was done on the issue, and we reviewed the indicators used in those two indices. As a result, with consensus and consultation, two new indices were developed that were found to have a much better statistical correlation than the previous ones. They were introduced into the district services EPCS block in 1998-99. Because they were new, they produced a slightly different SSA distribution. Indeed, the change was intended to establish a better fit between the indices and deprivation.

It is true that Rochford was one of the authorities that lost rather than gained following the introduction of those new indices, which were largely responsible for the 4.3 per cent. SSA reduction that Rochford experienced that year. However, since then, Rochford's SSA has increased each year. I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's claim that that has only happened this year, but I appreciate that the increase may not be as fast as he would like. The main reason for the increase is that the Government have been able to put more resources into local government generally.

We should consider the years subsequent to the methodological change that affected the area. During 1999-2000, in the next settlement, the SSA increase was 1.2 per cent., and would have been higher but for data changes—that is, Rochford lost some aspects of population. In 2000-01 and 2001-02, there were no SSA methodological changes that affected shire district councils because we had stated that, during the three-year review of revenue grant distribution, no methodological changes would be made. In 2000-01, Rochford's SSA increase fell slightly, by 0.6 per cent., due to data changes—there were changes in the population groups fed into the formula—and to larger than average decreases in measures of deprivation. This year, Rochford benefits substantially, due to a larger than average increase in population—1.3 per cent. compared to a national average of 0.5 per cent.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned two specific issues. He considered funding in terms of spending per head in Rochford compared to other parts of Essex and the country and spoke about what he said were extra spending requirements in Rochford. As I have explained to the hon. Gentleman in correspondence, many spending pressures and measures of social deprivation are used in the SSA formula. Rochford has a level lower than the Essex average on virtually all the indicators, such as housing benefit, morbidity, mortality, overcrowding and income support claimants. Rochford has fewer of those problems in its population than other parts of Essex, and that is why it receives a lower SSA than its Essex neighbours. Although Rochford has its share of less affluent areas, the borough as a whole has less deprivation than its neighbours as measured by those indicators. Harlow, for example, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, has three times the rate of housing benefit claimants of Rochford. Tendring has approximately twice the unemployment rate of Rochford. Those figures highlight the differences in cost pressures between the boroughs. That explains the differences in spending per head: other parts of Essex face higher cost pressures to meet the needs of the population.

The hon. Gentleman also contrasted the increase in Rochford's SSA for the next financial year with various items of what he calls extra spending that he argues are being forced on the council by Government policy. Although central Government may lay down standards or outcomes that we want to achieve, we rarely direct

[Ms Beverley Hughes]

local authorities to achieve those results in only one approved way with one specific level of expenditure. It follows that it is a central feature of the local govt funding system that most funding is not ring-fenced for a particular purpose, but paid in the form of general grant. Increases in funding for new responsibilities are usually included in the general grant and it is up to local authorities to decide how they will deliver the better services that we all want.

I acknowledge that the SSA formula can never match exactly the circumstances of each local authority; some will feel that they have done well and others that they have done not so well. The hon. Gentleman may think that Rochford falls into the second category, although I should tell him that during the long consultation period, Rochford made no representations to me about any aspect of the proposed settlement. Until we reached the final settlement, we did not hear from Rochford about any fears about the proposed level of funding.

I assume that the figures given by the hon. Gentleman for cost pressures facing Rochford are council estimates. It is for councils to assess individually how best to meet the pressures on them and the needs of their local residents. I have no way of knowing whether the estimates that he cited are reasonable, but in any case it is for the council to decide how to spend the money that it has been given. We are confident that nationally we have provided sufficient resources to meet the costs of any new responsibilities. Those sums are generally included in the block—for example, we have estimated the increased costs of the statutory minimum concessionary scheme that the hon. Gentleman mentioned as being £54 million, which has gone to local authorities as additional money in the block.

The settlement for Essex is also relevant, because Essex provides services directly to the people of Rochford. For the forthcoming year, the total grant for Essex—general grant and ring-fenced grant—will increase by 7.3 per cent., together with additional spending money.

Sir Teddy Taylor *rose—*

Ms Hughes: I am in my last minute, and although I do not like to say no to the hon. Gentleman, I must draw to a conclusion. I understand his points but I also believe that Rochford has had a fair settlement in the context of the general increase in funding for local authorities that we have tried to provide.

Sir Teddy Taylor: If the Minister has time, would it be possible for her to visit Rochford? The people of Rochford would be grateful, and I am sure that it would be of great benefit.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I am sure that the Minister has heard that. We must now move on to the next debate.

Wandsworth Prison

1 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I welcome the opportunity to open this short debate on Wandsworth prison, which is in my constituency. I have visited the prison many times over the years, and have had debates in the House and asked many questions about it. It is an old building, and over the years there have been changes in the role that it plays in the prison system. At present, the prisoner roll at Wandsworth is 1,300 inmates.

Over the years, the prison has often been criticised, sometimes rightly and sometimes wrongly. I have read several times the report on the prison by the chief inspector of prisons for England and Wales. I am talking not about the Wandsworth prison of yesteryear but about the prison that I have seen on my visits, and the prison that my right hon. Friend the Minister and I saw when we visited it in the latter part of last year.

Last week, the press and television gave great coverage to the speech made by the Director-General of the Prison Service, Martin Narey, at the Prison Service conference 2001. He was highly critical of many aspects that still exist in the prison system. He is right. I know it, and my right hon. Friend the Minister knows it. What did the director-general say about Wandsworth? He said that Stephen Rimmer, the governor,

"has empowered an alienated staff, producing striking attitudinal change and as a result has made massive improvements, symbolised for me by the transformation of the segregation unit. I must be the first Director General for some time to await a Wandsworth report with optimism."

I welcome those comments, as do the Prison Officers Association and the board of visitors. In Stephen Rimmer, a young man, the prison has a constructive, progressive and fair governor. Those qualities are reflected in everything that he does as governor and in his dealings with officers and inmates in the day-to-day life at the prison. I have seen him at work, using those skills, on visits to the prison.

I also warmly congratulate the prison officers at Wandsworth. Their work is difficult and sometimes dangerous, but they do an excellent job. They show good will and are totally committed to the changes taking place. The board of visitors and the chairman, Mr. Akerman, deserve great credit for their time and commitment, week by week, in the prison. As I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister would agree, the board of visitors spends many hours each week in the prison. That is work that no Home Office, under any Government, would be able to do, in terms of either time or cost. I am sure that that applies to prisons throughout the country.

I have commented on Martin Narey's remarks. When the chief inspector of prisons reported in December 1999, there were 88 recommendations, which were translated by the prison into a 147-point action plan. All those action points have been taken up and are either completed or in the process of being completed. That has been done with the full support of the governor, prison officers and the board of visitors.

Those of us who take an interest in prisons know that the worst aspect for prison inmates is the time that they spend in their cells. To Wandsworth's credit, it has increased the number of hours per week that inmates are out of their cells, and that applies to all prisoners. More provision has been made for exercise, association and phone calls. As we all know from our daily lives, making a phone call to family or friends is crucial.

The role played by each of the prison wings and their inmates, be they short-term or long-term prisoners, has been enhanced. The induction system for inmates entering prison has been improved, and programmes are being developed for resettlement and advice on housing and employment opportunities on leaving prison.

Each month, the governor, Mr. Rimmer, meets prisoner representatives from each of the prison wings for a general discussion of prison issues, and he should be commended for that. The gym, which as we all know can be popular with men in prison, is now open at weekends, which is greatly appreciated. The governor and his staff have revised the prison's incentive and earnings schemes, which are, again, a matter of great importance to someone serving a prison sentence.

When the next inspection of the prison takes place, I am sure that striking comments will be made about the major changes that have taken place in the operation, care and structure of what was the segregation unit. Family visits have been introduced to keep families together during difficult times. As we all know, if a loved one is in prison, enormous stresses and strains can be placed on the family relationships.

I am also delighted to be able to say that Wandsworth has excellent prison officers, both men and women, some 11 per cent. of whom come from an ethnic minority background, although they were born here and this is their home. I warmly welcome that, as, I am sure, does my right hon. Friend the Minister. The prison has an excellent race relations organisation, and the officer responsible for it does a wonderful job. All those developments are supported not only by the governor, who, to his credit, initiated many of them, but by prison officers and the board of visitors.

Another important development has taken place at Wandsworth, as in other prisons. There are

> "Sustained challenges to unacceptable behaviour—5 staff currently suspended, 2 sacked, everyone fully aware that any violence or threat of violence to prisoners (or colleagues) will not be tolerated under any circumstances".

That is the stated policy of the governor, and I am sure that we all welcome it warmly.

As we all know, circumstances can change if the commitment is made. That commitment for change has, as I briefly outlined, been made at Wandsworth prison, which looks to the future and the way forward. I know that my right hon. Friend the Minister is also committed to that, but the future will not just happen: it must be planned and financed. The prison operates on a tight budget. What will the budget be this year, and will the staff and governor be asked to make any cuts in their budget for the coming year?

When I last visited the prison, I attended the monthly meeting of the board of visitors and we discussed various issues. Much has been done concerning education, but much more could be done. We all know that, sadly, men and women who are sent to prison often have poor educational ability, but if that can be improved, their whole lives start to improve, not only while they are in prison but when they leave. I believe, as does the board of visitors, that education must be a top priority in prisons. It costs about £19,000 a year to keep someone in Wandsworth prison, and if education facilities are provided to help people to find employment, the chances are that they will not return to prison. Wandsworth wants to develop its education facilities. How does my right hon. Friend expect that aspect of Wandsworth's continuing development programme to progress?

Asylum seekers are now a major issue. Some 500 asylum seekers will be housed in prisons throughout the country because of immigration irregularities. I understand that there will be 60 at Wandsworth, which will cause pressure and strain on the system, as it already houses some 250 foreign nationals. Asylum seekers should not be put in prison without proper facilities, because they will have special needs. Asylum seekers may have broken immigration rules, but they are not convicted criminals and it is crucial to learn from my right hon. Friend what funding will be available for the extra stresses, strains and responsibilities that Wandsworth prison will be asked to take on.

Prisoners used to be housed in police cells, and successive Home Secretaries said that that was not a problem. However, there was indeed a problem, and in time the practice was stopped. I speak in friendship and with a desire for the progress to which my right hon. Friend is committed, but I do not believe that this aspect of policy has been properly thought through or properly funded.

Another matter that concerns us greatly in Wandsworth is category C prisoners. Wandsworth currently has about 480 such prisoners, many of whom are waiting to be moved to other prisons. The governor has told me that category C prisoners often have to wait 12 to 18 months before being moved. My right hon. Friend's Department must examine the matter and find out why there is a delay in moving them.

At present, some 210 inmates are working in Wandsworth. The hope is that during this year there will be opportunities for another 200 to work. That can only be welcomed. We have improved the safety of inmates and reduced self-harm through the national pilot scheme. That, too, can only be warmly welcomed and again is fully supported by all sections of the staff and the board of visitors.

As I have said, Wandsworth prison has changed greatly, and all the changes have been supported, but one issue remains: staffing levels. That may apply not only to Wandsworth but to many other prisons in London and this part of the country. As my right hon. Friend knows, there are serious problems of staff recruitment and retention. I should be interested to hear what he thinks can be done about that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to have this short debate, which outlines the changes that have taken place: changes that, as I have repeatedly said, have been supported by the governor, the POA and the board of visitors. I am glad to have been able to put on record the support for the efforts that the governor has made, and will continue to make, to make Wandsworth one of our model prisons.

1.16 pm

The Minister of State, Home Office (Mr. Paul Boateng): My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) brings to this subject a lifetime in the House of championing the cause of Wandsworth prison and, at the same time, of constantly challenging that institution to improve its game. His tribute to the governor, the staff and the work being done there is therefore all the more valuable, because he is a not uncritical friend of that institution or, quite properly, of the Prison Service.

We have had an opportunity to hear of the gains made in Wandsworth recently in improving regimes, conditions, management and industrial relations between the management and the staff, and all credit goes to those who have been responsible for bringing about those improvements. My hon. Friend rightly singles out the governor, Stephen Rimmer. I would add a word of recognition for the Prison Officers Association chairman, Richie Keller, who has demonstrated commendable qualities of leadership.

You will know, Mr. Winterton, that to bring about change in an institution is no easy matter. It requires determination and resolve as well as a willingness to face and speak some unpalatable truths. That has happened in Wandsworth, and we should reflect on the lessons that the Prison Service can learn about how best to bring about change. Although we have seen marked improvements at Wandsworth, there is no room for complacency in the Prison Service. That is why the director general made the speech that he did at the recent Prison Service conference.

On Wandsworth's immediate future, I assure my hon. Friend that it will have to make its fair contribution to the efficiency savings that the service as a whole must make. Discipline has led to improved management across the service. Wandsworth can expect to gain from the additional resources that the Government are putting into prison education. Today, the Minister for Education and Employment, Baroness Blackstone, and I launched a major joint initiative for Wormwood Scrubs—another improving institution that has had its problems—involving her Department and mine. New resources amounting to some £17 million over three years will be invested in prison education.

Prison education is linked specifically to addressing the numeracy and literacy deficits that affect inmates throughout the prison system. Some 60 per cent. of inmates have numeracy and literacy deficits that disqualify them from 94 per cent. of jobs. We are putting new resources at the disposal of prison education in order to improve basic numeracy and literacy skills. Those resources also form part of a custody-to-work initiative to help inmates make the transition from a custodial to a community context, so that on leaving prison they have a hope of finding gainful employment. Whether they have an actual job to go to or an appointment for one, former inmates will have the back-up of the Employment Service and, where necessary, of the further education establishments in the area to which they are returning. Wandsworth will benefit from that concerted effort.

Wandsworth will also benefit from our additional investment in prison health care. Given that this issue is dear to your heart, Mr. Winterton, you will know that it has long been neglected. However, with the full support and co-operation of colleagues in the Department of Health, we are tackling it in a manner that requires the national health service and the prison health service to work together for the first time in a coherent and focused way to ensure that prison health care receives the necessary investment in personnel and resources.

Importantly, there must be through-care from the prison health service into the wider mental health service. There are far too many in our jails whose main problem is one of mental health. Throughput from prison health care into mainstream NHS mental health facilities is particularly important. There will be new, additional moneys to enable Wandsworth to improve conditions, the quality of health care and the environment of its health care centre. Moreover, there will be additional resources for mental health care and psychiatric care, and for the introduction of community psychiatric workers who will work on the wings. That is good news for Wandsworth, and is in addition to the £16 million that it is due to receive.

The good work that Stephen Rimmer has started must continue and my hon. Friend and I had the opportunity to see that in action during our visits to the establishment. Central to that is the involvement of the wider community, including the board of visitors, to which my hon. Friend rightly paid tribute, and voluntary sector organisations that introduce programmes into prisons. I saw one recently that dealt with the unresolved issues that many prisoners and others suffer in terms of their relationship with their parents and which may have contributed to their offending. Innovative and challenging approaches from the voluntary sector and the prison officers are important and contribute to protecting the public by reducing reoffending. We want to build on that with mentoring and with closer community links between local businesses and prisons to aid resettlement. There will be a continuing need to ensure that Wandsworth develops those links with the wider community.

I want to refer to two matters on which Wandsworth will continue to be challenged. It must bear its fair share of the increased number of immigration detainees in prison. The Government are determined to increase the number of immigration offenders and failed asylum seekers who are removed from the United Kingdom. That is our duty to the people we serve and to the maintenance of confidence in the integrity and reliability of the immigration and nationality system. That means that we must hold a number of immigration detainees in Wandsworth prison.

I assure my hon. Friend that, in the longer term, we intend to reduce the use of prisons for holding such detainees. In the meantime, higher levels of absconding make it necessary to detain people in prison and we are determined to maintain our capacity to do so. My hon. Friend the Minister of State, Home Office will ensure that the immigration and nationality directorate puts in place the services that are necessary to meet the special needs of that inmate population, including interpreters and immigration service surgeries.

I commend the work being done at Wandsworth, not least by Mr. Hindpal Singh Bhui who won the Butler trust award, to ensure the welfare of foreign national inmates. That work has been of enormous value and we want immigration detainees to benefit from it.

Wandsworth is an improving jail and the commitment and dedication of staff and management alike and the active involvement of my hon. Friend and the local community will ensure that that continues. The service as a whole can learn lessons from Wandsworth, which continues to play its part in meeting the challenges that face the service. It is a good-news story and I hope that it receives the coverage that it deserves. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for enabling the debate to take place.

Flood Defences (South Devon)

1.29 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I want to discuss sea defences and flooding in the west country because, in the past year, global warming and changes in the weather pattern have seriously affected the communication corridors linking the entire south-west with the rest of Britain.

The railway embankments between Exeter and Tiverton Parkway have collapsed, particularly at Cowley bridge and Stafford bridge, as a result of river flooding closing the main railway line from Exeter to the rest of the country. I have been one of the passengers who have been regularly bussed along what are already congested roads to reach my destinations. What is the point of spending two and a half hours on a train to be turfed out at Taunton railway station and put on a bus that travels along the M5? We may as well go by bus all the way from Victoria coach station, which is about a quarter of the price of the railway fare.

A few weeks ago, a landslip closed the main line at Teignmouth. An 80-tonne boulder and 10,000 tonnes of cliff rubble had to be removed from the railway track before the mainline track could be re-opened. As for Dawlish on the main railway line, for many years the sea defences have been under threat with spring high tides damaging the rail embankment and destroying the track. Over the past couple of months, the main line between Penzance, Plymouth, Bristol and London has been closed, either because of floods outside Exeter, cliff slip around Teignmouth or the constant battering of the sea at Dawlish Warren. That is a regular occurrence, not an isolated incident. The number of times that I have jumped on a bus, having started my journey on a train, is too many to recall.

More recently, storm damage at Slapton sands has closed the A379, a road that links the two communities of Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. That latest catastrophe drives home the long-term problems presented by global warming, particularly the predicted rise in sea levels. It is clear that any long-term solution to global warming will come too late to halt the dramatic change in weather patterns and the predicted rise in sea level. Expert opinion suggests that for every 3 ft rise in the sea levels, more than 500 ft of foreshore could be lost in areas such as Slapton. The consequences for south Devon of such a rise, coupled with a switch from the prevailing south westerly winds, the easterly gales and other changes, could sever the existing mainline rail link outside Exeter, at Teignmouth, Dawlish, Tiverton and places between. Some road networks could be severely disrupted, too.

For at least a decade, it has been my view that an alternative rail route between Exeter and Plymouth is long overdue. Those with a branch-line mentality—and they are numerous—are shortsighted in suggesting that all that is needed is a rail bypass of Dawlish and Teignmouth. A more radical and ambitious vision would see a new line running along the A38 with a tunnel through Haldon hill. Provided that the track is there and that First Great Western is allowed to operate at the speeds it would like, it would make a journey time of two and a half hours between London and Plymouth. We must link Plymouth to London by rail in that time.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

An alternative would be to rebuild the Okehampton line to Plymouth, which was removed during the Beeching cuts. I am not hung up about where the new railway line goes, but it must go somewhere other than along such a wonderful tourist track that was built many years ago, when Brunel had the vision to lay a track to Penzance. Small-minded people whinge about making Newton Abbot and Totnes stations less important, because they will be bypassed by the new line. They are incapable of seeing the bigger picture. There is no other option if the west country is to survive as a major player. Bristol to Plymouth should be an important business corridor, as London is to Bristol, and that could be the case if it were not for the lack of vision and the branch-line mentality. Communities could be built along the road and the rail infrastructure with employment opportunities close by. In the meantime, planners persist in building doughnut rings of executive homes around what are already poorly served communities and small market towns.

On 11 and 12 January this year, something significant happened. Easterly storms coincided with spring tides to devastate a section of the A379 at Slapton sands near Strete Gate, undermining the foundations of some of the two-mile stretch known as the Slapton line and cutting off communities in my constituency as well as connections between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. Local historian, Anne Born, explained that the shingle barrier is about 1,800 years old. The road or "the line", as it is called, was probably so named when the turnpike was created in 1856 and was originally a walkway across the sand ridge. The first artificial road surface was based on faggots or reeds and was metalled in about 1920, at first with a dry bound macadam road and later a bitumen road.

The beach was used as a practice ground for the Normandy landings. Three thousand people in the area were evacuated at the end of 1943 to make way for 15,000 troops arriving for battle exercises. A 20 ft obelisk was erected by the American Government beside Slapton beach as a tribute to those who gave up their homes for the war effort and to commemorate those who sadly died during those exercises. The monument has had to be dismantled following the storm as a temporary measure as the sea had undermined its foundations.

To the landward side of the line is Slapton Ley. It is the largest fresh water lagoon in south England. The ley is an important wildfowl habitat in winter in which rare flowers and lichens flourish. Slapton Ley and the ridge were designated as a site of special scientific interest, reflecting both their biological and geological characteristics. It is also a nature reserve. Under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, the district council, the county council and the Whitley Trust—the owner of the site—have a duty to protect that habitat and English Nature is a consultee.

Not only is the site of historical and ecological significance, but it is important economically and socially for the region and that cannot be underestimated. As the Coleridge Association of Parish Councils said:

"We didn't realise how important the road was until we lost it!"

Those sentiments have been echoed by Dartmouth town council and the parishes of Slapton, Stokenham, Stoke Fleming and Strete. In spite of all the representations that have been made, all the talk of partnerships, the Liberal Democrats' lovey-dovey approach that we should get together and sort out the problem, the steering groups and the advisory forums that have been set up, the road is still closed. At a time when rural communities are being encouraged to diversify away from traditional ways of earning a living, people and goods cannot get about. When we consider that the holiday season is looming, the problem could not have come about at a more difficult time for the tourist industry.

The situation cannot be permitted to go on any longer, but what has happened so far is like a farce. I recognise, however, that everyone is well intentioned and that all the public authorities are doing their best. We have had parish meetings, district meetings, county meetings and public meetings. Because of the SSSI status of Slapton Ley, English Nature is involved, as is the Environment Agency.

The Slapton Ley field centre then threw a spanner in the works when it suggested a policy of managed retreat, on the basis that King Canute found that there was no stopping the sea. The centre is highly regarded for its work, but its initial studies suggest substituting for the road cycle tracks, picnic areas and other green tourist features that the Liberal Democrats consider to be "simply splendid". That will result in fewer, more discerning visitors—but not the hoi polloi who are preferred by the Tories and the Labour party. It has not gone down well with local businesses or the tourist centre.

What is worse is that the leader of the county council has been wheeled in. Poor Mr. Greenslade's feet have not touched the ground; he is being wheeled round by all the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidates to see floods, sea defences and coastal retreats. My impression was that initially he was well disposed towards the managed retreat—they could have picnic areas, cycle tracks, and so on—but he has now turned round and said, "No, we've got to reopen the road"; but the road remains closed. If the sea had destroyed the two-mile road between Torcross and Strete Gate on other occasions, perhaps a policy of managed retreat would have been a more serious candidate for discussion, but as the last storms to create such havoc were more than 20 years ago, there is an overwhelming desire for two-way traffic to be reinstated as soon as possible.

Thankfully, the Devon county council officer injected some sense into the debate when he acknowledged that we need to get our priorities straight. He rightly pointed out that

"sending an endless pot of money to defend every inch of coastline whatever the cost was not an option"

but he added

"keeping coastal settlements that are fundamental to our local economy is where we ought to put our efforts in, and if our pot of money isn't big enough we have to go to Central Government to get more".

To make matters worse, the Liberal Democrats are doing their level best to exploit the situation politically, showing special concern ahead of the elections: popping

up in every picture; chucking out press releases at a rate of knots; and suggesting, of all things, that Europe could save the A379—as if Europe has anything to do with it. As the Liberal Democrats are the party of the single currency and a federal Europe, one can understand why they dragged the only Liberal Democrat MEP for the area down to view the place. He has come down, as has the leader of the Liberal Democrats in the county; everybody is down there. The only snag is that the road is still closed.

Heaven knows why Europe has been involved. Giles Chichester, the MEP, told me that he looked at the matter years ago and that no European money is available. He explained that Slapton is unlike Venice—we probably understand that—because it is not a city sinking into the mire. The road at Slapton is the responsibility of the county council, not Europe: the council must find the solution, which is surely not beyond the wit of man today.

We have some strange goings on involving the hon. Member for North Devon (Mr. Harvey)—I do not blame him for not being in his place, because he did not know that I intended to mention him. According to a Liberal Democrat press release, he intends to call on the Government for coastal funding. Surprise, surprise, questions appeared on the Order Paper asking for money for coastal funding. I wonder whether those questions were drafted by the hon. Gentleman or by the Liberal Democrat prospective parliamentary candidate for my area. I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman sent the questions to the Table Office or whether she sent them there. The Minister probably does not know the answer to that, because I do not. However, some strange things are going on.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. If the Table Office accepted those questions, they must have been in order, and they must have been submitted by a Member of the House. It is important to put that on the record.

Mr. Steen: Of course they have been correctly submitted, Mr. Winterton. The point is that once the written question is signed by the Member of Parliament, anyone can send it in.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I must also tell the hon. Gentleman that if he makes an allegation against another hon. Member, as I perceive him to have done, he is obliged to give him notice. I hope that he understands that.

Mr. Steen: Enough public money has already been wasted on achieving nothing—everyone involved is publicly funded. The Coast and Countryside Service is publicly funded; the Slapton Ley field centre receives public funds; English Nature is publicly funded; Devon county council is publicly funded; South Hams district council; the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency are publicly funded. An enormous number of people are involved, all funded by the taxpayer.

The communities do not want a massive granite structure—a sea defence–to try to deflect the sea at Start bay. If they did, the district council would of course approach MAFF, but no one to whom I have spoken wants that unique, beautiful bay spoilt in such a way. Meanwhile, the county council has put up limestone boulders along the seaward side of the stricken road that are interacting chemically with the sea water, attracting some criticism. I wonder why they bothered to shore up the track when that is not what is needed. They said that they could not open the single track to heavy road vehicles because it would sink—but what about opening it to light vehicles?

It is common knowledge that the road has been reduced to half its width and seriously undermined. It is worth noting that, despite all the meetings between county engineers and other interested parties, no further progress appears to have been made to reopen the road from a month ago. Although Rome was not built in a day, I cannot believe that the Italians or the French would not have found a speedier solution.

The electorate want their road back. I have received endless letters from people at Slapton, Torcross, Dartmouth, Chillington and Strete, and from businesses such as the Torcross Gallery, the Park West holiday bungalows, Roxborough house hotel and the proprietors of the esteemed watering hole called the Start bay inn, which does a good plate of fish and chips. The new owners of the Tradesmans arms, which is also doing well, wrote to me as well. All my correspondents despair about what is happening—or, rather, what is not happening.

On 26 January, I asked the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he would assess the impact on tourism of the Slapton-Start bay road remaining closed during the summer of 2001. He replied that no decision had been taken on whether the closed section of the road between the monument and Strete Gate would remain closed for the summer. Is that still the case on 14 February? Will the Minister give the House some idea as to the timetable for reopening the road, and what the cost of stabilising measures might be?

The parliamentary answer provided on 6 February referred to joint meetings with relevant agencies discussing draft shoreline management plans. What has come of those discussions, and will they make any difference? What are the serious long-terms options if a new road is built next to the old one? I am told that no planning permission is needed for that option. However, the snag is that the road will fall into the sea at the next spring high tide, so the option is, sensibly, not being canvassed. The best idea so far is to build a 150 ft loop back from the present line, but planners, English Nature and the landowners must give approval.

Meanwhile, as Richard Kennell of Chillington said in a letter to the *Dartmouth Chronicle* on 9 February,

> "The loss of the coast road will cut trade in half and has serious implications, not only for travel and emergency services, but all businesses along the route."

The A379 is a vital link between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. It is a recognised route of great scenic beauty, attracting much-needed tourist trade to an area hard pressed by the decline of agriculture and fishing. Local businesses rely heavily on passing trade to survive. The closure of the A379 above Blackpool sands a few years ago started the decline of local businesses, several of which have closed. The closure of that stretch of road forces motorists to use inadequate back lanes with few

[Mr. Steen]

passing places. The lanes were an attractive feature of the area, but the erosion of the high banks after prolonged rain and increased traffic has turned it into a mud bath. There is a real danger to life and limb, as Mr. and Mrs. Green told me with regard to Gara Mill, which is on that backwater route.

The emergency services cannot get to places within the proper response time. Those sharing the services of neighbouring communities, such as schools and doctors' surgeries, are under tremendous pressure. The closure creates a long and complex journey of an extra 20 miles. The notion that the road should not be reopened beggars belief. If we do not have a serviceable two-track road by Easter, how will charabancs get across the bay in the summer? It is imperative that transport should flow again as soon as possible between Torcross and Strete.

There is a simple solution: call in the Army. They should cease live firing on Dartmoor for a few weeks and throw their engineering expertise into creating a lifeline for the communities of south Devon. They could build a Bailey bridge overnight; if they did that in Bosnia, why not in Slapton? That would provide access for traffic in both directions which could be open by Easter. The permanent solution may take years to materialise, but the military solution could alleviate the problem.

I cannot impress on the House how important the road is to the communities involved. Any further prevarication, however well intentioned, verges on a dereliction of duty towards rural communities that are fighting for survival.

1.48 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing this debate about an issue that concerns his constituency. I recognise that he is worried about transportation problems in south Devon caused by the damage to the A379. On the night of 11-12 January, exceptional weather conditions in the form of an easterly gale, coinciding with high tides, caused severe damage to the A379 Slapton line. About 250 m of the road were reduced to a single lane. It is appropriate to pay tribute to those who carried out the emergency work in difficult and dangerous conditions. If it had not been carried out, it is highly probable that the shingle ridge would have been breached and the road completely lost. I understand that the work, including the provision of rock armouring, cost Devon county council close to £150,000. However, in spite of those efforts, the road remains closed while the conditions remain unsafe and until an appropriate solution can be found to allow it to reopen.

The context in which any decision can be taken on the future of the Slapton line is complicated. The shingle ridge and Slapton Ley, which it retains, lie within the South Devon area of outstanding natural beauty and heritage coast. The area is also a designated site of special scientific interest, as the hon. Gentleman said, and a national nature reserve, in recognition of its biological and geological importance. The site is owned by the Whitley Wildlife Conservation Trust, which in turn leases it to a field studies centre that operates the Slapton Ley field centre and manages the national nature reserve. The site is extensively used for educational courses and research, and is probably one of the best documented in Great Britain. Schedule 9 to the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 sets out a formal procedure that requires statutory undertakers, including local highway authorities, to obtain English Nature's approval before undertaking work affecting an SSSI.

I understand that some conservation interests criticised the emergency actions to protect the Slapton line, considering that they interfered unacceptably with the prevailing coastal processes. They remain concerned that measures to reinstate or replace the A379 should not adversely affect the SSSI or the NNR. However, following a meeting between the county council, the district council, the conservation bodies, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Environment Agency, those initial criticisms have diminished, with the greater awareness of the road's importance to the community's social and economic well-being.

The Slapton line provides a vital communication link between the settlements east of Kingsbridge and west of Dartmouth and is a popular route for tourists and visitors throughout the year. It is identified as the emergency alternative route to the A3122/A381 between Kingsbridge and Dartmouth, should that be blocked. I know that business and community interests in the severed communities have expressed considerable concern about the disruption and loss of trade, as well as the inconvenience and damage caused by increased use of the surrounding minor road network.

Clearly the county council's immediate concern is to reopen the road for safe use by traffic as quickly as possible but in a way that causes as little damage as possible to the special features of Slapton Ley. It is also apparent that a permanent solution is an ambition that can be achieved only in the long term. Given the complexity of the issues involved, considerable research will be needed to inform the design and the decision-making process, including assessments of present and projected coastal processes, the impact on the natural environment and economic considerations. Such research could take between two and three years, and it is unlikely that a new permanent road would be in place within less than five years.

Devon county council is therefore urgently seeking a long-term solution and, in the interim, a temporary scheme that will serve the local community's needs and have the least damaging affect on the SSSI and the nature reserve.

Mr. Steen: Will the Minister give way on that point, or is he pushed for time?

Mr. Ainsworth: I am pushed for time, if the hon. Gentleman does not mind.

Although a distinction is drawn between the maintenance of coastal defence works and the maintenance of the highway—particularly in terms of the responsibilities of public bodies and funding sources—in the determination of a long-term solution, they are closely interrelated. South Hams district council has discretionary powers to undertake coastal

protection work and apply for coast protection funding from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, while the county council takes responsibility as the highway authority.

There are advantages to both authorities working in partnership to secure an appropriate long-term solution. To that end, a meeting between the two was held on Friday 2 February, where it was recognised that considerable research would be required, which would probably entail the employment of consultants at significant cost. There is a need to identify possible funding sources, both national and European. It was agreed to establish three groups to develop a long-term solution. I welcome the decision of both authorities to work closely to develop a long-term solution and to engage the local community.

On the issue of an interim solution—the hon. Gentleman majored on that—Devon county council has examined various options. Reopening the existing road as a single lane stretch with passing bays and temporary traffic lights has been ruled out because of the storm damage to the ridge on the seaward side. At its meeting on 12 February, Devon county council resolved to seek the necessary approvals, which include planning consent and/or assent under schedule 9 of the 2000 Act, for the construction of one of three options for a short-term solution to reopen the road.

The first option is a scheme that allows for realigning the road by moving the carriageway up to 25 m from the edge of the existing carriageway. That would be sufficient distance from the area subject to erosion to give a reasonable expectation of at least five years' use, but without the need for extensive and expensive coastal protection works, which would be strongly resisted by English Nature and the landowners. The county council will continue to pursue an application for planning permission for that scheme, which will be accompanied by an environmental impact assessment, in the hope that the consent of English Nature and the landowner will be forthcoming.

The second option is a lateral extension of the existing carriageway to provide a two-lane carriageway, including rock armouring or equivalent coastal protection works. The county council considers that those works would be a permitted development and would not require planning permission.

The third option is a lateral extension of the existing carriageway, but without the rock armouring or other coastal protection works. The views of English Nature and the landowners are awaited on all three options.

It seems clear that the county council's immediate concern is to reopen the road as quickly as possible because of its importance to the local community and economy, and its role as an emergency route.

Mr. Steen: Will the Minister investigate whether the Army can help? Nobody has yet considered bringing it in, it is located on Dartmoor and it would enjoy a real-life challenge.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am certain that if a solution can be agreed, the county council will look for help wherever it is available. The agreement of the landowners and English Nature will be needed, so I cannot see there being an immediate solution. In my view, the county council should be commended for the speed of its emergency action and for its partnership working to develop a long-term solution that takes account of the area's biological and geological importance.

I am aware of the meetings with Railtrack and I shall try to get back to the hon. Gentleman at a later date on the rail issue.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 15 February 2001

[MRS. SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Ofsted

[*Relevant documents: Sixth Report from the Education and Employment Committee, Session 1999-2000, Standards and Quality in Education: the Annual Report of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools 1998-99, HC 345, Seventh Report from the Education and Employment Committee, Session 1999-2000, Government and OFSTED Response to the Committee's Sixth Report, HC 861, Second Report from the Education and Employment Committee, Session 2000-01, OFSTED Corporate Plan 2000, HC 34, and Second Special Report from the Education and Employment Committee, Session 2000-01, Government's Response to the Committee's Second Report, HC 258.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned—[*Mr. Pope.*]

2.30 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It gives me great pleasure to open the debate on the Office for Standards in Education, which forms part of a process that has been instituted in Parliament over time. On becoming Chairman of the Education Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Education and Employment a little over a year ago, I discovered that colleagues and former Chairmen of the Committee had made great progress in holding the chief inspector to account. I hope that you will indulge me, Madam Deputy Speaker, by allowing me to outline the historical background to the current position. This important debate reflects what is an outstanding achievement in education, so I shall try not to adopt a party political tone.

Ofsted was created by a former Government; as I recall, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) created it. Although one never quite knew what he would get up to next, he proved an innovator in virtually all the ministerial posts that he held: as Under-Secretary at the former Ministry of Transport, as Secretary of State for Health, as Secretary of State for Education and Science and as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

As Secretary of State for Education and Science, the right hon. and learned Gentleman decided, as many people in the education world had, that we needed to know whether school standards were improving and whether teaching was of a sufficiently high standard. It is a mark of the present Government that, on taking office in 1997, they took the same view and recognised Ofsted's achievement. They recognised the need for an independent body that scrutinised school standards and that reported to the Secretary of State, so that appropriate changes could be made where necessary.

Since becoming a Member of Parliament, I have dedicated myself to trying to improve British competitiveness. In that time, the desire to make us more effective and efficient, and better at creating, spreading and sharing wealth, has formed the core of my being. Having examined the relevant figures before this sitting, I have to say that any industrial sector that achieved the results that we have achieved in education would be the most remarkable that one could imagine. In 1992-93, 29.6 per cent. of lessons at primary schools were deemed unsatisfactory or poor. According to the most recent figures, 4.1 per cent. were deemed unsatisfactory or poor. That is an outstanding achievement in anyone's terms. In secondary schools, 21.1 per cent. of lessons were unsatisfactory or poor in 1992-1993. That figure dropped to 6 per cent. in 1999-2000.

Across the piece, we can see dramatic change in the quality of the lessons and education that most children receive. However, we know from experience elsewhere that we must not relent in the search for higher standards. It would be a recipe for disaster if people in education said, "We want to pack up Ofsted. We have done the job. We have made a real improvement. Let us all go home." My private sector experience taught me two things. First, if one cannot measure it, one cannot manage it—of course, one must measure consistently over time. Secondly, every time one feels that one has achieved something, a new opportunity arises to get even better.

No member of the Select Committee and no one with a genuine interest in education would want to get rid of Ofsted. Ofsted was founded to report the results of the regular independent inspections of schools to the Secretary of State, so that he or she could take speedy action. That process has built up over the years.

Strangely, there has been a lack of clarity about whom Ofsted was accountable to. I have examined views on that subject in press cuttings from the past nine years. It was interesting to read that some people thought Ofsted was responsible to the Queen, others thought it was responsible to the Secretary of State and others thought it was responsible directly to the Prime Minister. However, the most consistent view that emerged, which was shaped by our previous inquiries into the workings of Ofsted, was that the chief inspector was responsible to the Select Committee.

That is a clear relationship, but in a sense it is an odd one. Ofsted is a strange creature—a previous chief inspector called it a Frankenstein monster—because it was put together randomly. It is a non-ministerial department that is accountable to a Select Committee of the House of Commons. In other words, it is responsible to Parliament through our Select Committee. We must discharge that serious duty responsibly.

That is why I shall try not to be party political today. I hope that my opening remarks, which included a tribute to the innovation and imagination of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe, got the balance right. The Government have not only added to the work, responsibilities and remit of Ofsted, but ensured that there was no disjunction by allowing the chief inspector to have a long period of continuity, which stretched across two Governments. That is the background to the way in which we have established a good pattern in terms of accountability.

[Mr. Barry Sheerman]

We meet with the chief inspector twice a year. In the spring, we discuss his annual report. In the autumn, we discuss his conduct of the office—in short, the way that Ofsted runs its operations. The press do not always understand that we have two contrasting meetings. The meetings in the spring tend to be more amicable than those in the autumn. In the spring meetings, we examine, take a general view on and ask questions about the annual report. During my chairmanship and that of my predecessor, they have been reasonably happy occasions. The chief inspector has usually reported remarkable progress on education standards. The atmosphere tends to be positive at those meetings.

The autumn meetings tend to be a little more acerbic because, as the accountable body, we are the recipients of complaints about the chief inspector. It would be strange if the Committee held the chief inspector to account, but did not press him or her hard on those complaints. Anyone who reads the Select Committee report of the previous Session will know that it ranged across a number of issues and the agenda wrote itself. Those issues included, for example, Durham education authority and the Commission for Racial Equality. I want to put the matter into context. We have a responsible job to do and the atmosphere at our autumn meetings tends to be more negative.

We are discussing an interesting innovation that has worked. I hope that any coverage of our debate will examine not only the way in which the inspectorate process is working and its achievements, but the remarkable efforts that are being made by teachers, heads, governors and parents throughout the country. They are working together in teams and as stakeholders in education in their communities, and have achieved tremendous benefits for children. That must be acknowledged. We must thank Ofsted. I am saying nice things about it, but it could not make those reports unless real change had taken place at the chalk face. People are working hard to get things right.

Some of my more critical comments about Ofsted should be looked at in context. Before I became Chairman, the Select Committee wanted a board to be established to which Ofsted would have been directly accountable. The work on that was done before my chairmanship—I was not involved in it—but I concur with that view. The Government did not accept that there should be an independent board. The arguments are on the record and I do not intend to dwell on that matter today. However, there is accountability, it is novel and it seems to be working. Many of my colleagues believe that a board would make it even more effective and that is on the record.

I want to issue some warnings. Ofsted is growing very fast. The number of people employed by Ofsted has been relatively small, but Governments are always keen to make organisations more effective, more holistic and more all-encompassing. I do not disagree with that, but it is the nature of the beast that the bureaucracy of Ofsted will increase. It is growing fast and will consolidate into a much larger organisation.

There are always dangers when organisations get bigger and there are more people to manage. Much excellent leadership and management will be needed for Ofsted to remain as effective as it has been. The Select Committee will keep hard at it over the coming months. There will be a transition from a modest-sized bureaucracy to a much larger one. We all know the reasons—the extension of the remit to further education and to pre-school and nursery education. That is a new responsibility, but it is cause for concern. Bureaucracies must be watched extremely carefully. We shall watch Ofsted to ensure that it is managed properly.

There is a further issue. I was reading the National Union of Teachers briefing for this debate before I came in. I am acquiring a reputation for not always agreeing with the teaching unions' views on such subjects as Ofsted, although I do not disagree with them all the time. That is a healthy relationship for a Chairman of the Select Committee. The teaching unions believe that schools may go through a rough period when trying to get things right.

Ofsted was set up nine years ago, when 30 per cent. of lessons in primary education and 20 per cent. in secondary education were seen to be unsatisfactory or poor. Now, much higher standards have been achieved. A voice is calling for lighter inspections, a softer touch and a more co-operative attitude. I have been part of that voice, which says that one must ensure that inspection produces a range of ways of making the school better. The worst thing that can happen to a school is to get a bad Ofsted report, to be left demoralised and to have to pick up the pieces. We all know that a school in special measures, for example, is often left literally picking up the pieces, unable to recruit new staff or raise teachers' and governors' self-esteem.

I want to see much more—the change is already taking place—of Ofsted having a discourse with the teachers, the head, the parents and the governors and saying "You have a poorer evaluation than we would like, but you must now work with us to address certain problems." Going back to the private sector parallel, I know of no well-managed organisation that benefits from only negative criticism. Therefore, I hope that, wearing one hat, Ofsted will be frank, honest, impartial and independent, but that, wearing another, it will make a series of recommendations for turning the school around and will quintessentially improve the quality of the education that is delivered to pupils.

I do not, however, want Ofsted to become flabby; I want to have my cake and eat it. I do not want people throughout the country to say "We can all relax now. Ofsted is becoming a softer touch." I want people to be concerned about Ofsted and to know that they must do well to get a good Ofsted report, so that they will be left with a positive feel if an inspection is made and things are found to be less good than they might be. I want the relationship to be positive. I think that I can have my cake and eat it. I do not want Ofsted to be demonic, so that people are frightened and stressed.

One of the best ways in which to evaluate Ofsted is to go out to the country and to talk to teachers about it. The Select Committee has a wonderful reputation, not only for taking written and oral evidence, but for visiting schools, colleges and universities to find out, as far as possible, what it feels like to be on the receiving end of an Ofsted inspection.

When working on our recent report on the early years—birth to eight years of age—we visited the constituencies of the hon. Member for Oxford, West

and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey). We talked to teachers, at times sitting on extremely small chairs, trying to evaluate the feeling in the school. Not one teacher or head wanted to end Ofsted inspections. A 40-year-old woman said that it was the most stressful experience in her life, but no one wanted to stop such inspections. The balance that we want to achieve will keep on driving up standards and the quality of education for our children, and at the same time form a more positive and co-operative relationship between the inspectorate and schools. That is already happening. Some excellent changes have been made.

Most of the debate will be about our reports. In a couple of weeks, we shall meet the new chief inspector. Much of the two reports before us today are a bit old hat, because they were drafted a long time ago. We thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards for her reaction to our most recent report. We are always pleased, as a Select Committee, when we have a couple of wins. We came up with ideas that were good common sense, and the Minister seemed to agree that we had taken some positive steps.

I shall cite an example of how well the relationship is working. Given the agreement between Durham education authority and Ofsted, we thought that the independent adjudicator would not be as independent as we would like. She was looking into a complaint about the chief inspector who had appointed her. We thought that that was a bit rum and suggested that the Secretary of State should appoint the adjudicator. I am delighted that the Minister agreed.

The relationship between parliamentary accountability and the machinery of government exemplifies how we can make our reports more effective. I ask the Minister to tell her colleagues that we are producing other reports. We hope for even more significant wins as a result of our early years report, the report into access to higher education and the report on retention in higher education. If such a relationship can blossom and we receive positive reactions to our reports, we shall be only too pleased.

My job in introducing the debate is to flag up the issues and to set the debate in a general context for colleagues to weigh in with their comments. Several other concerns in the reports have not produced as much reaction from the Minister, or from the inspectorate, as we would like. Certain areas have sometimes received short shrift from the chief inspector.

The Select Committee has been concerned about the quality of supply teachers for some time. On the basis of conversations with teachers, parents and pupils, nothing is more disruptive to a child's education than having a supply teacher who does not know what point has been reached in the curriculum or the level of the class. Such teachers do not know how to pick up the pieces. We were keen that Ofsted should look much more carefully at supply teaching, and the quality and training of supply teachers. The Minister gave us a reasonable response on the matter. When the new chief inspector appears before the Select Committee in a couple of weeks, we will ask the same questions again.

Some of the issues flagged up by the Select Committee were regarded by the previous chief inspector as not really his business or too difficult to address within the inspection system. The Select Committee is probing whether the inspectorate can deal more sensitively with issues such as supply teaching and bullying. Over the past year, several reports have been published which show how disruptive bullying is to the quality of education in a school. When considering the good management of a school, it is possible to ensure a framework for reporting bullying and best practice in dealing with bullying, and a way in which bullying can be tackled positively and proactively. I do not agree with the former chief inspector who said, more or less, that the problem was too difficult to tackle effectively. The Select Committee will revisit that issue with the new chief inspector.

Before I became Chairman, its members went on away-days—or a couple of days away—in an Oxford college. I missed that nice experience.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): It was when the Select Committee was chaired by the hon. Member for Barking (Ms Hodge).

Mr. Sheerman: Yes, it was chaired by my hon. Friend, who is now a Minister. In the past, Select Committee reports were of a piece. In an age in which there are dozens of consultancies, think tanks, special groups, working parties and commissions, however, the Select Committee is an unusual—I hesitate to say Frankenstein-type—creature. Things are done in a traditional way. We decide on the terms of reference, invite oral evidence—everyone wants to take oral evidence and have their chance to be on television—and make visits. We then ensure, with the help of special advisers, that we produce as good a report as possible.

Often, that is as far as it goes—it is a cathartic experience. We produce a report, hand it to the Minister and that is it. We walk away from it and it can gather dust. The report that came out of the away-days concluded that that was not good enough. If Select Committees are to be an effective part of the parliamentary process, which many of us are trying and working hard to modernise, they must be more rigorous and on-going. The relationship with Ofsted is part of that. It is not going to go away.

We produce a report, give it to the Minister and the Minister is supposed to respond within a certain time. We then have a debate in Westminster Hall. That, I tell the Minister and the chief inspector of Ofsted, is not the end of the matter. As long as I am Chairman of the Select Committee, I intend to keep returning to issues and pushing forward the elements involved. If a report is good, it is good not only for today but for many months and years to come. A Select Committee should return to themes. That is good advice. I voiced that view in the Liaison Committee, the committee of Select Committee Chairmen, and it is percolating through the thoughts of most Committee Chairmen and members. That is most important.

Our relationship with Ofsted is unique for a Select Committee, as I said earlier. It is good and it will get better if we press those themes until we are satisfied.

[Mr. Sheerman]

I hope that, in this debate, which takes place just before an interesting short parliamentary break, we shall benefit from my colleagues' participation. As it is such a unique occasion, with Parliament not sitting next week, I hope that we shall receive enormous exposure in the press on our Select Committee and its relationship with Ofsted.

We should not be over-content or feel that we have done the job, but the relationship between Ofsted and the improvement in schools has been positive. We intend as a Select Committee to play our part in ensuring that Ofsted remains independent, rigorous and fair and that we do not mistake Ofsted for something that it is not. Ofsted does not energise the process on the ground. It can play a part in that process, but parents, pupils and, above all, teachers and heads lead that process. I hope that some of my colleagues will join me in saluting the progress that has been made.

3.2 pm

Mr. Nick St. Aubyn (Guildford): I congratulate the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Chairman of the Education Sub-Committee, on having persuaded the Liaison Committee to secure this important debate this afternoon. It is perhaps the last opportunity that we shall have to debate Ofsted's role before the election. I appreciate his warm remarks about my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, set in process the new inspectorate system. We would do well to remind ourselves why my right hon. and learned Friend felt it necessary to introduce an independent inspectorate.

The effect and work of Ofsted has borne out the deep anxiety that was expressed that the old inspection system took almost too kind an approach to schools and that there was too great a reluctance to level criticism where it was needed. The lesson of Ofsted's success is that, if we are not prepared to criticise, we shall find it almost impossible to improve.

I hope that we shall have a constructive and informed debate and that I shall not be accused of playing a party political card merely because I level significant criticisms of how matters are proceeding. Without such criticism it is hard to imagine how our school system can improve. That is not to gainsay the fantastic work done by the vast majority of teachers and the many schools that make a success of the lives of children who attend them.

I welcome the comments of the hon. Member for Huddersfield on what he called the excellent leadership and management that Ofsted has shown. During the tenure of the previous chief inspector in particular, we sometimes wondered whether the hon. Gentleman and some of his hon. Friends saw the role of the chief inspector in that light, so it is encouraging to hear that endorsement today. If the new chief inspector can do as well as the previous one, Ofsted will be fortunate indeed. That is not to say that we should hesitate to level criticism against Ofsted itself—our report did so.

This is a fast-moving scene and, after our reports were issued, we received the Green Paper "Schools: Building on Success" and, in the last week, Ofsted's latest annual report, to which it is proper for us to refer, so that our debate is entirely relevant and up to date. It is worrying that on page 20 of Ofsted's new report, the new chief inspector tells us:

"raising standards is at risk",

because there has been a constant trend of rising standards in our schools. We should be concerned with why he thinks that standards are at risk. He identifies three problems. The first is what he calls

"the adverse impact of high staff turnover",

Secondly, he refers to

"widespread use of temporary teachers",

and thirdly, he refers to

"a poor match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects taught".

The hon. Member for Huddersfield referred to behaviour in the classroom. The chief inspector alerts us to that by saying:

"This year, for the first time in recent years, inspectors report increasing levels of poor behaviour."

Clearly, there is a link between the problems in teaching—the high turnover, temporary teachers coming in and out of class—and children's behaviour, on which the chief inspector says:

"pupils' behaviour is at times inconsistent".

In other words, the teachers whom the pupils know, and who know the pupils, can contain the problem and excite their interest, but the high turnover and greater emphasis on the use of temporary staff mean that people with knowledge of the behaviour and inclinations of the pupils are not present throughout the school day. That is why matters get out of hand.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that elsewhere in the report, the chief inspector points out that only one in 50 primary schools has unacceptable behaviour problems and notes tremendous progress, especially in the primary sector, on behaviour issues?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for anticipating my next point. I was going to say that behavioural problems in children tend to exhibit themselves far more as they go through adolescence and in secondary school. It may be possible to contain problems in a primary school despite staff turnover, but in secondary school—when all the other pressures, excitements and interests of life bear down on children—that becomes much harder.

Mr. Hayes: My hon. Friend may want to alert the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) to the section of the report that states that one of the chief problems of disruptive behaviour occurs when children first enter secondary education. It is in that changeover period that many problems begin. The chief inspector's report mentions that. My hon. Friend is right to deal with that issue. Of course, on average, one in 12 schools suffers from severe disruption problems.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his extremely helpful intervention. Although we should congratulate primary schools on what is, in broad terms, a healthy report—an overview—from Ofsted, not everything in the garden is rosy. Writing is an area of

particular disappointment—scores have improved by only 1 per cent. despite all the effort put into booster classes and other initiatives. That opens another area of debate. When testing schools, Ofsted has a clear eye on the results of tests—key stage tests, GCSEs and A-levels. Ofsted regards them as an important external measure of the subjective reading that it takes in the classroom when it visits a school.

Laudable though the improvement that Ofsted has traced through key stage test results is, people worry that some of it may be due to an increasing pressure on teachers to teach to the test, rather than encourage the spirit of learning and develop the child's broader ability. It is far harder to teach for the writing test than for the skills of spelling or adding up. We should applaud what schools are achieving in difficult circumstances, but remain alert to the risk that Ofsted and the testing system may become a new version of the self-congratulating system that did so little to help schools in the years before that body was created.

Ofsted, of course, represented simply one step on a long march. The hon. Member for Huddersfield suggested that, if a private sector company showed the improved performance that schools have recently shown, it would be a star company. He is right to remind us that the golden legacy in education left by the previous Government was matched by a golden legacy in the private sector—the remarkable changes made in those areas coincided and complemented each other. Unemployment is low today because increasing numbers of school leavers are equipped and job ready for the world of work that awaits them.

Some long-term trends show that the Government's best efforts may not have been truly effective.

Charlotte Atkins: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, in 1994-95, one in five lessons was considered unsatisfactory? Was that part of the previous Government's golden legacy?

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Lady is right to point out that, since that date, the number of unsatisfactory lessons has steadily decreased. The chief inspector tells us in his latest report that one in five lessons was unsatisfactory in 1994-95, but that the proportion has declined steadily each subsequent year. Teaching is now unsatisfactory in only about one in 20 lessons. The proportion of good or better teachers increased from about 40 to 60 per cent. That shows that the introduction of Ofsted had a dynamic effect on the performance of our schools, but that did not occur in isolation: the improvement also depended on the long struggle to establish an effective national curriculum and testing system for various ages and to create several ways in which to measure performance. As a result of that system, we know more about the performance of individual pupils and schools than is known in any other country.

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris) *indicated assent.*

Mr. St. Aubyn: The Minister nods in agreement. I regard that knowledge as a good thing, provided that the time and effort spent in collecting the information does not impede teaching, the broader development of the child or the broader success of the schools. We should not become fixated on self-created targets for performance that do not accurately measure what is happening on the ground.

Before I was interrupted by the hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins), I was about to refer to some long-term trends. Information is given at the back of the latest reports that was given in previous reports, which allows us to contrast the changes that have taken place. The reduction in class sizes in primary schools in the first few years was a big initiative of the new Government. Ofsted has told us that it would be willing to consider the cost-effectiveness of several of the Government's programmes and it is important that it should do that in this case. I do not gainsay the immense advantages to individual schools of the money that they received as a result of the class size reduction initiative. However, the original cost was given as £100 million in 1997. My latest information is that it now costs more than £600 million. We are entitled to know how the additional teaching in the first three years has affected performance.

Significantly, secondary schools have improved more in the relevant period than primary schools. For instance, a 24-point improvement was made in year 11 between 1993-94 and 2000. A 21-point improvement in year 3 was made in a similar period. I do not suggest that that is more than a crude measure of what Ofsted should examine, but I hope that the effectiveness of what is being done will be studied, bearing in mind that a dislocation cost, as well as a financial cost, resulted from the class size programme in its first three years. Some siblings could not attend the same school and some schools had to cut numbers, despite being popular. Above all, the fact that the programme acted as a magnet to draw more teachers from training colleges into primary schools has contributed to the current acute scarcity of secondary school teachers.

There has been a price to pay for the initiative. I asked the permanent secretary whether he thought that it was a price worth paying and he seemed to imply that it was, but my preference is that Ofsted should examine the issue. I look forward to its doing so.

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that when the former chief inspector of schools gave evidence to the Select Committee on 15 March 2000, he said in answer to a question from the Chairman that, when Ofsted had examined the correlation between class size and standards of pupil achievement, there was

"a clear correlation with key stage 1 and we welcomed the Government's investment in that particular stage after the election."

Mr. St. Aubyn: I would be the first to accept that, all other things being equal, smaller class sizes are highly desirable. The former chief inspector also qualified his remark by saying that, of course, the quality of teaching is important. We would all agree that a larger class taught by an excellent teacher would probably make more progress than a smaller class taught by a less experienced, less effective teacher. That is common sense.

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

The success of the Government's programme and the time frame in which they decided to implement it must be gauged against all the issues that I have identified. We must not merely rely on the presumption that smaller class sizes are always better, whatever the cost to the rest of the system.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The hon. Gentleman talked about the importance of excellent teachers and prefaced his remarks by paying tribute to them. Does he argue, as I would, that labelling a group of schools as bog standard implies that the teachers in those schools—who, everyone would agree, are the ones who create the standards—are bog standard too? Is that good for the morale of teachers and an appropriate comment for Ministers, or even Prime Ministers, to make?

Mr. St. Aubyn: It was one of the most unfortunate remarks that has yet issued from No. 10 Downing street. I should have thought that the school standards unit in Downing street would be more aware than anyone that four categories of schools can be identified in the present context. They are beacon schools, which are the best in the system, good schools, coasting schools and failing schools.

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): Under-achieving.

Mr. St. Aubyn: Indeed, one might describe them as under-achieving schools. There is such a school in my constituency and we have shown how much more it is able to achieve under a new system of management. I hope to speak about that if I have time.

The Prime Minister's remarks were intended to flag up a document, "Schools: Building on Success", which would be better described as the mea culpa of the Government. It begins with a confession that

"comprehensives were mostly established...on a model which...often allowed little scope for schools to develop a distinctive character and mission."

I wish that the Government had recognised that when they first took office rather than after four years.

We struggled during the Government's first year to explain that each grant-maintained school had a distinctive character. We were perplexed that the Government should contemplate grouping schools into action zones that might be thought of as grant maintained and we were puzzled that they were not prepared to contemplate the continued existence of the grant-maintained schools themselves. They were prepared to promote the Conservative concept of specialist schools and I congratulate the Minister on his wholehearted conversion to that cause. However, they were not prepared to accept that grant-maintained schools were already specialist schools and that their more effective use of resources meant that they already had the additional funding per pupil for which specialist schools now have to apply one by one. I would welcome it if the Minister were now looking for a light-touch inspection regime. That would be a mark of how many schools have already reached the threshold. Indeed, fewer schools are not making the grade.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) pointed out that the Prime Minister offended a great many people when he allowed that phrase to slip out. No school can be called a bog standard comprehensive. We have an excellent system of education in comprehensive schools, and when it is applied properly and if those schools have a proper broad intake of pupils, they can be among the best in the country.

Of those comprehensive schools promoted during the past 20 years, the most outstanding have been city technology colleges. I am delighted that the Government have now taken on board the success of the city technology college model. If more are created, they will be called city academies, but I do not wish a change in nomenclature to prevent another wholehearted conversion to the ideas put forward by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe and the other eminent Conservative Secretaries of State who presided over that epic period of radical change in how our schools are run.

As regards the debate on standards versus structures, we need to keep the role of Ofsted clearly in mind. The hon. Member for Huddersfield said that Ofsted cannot energise schools. I am not sure that I entirely agree. It can energise schools dramatically when inspecting them, but the effect is short lived. Ofsted inspectors cannot implement the changes that they have identified as being necessary. What is encouraging about the latest report is that many schools take up Ofsted's recommendations. When Ofsted makes second inspections, it often reports that schools have implemented most or even all of the recommendations made on the first visit. It would be wrong to say that Ofsted does not energise schools, but it cannot be a fully fledged support system. I raised that matter with the previous chief inspector when he was preparing the report that we are considering. I am sorry to say that he did not see things as I did. We shall have to wait to see who was right.

Should the opportunity arise, I look forward to questioning the new chief inspector about leadership. We should consider some of the initiatives suggested by the Government. For instance, we learn on page 64 of the new report that of the eight fresh start schools inspected, only three were making satisfactory progress. The Minister may wish to correct me, but that seems to imply that the majority of fresh start schools are not succeeding. The initiative is not enough, which comes as no surprise to me.

On education action zones, the report says:

"some useful although not ground-breaking developments were being pursued...Almost all the initial zones' plans were too ambitious."

The initiative is noble, but it has not succeeded.

The Government said that they wanted standards, not structures, but structures turn out to be important. Finding the right structure to correct deficiencies in failing schools is important in making them successful. That is why I will blow the trumpet—I hope that I will be forgiven for doing so—of my education authority in Surrey, as it has followed a different path in the teeth of opposition from the Secretary of State. It has brought in a private-sector company to run a state school.

No one would think that such a proposal would generate a great deal of popular support. The local population, especially parents and teachers, treated the initial idea with great hesitancy three years ago. However, a striking mark of the success of the project from day one was the fact that, by the time that the company had been chosen in co-operation with the teachers and parents, nine out of 10 of those people voted in favour of the decision taken by the education authority. Since then, we have seen a transformation in the school in Guildford. Unlike the hon. Member for Huddersfield, I would not say that Guildford was an inner-city area, but the school is in the least prosperous part of town. The local housing estate has unemployment of 7 per cent. and there are problems of literacy and social breakdown.

Mr. Sheerman: I meant my comment humorously, as I remember that the hon. Gentleman described part of his constituency as being an inner-city area once at Prime Minister's questions. I was reminding him of that.

Mr. St. Aubyn: The hon. Gentleman's memory is at fault. If I said that, it must have been a humorous comment as well. We aspired to city status, but that is another story.

We have learned some lessons. For example, we know that an education authority is not a good vehicle for turning failing schools around. An education authority has too broad a focus and too many competing interests, especially its responsibility to champion many schools in the same area. It cannot champion a failing school at the expense of others. An outsider that presents a new brand image for a school—a new future for it—can champion it consistently. The success of the school is due to a magnificent new head, investment and other factors, but they have had to be co-ordinated by a company with a clear benchmark for and expectation of performance. That has been essential in dealing with the challenges and difficulties posed by the children and their homes.

I am glad that the Government appear to be converted on the issue. They should be reminded that they did not think of it. On Monday, David Blunkett must have been in a dream world when he said on "Newsnight" that he had had to bear down on Surrey county council to effect the change. I received letters from him two or three years ago saying that he would try to prevent the project. I am glad that his attempts to frustrate the initiative failed and that he is now big enough to see that he should take it on board, as it has been such a success. However, he should pause before he tries to claim it as his idea in the first place.

What role is left for local education authorities? They used to carry out inspections, but there is now an independent inspectorate and a national curriculum and, increasingly, other providers of services give a range of support to schools. The point is moot, as the defence of the LEAs—I look forward to hearing those who believe in LEAs to respond—is that they still do vital work, especially in special educational needs. That is why the evidence in that category from Ofsted is worrying. In the latest report, LEAs' support for special educational needs comes in for a pasting by the chief inspector. Ofsted found that 45 per cent. of the LEAs inspected had an unsatisfactory special educational needs strategy. Furthermore, it found that 35 per cent.—more than one in three—of those inspected provided poor or unsatisfactory value for money in their provision for special educational needs. Ofsted tells us that education authorities are failing in the one area where those authorities still have a critical role. I refer to page 86 of the latest report, for those who have it. Ofsted is telling us that LEAs are not doing the job.

The challenge for the next Government—the Conservatives look forward to taking it up—is to find a new way to deliver high quality special educational needs services without being hung up by the fact that they are at present delivered by LEAs. The Conservative free schools policy, which envisages a gradual minimisation of the role of LEAs, will work better if we can provide alternative structures for the delivery of special educational needs in the free schools. Given that the Government, in their latest Green Paper, go half way towards adopting the free schools model, the Minister should tackle that issue this afternoon.

If I had more time, I would deal with child care inspections. My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) highlighted the concerns of Conservative Members on the issue in the Standing Committee debates on the Bill that became the Care Standards Act 2000. Many of us feel that it may be a great mistake for Ofsted to expand its role into that rather different field. Ofsted has succeeded because it is focused. It will now be asked to move into an entirely new area of inspection—early years—in which the number of establishments that it will be required to inspect will be far greater than that which it is required to inspect at present. In an early years setting, inspection will not be as thorough as in a typical school. Nevertheless, the scale on which Ofsted is becoming involved, and its new contractual relationship with local education authority employees in the field as distinct from its independent position in the field of school inspections, will confuse the organisation's approach.

It would probably have been better if, while recognising the importance of the transition from early years to school, the Government, like most of the Governments that our Committee visited, had recognised that early years are not just about education—they are about child development. Those are separate matters and I look forward to the Minister's comments on the issue. When our Committee went to Denmark last May, we were particularly struck by the ethos there. The pedagogic tradition of the early years sector was distinct from the teaching tradition in schools.

To ask Ofsted to undertake both roles could produce flaws in the system. We must bear in mind that part of Ofsted's effectiveness derives from the consistency of its performance and of its evidence taking. No institution is perfect and, as the Chairman of our Committee said, we have criticised Ofsted on individual cases in which inspectors have not been up to the mark. However, I am concerned that if Ofsted's role is broadened to take in so many early years settings, consistency will suffer and the reputation of Ofsted in school inspection will suffer. Ofsted's effectiveness would suffer if there were shortcomings in the inspection process for the early years.

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

Finally, we must attend to Ofsted's responsibilities to Parliament. The Committee has struggled to hold Ofsted to account. The current structure is a mish-mash, with its dotted line responsibility to the chief inspector and to 10 Downing street, its appointment by the Crown and the reporting lines to the Secretary of State. Ultimately, however, when people are questioned about it, they say, "He must respond to the Select Committee." We have been well served by the quality of chief inspectors and the organisation but it is vital, particularly in view of the hurdles that Ofsted now faces following the expansion of its role, that the Government should look again at its corporate structure.

Mr. John Butterfill (In the Chair): Order. I did not wish to interrupt the flow of the hon. Gentleman's rhetoric, but he referred to the Secretary of State by his name rather than by his title or his constituency. I remind hon. Members that the convention of the House is that we refer to other hon. Members either by their official title or by their constituency name.

3.35 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I want to refer to three areas as they apply to Ofsted: accountability, following the comments of the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn); credibility; and respect.

I welcome this debate. The Committee's last recommendation was that we should have such a debate in Westminster Hall, and I hope that this will be the first of a series, so that more hon. Members can take part. It is unfortunate that this first major debate on Ofsted should occur on a day when few hon. Members are present—almost all those here are members of the Select Committee—but I trust that on future occasions others will participate.

This debate forms part of our apparent on-going accountability for Ofsted, which I want to split into two or three areas. First, there is the totality of Ofsted's work. It is not often that I agree with the hon. Member for Guildford, but on this occasion I agree entirely. The extension of Ofsted's work gives it a huge remit—early years education in all its forms, primary and secondary schools, 16-plus and the college sector, teacher training and local education authorities. It is a daunting task for the Select Committee to have to cover such a large area year by year. The Committee is also responsible for holding to account the chief inspector. The Committee was given that remit, publicly at least, by the previous chief inspector. The difficulty of carrying out that responsibility became clear at the sitting on 1 November last year, when the Committee realised that it could comment or criticise, but that any enforcement of its comments would be without answer. If the Committee is to hold Ofsted and the chief inspector to account, there must be, with the Department's help, a clearer line of accountability and it must be given greater resources.

One area of accountability that has not been mentioned is Ofsted's value for money. Having undergone an expensive Ofsted inspection, many schools have said, "Wouldn't it have been better to have given us the money?" They would say that, wouldn't they? Who is monitoring whether the state funding for Ofsted—this monolithic creature that we are creating—is well spent on raising standards? Although the Committee applauds Ofsted's work generally, who has done the research to show that that kind of inspection and delivery provides value for money? I know that, in part, that is the responsibility of the Audit Commission, but it is also the Select Committee's responsibility; given that, the Committee needs to be given specialist support, which it does not yet have.

There is a National Union of Teachers briefing, of which I have not had a copy, but I should declare my interest as a member of the NUT. All teachers, lecturers and carers of young children are concerned about credibility. Like the Minister, I welcome the appointment, in response to our report, of Maggie Smith to the early years Ofsted team. Given her worthy background in early years work, she would appear to be a good choice. However, we need reassurance that those involved form a credible, professional team of people, particularly given that there has been reason to question the many independent private sector Ofsted teams.

Reference has been made to the process having energised schools, but on occasion, it has exhausted them. We need to show professionalism and practise self-assessment and self-inspection, so that we can provide the necessary encouragement and improve the way in which schools and local education authorities are assessed. That theme, on which I have often concentrated, is the long-term future for the entire inspection system. We have changed the way in which Ofsted inspects on return visits to schools that need them most. The new structure is clearly welcome, but as has been said, it is not Ofsted's role to be a constant presence providing long-term support. Each school should self-inspect, and I hope that encouragement of such a system underpins Ofsted's work at every level.

Credibility is crucial but so is respect, and respect must be mutual. Ofsted must respect the teaching profession and, of course, the children themselves. In that regard we need to build trust, and although there have been clear examples of a breakdown of trust, Ofsted has done a great deal to rebuild it. Because of the more laid-back—by which I mean relaxed, positive and reassuring—approach to inspection, teachers are beginning to realise that there is a life beyond Ofsted that is purposeful, and which hopefully will be enhanced by the experience of an Ofsted inspection.

That brings me almost full circle. In terms of accountability, there are the Durhams of this world, although I do not want to discuss that example in detail. Let us consider the two examples that have been brought to our attention: a disgruntled and completely disillusioned LEA, and an organisation such as the Commission for Racial Equality. If, having participated in the complaints procedure, such a body remains dissatisfied, its last resort is the House of Commons.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said, the Minister's response was generally positive and has enabled on-going dialogue. According to the Government's response to the second report, because it was mentioned in the House of Lords and debated in the House of Commons, Durham county council's case

"therefore confirms that Ofsted is accountable to Parliament".

However, that seems a non sequitur. Durham's case was also discussed by our Committee, but Durham nevertheless felt that Ofsted did not give it a fair and just hearing.

The House of Lords is the final court of appeal, but I do not believe that the Committee is the final court of appeal for individual cases. What must bodies such as Durham county council and the Commission for Racial Equality do to establish a right of appeal and somewhere justifiably to take their case? I would maintain that that is not the role of the Committee.

We have tried desperately not to use individual cases, even when members of the Committee have had detailed cases brought to their attention, because individual cases make bad law. We are not here to justify an individual case or cause; we are here to examine a broad remit, which I trust will be the case in the future. That examination relates to accountability and how individuals can seek justice.

Last but not least, I want to bring a personal touch to the debate. Her Majesty's inspectorate, Ofsted and the many agencies that have sprung up to give advice to local education authorities and schools drain many excellent teachers from the system. However, we could put those quality teachers back in schools. The credibility of the inspectorate would be increased by inspectors spending one year—I am prepared to argue the toss whether it should be one year in three or one year in four—teaching in schools. Some inspectors have been out of school for eight or nine years since Ofsted was set up, while Her Majesty's inspectors have been out of teaching for much longer. To be back teaching in the kind of school that they have seen as lacking in some way would increase their credibility and add to their professionalism. Although many regions are not experiencing a recruitment crisis, I suggest to the Minister that some areas would welcome the experience and professionalism of inspectors teaching in schools and colleges.

3.46 pm

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): I am delighted to take part in this important debate. I am also delighted to see the first annual report of the new chief inspector of schools, Mike Tomlinson. He has brought a welcome change of style to Ofsted. The report contains no snide attacks on teachers or suggestions that the goalposts have been moved and that tests are less rigorous. It celebrates particularly the success of our primary schools, where the great improvement in attainment in schools with the highest levels of disadvantage is especially pleasing. Clearly, the gap between the highest and lowest performing schools has narrowed. The report also recognises the positive role played by the Government's national literacy and numeracy strategies. I was delighted that it highlighted the fact that behaviour is unsatisfactory in only one in 50 primary schools.

There may still be problems with behaviour in secondary schools, but in my experience as a governor of a primary school, the seeds of poor behaviour are often sown when children—especially boys—are seven or eight years old. Having sat through many lessons, I know that learning flies out the window when teachers are engaged in sorting our rows, squabbles and fights. The advancement in primary school behaviour provides a great foundation for improving behaviour throughout the school system.

The Education Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Education and Employment has always stressed the need for the observations of the chief inspector of schools to be based on the evidence of inspections, which is something that Mike Tomlinson has done. His commentary at the front of the report is timely. In 1994-95 teaching was unsatisfactory in one in five lessons; the figure is now one in 20 lessons, which is a tremendous achievement in anybody's book. The proportion of good or better teaching has increased from about 40 per cent. to 60 per cent. over the same period. That is marvellous. It is tremendous for pupils, teachers and parents.

Those significant improvements are, rightly, attributed to the hard work and dedication of head teachers and teachers, ably supported by local education authorities, governors and parents. Improvements in teaching, not surprisingly, have gone hand in hand with rising standards in pupil attainment at all levels of education and I was delighted to see the figures rehearsed. The proportion of 11-year-olds reaching the expected standard in maths increased from 57 per cent. to 75 per cent. in 2000, which is a staggering 18 per cent. increase in attainment. That percentage rise is mirrored in English. It is more difficult to achieve such an improvement in English, particularly written English, and it is a tremendous improvement.

The second round of inspections provides evidence for how the improvement was achieved. Schools have focused more sharply on raising standards by tackling the key issues for action identified in their first inspection. That comes down to good teaching and high-quality leadership. I can testify to the success of the primary school that has become the most improved primary school in London. I am proud to be a governor of that school and I was chair of the governors for six years before coming to the House. The improvement was the result of solid hard work and the support of the local education authority. I recognise and welcome the chief inspector's recognition of the role of LEAs, two of which I know: Lewisham and Staffordshire. LEAs are variable but they have a crucial role in acting decisively and supporting schools in difficulties. If a school is on its uppers, it is difficult for it to garner its personnel and financial resources, to give a clear lead and to pull itself up by the boot straps without outside support. Collaboration, pooling good ideas and even sharing innovative teachers are important.

My daugher's school—Westwood high at Leek in Staffordshire, which is not a bog standard comprehensive by any stretch of the imagination—has just seconded its deputy head to another school. He is doing a tremendous job in leading that school to improved performance.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Lady. Such intervention may help to turn schools around when they are in difficulty, but structural changes may also be needed if the turnaround is to be sustained. Surely the lesson to be learned from the

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

failure of, for example, the fresh start initiative, is that the flash-in-the-pan approach does not lead to consistent improvement in performance.

Charlotte Atkins: The lesson to be learned from the problems in fresh start schools is that it is impossible for individual schools to turn themselves around on their own. If they have the same pupils and, by and large, the same staff, head teachers alone, however brilliant, cannot be expected to transform the situation. The approach must be collaborative. If private sector initiatives work as islands, there is no cross-collaboration and the result is the damaging competition between schools that occurred under the previous Government. We do not have that now because we have partnership and collaboration, which I welcome.

The previous chief inspector's hostility to LEAs did nothing to encourage this partnership approach, which has replaced the previous damaging competitiveness. That partnership approach is demonstrated by specialist schools, which were set up by the previous Conservative Government, but are very different under Labour. I welcome the Secretary of State's recent encouragement of joint bids for specialist school status. That will be ideal for my constituency. We already know about the requirement of specialist schools to share their resources with the community and with other schools. It is not a winner-takes-all situation as it was under the previous Government. Clough Hall technology school in Kidsgrove in my constituency shares its resources with the community in Kidsgrove. It has after-school clubs and shares its resources with Maryhill school down the road. Such action has a tremendously important community spin-off.

I am delighted that Ofsted's latest report has highlighted that insufficient progress has been made in key stage 3. In much of Staffordshire, Moorlands there is a middle school system in which pupils move to the high school in year 9. In my experience—both personal and professional—that system can leave year 8 as a gap year, when pupils can mark time unless extreme care is taken. Many of them are bored and insufficiently challenged. Year 8 could be an exciting year for pupils. They could be encouraged to think beyond the horizons of obtaining a job at 17 years old, and to consider looking into further and higher education and planning for GCSEs. Collaborating with local universities and other institutions will ensure that pupils' aspirations are widened. Key stage 3 should be a good foundation for GCSEs. It should enthuse pupils, not bore them.

If we are to achieve the Government's ambitious target of opening up higher education to 50 per cent. of pupils, we need to start encouraging pupils early in years 7 and 8. They can then explore the opportunities of higher education, and the available Government financial support, rather than feel burdened by the idea of debt. They must consider in those early years how they can expand their life chances, not limit them. That would particularly help non-traditional students—those students whose parents did not attend university.

All hon. Members here today know that Ofsted has played a valuable role in providing independent external inspection of education services. When the Select Committee produced its report on Ofsted in 1999, we recognised that, too. However, I share the worries of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) and the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) about accountability. I am delighted therefore that the Ofsted complaints adjudicator is to be appointed by the Secretary of State rather than Ofsted. That will give him or her a truly independent role.

That will give an important message to schools such as Moorside high in Cellarhead in my constituency. Its Ofsted report was poor in many ways. The school's standards had declined, but the report contained factual errors. There were several performance shortfalls and problems and the school went into special measures. The head teacher did not consider that Ofsted dealt with his justifiable complaints fairly. That created a problem for the school in accepting that certain matters had to be put right. The school's confidence in Ofsted was undermined. It then found it difficult to deal with the concerns of parents, staff and pupils. I am glad to report that, because the local education authority put in a temporary head who was subsequently replaced by a permanent head, the school is facing a renaissance. It is now on the up and up. In less than a year, it has started to make tremendous progress. I congratulate the LEA for helping to steer the school to success.

Any inspection system will be stressful for teachers. In April 1997, when my enthusiasms may have been elsewhere, I promised, as chair of governors at Kelvin Grove school in Lewisham, that I would be at the school for the Ofsted inspection, although my election agent thought that that was inappropriate. I became heavily involved in that inspection, which was very fair. It highlighted some of the problems in the school, and science was identified as a particular problem area. In the four years since the inspection, Kelvin Grove has become the most improved school in London, and the 10th most improved primary school in England. That demonstrates that if teachers have the right approach to Ofsted, they can draw lessons from it and ensure that the focus is not on teaching to test but on individual pupils, their potential and their ability to make progress. Personal concentration on individual pupils is the way forward.

The shorter notice of inspections, which we recommended in our report, will help to reduce the pressure on the school, teachers and heads. The shorter period during which a school can prepare for inspection will also ensure that over-enthusiasm for preparation, which so many schools told us about during our Ofsted report inquiry—one school produced several crates of paper, which Ofsted inspectors had to hire a car to take away—will be curbed. Schools will always be prepared for their inspection because they will use the Ofsted framework, which many people have praised as a useful self-evaluation tool. They will use that framework to ensure that they are up to the mark, not just for the Ofsted inspection, but throughout the year, for the benefit of all their pupils.

Sometimes inspections can be marred by lack of co-ordination and liaison between the inspectorate team and the school management. That sometimes occurs because the inspectors are self-employed and do not operate from an office. I was pleased to see that in future the new early years inspectorate will be employed as opposed to self-employed. However, much concern has

been expressed about the fact that those inspectors will still be home-based rather than based in an office, which would facilitate effective team working. While we were conducting our inquiry we heard stories about inspectors meeting for the first time in the car park. I do not know whether those stories were true, but that is certainly the impression that some schools had. If we are to overcome the problem, we must consider whether inspectors should be employed rather than self-employed. I am pleased that at least early years inspectors will be employed, even if they are working from home. That issue should be revisited.

We should also consider the issue of pay and conditions. Currently, no one would move from being a head teacher to working for Ofsted as there would be no financial benefit in doing so. We became aware of concerns that inspectors had to take on the burden of too many inspections because of pay and conditions. Unless inspectors were retired, and therefore already had a pension or other retirement income, they might be tempted to take on too many inspections in order to make a decent living. That does not do justice to Ofsted. That issue must be considered if Ofsted is to deliver the quality service that we want for our education system. Ofsted inspectors must be properly employed, with appropriate pay and conditions, in order to provide an effective service to schools.

4.5 pm

Mr. Hilary Benn (Leeds, Central): I, too, welcome the opportunity to discuss the work of Ofsted. I praise the Select Committee for so tenaciously throwing the spotlight on that work and for producing such balanced reports. In essence, the debate hinges on getting the balance right in the inspection framework. We must also disentangle the noise that has recently surrounded Ofsted and its work.

Like every hon. Member who has spoken today, I am unequivocally in favour of independent inspection, owing to my experience as a former local authority chair of education. I held that position in a London borough in 1986, during a period in which the local authority inspected its own schools but never published the reports. One of my first moves was to ensure that they were published, which was a small step in the right direction, and a necessary change. We would all acknowledge that, in those days, local education authorities had little incentive to admit that things were not going well, because that would have reflected on the close relationship of those authorities within the system.

Inspection, together with standard assessment tests and other new measures, has given us much more information about what pupils do in schools. The process has developed as a common thread of Government policy over the past 25 years. In 1976, Jim Callaghan made his famous Ruskin college speech about the secret garden of the curriculum. If he had been asked at that time what percentage of lessons were of a satisfactory standard, he would have had to admit that he did not know, because—to continue the analogy—he had not investigated that particular flowerbed of the secret garden.

We can now demonstrate categorically that standards are rising for pupil achievement and the quality of teaching. I welcome the commentary contained in the chief inspector's annual report. Mike Tomlinson says:

"These significant improvements...have been achieved through the hard work and dedication of headteachers and teachers, supported by Local Education Authorities (LEAs), governors and parents...There is, therefore, much to celebrate in the trends in our education system. The great majority of parents are pleased with their children's education."

I say hear, hear to that—first because it recognises reality, praising head teachers and schools for their good work in the vast majority of cases and, secondly, because it makes the important point about parents' satisfaction. A great deal of evidence suggests that people give one view when asked about the state of education in general but another, more favourable view when asked specifically about the education received by their children. As the latter view is based on their actual experience, that is positive news.

I welcome the new style followed by the new chief inspector, which could be described as rigour without the provocation. The provocation of former times unquestionably, and unfortunately, tainted attitudes towards Ofsted. I support the Select Committee's comments on the role of encouragement and support in raising standards.

My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) said that inspection, and the shouldering of accountability that goes with it, is a painful process to undergo. In two months, every hon. Member will undergo his or her own form of inspection. In some cases it may be painful, or indeed terminal to parliamentary careers, but it is necessary. We must not lose sight of the fact that Ofsted itself must be subject to external evaluation. One of the Select Committee's most valuable contributions has been to begin to tease out issues surrounding that question. There is no doubt that the dialogue between the Select Committee, my right hon. Friend the Minister and her colleagues about precisely how Ofsted should be held properly to account should continue.

I have had two experiences of Ofsted inspections as the chair of a primary school governing body. As has been said, there is no doubt that the inspection in both cases was stressful, and anything that can be done to reduce that stress—shortening the duration and the other steps that the Government have taken—is to be encouraged. However, after both those inspections we sat down with the head and the staff and I asked: "On balance, was that a fair reflection of the school?" With one or two quibbles, on both occasions the head and the staff said, "Yes, it was a fair reflection." That is extremely significant, because it reflects what surveys tell us about the attitudes of heads and others to the inspections they have experienced: inspections may be stressful and difficult but in the end they describe the school as it is. That is clearly a strength of the system.

A criticism that I—and, I am sure, other hon. Members—have encountered is from head teachers, teachers and others who say, "Aha! It's accurate, but it doesn't tell me anything that I didn't already know." We must acknowledge that that is true. One would hope that a good head teacher and good members of staff would see reflected in an external evaluation what they knew about their institution, but the crucial

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importance of independent inspection is that it may tell those of us outside the school—parents and elected representatives—things that we did not already know. That is why the principle is right.

When I think back to my local authority days, there were schools in which, to be frank, head teachers were not up to the job. The local authority did not want to declare that fact publicly and used a variety of mechanisms to try to move them on, including encouraging them to take early retirement, and so on. However, during that time, children in those schools were getting less than a fair deal because the system found it difficult to acknowledge that things were not going well. The lesson is that in some cases—especially for schools in special measures—it is the external Ofsted inspection that brings schools face to face with their problems. That is not pleasant or easy, but sometimes an external stimulus is what makes the school sit up and say, "All is not well and we need to make progress." That self-awareness, encouraged by external inspection, is sometimes necessary.

That is not to say that improvements could not be made to the system; I shall mention one. The biggest weakness of the current system is what I describe as the inspect-and-go approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) talked about staff being left demoralised. In my experience, if people are told, "I've looked at what you're doing; a lot of it is good, but in these areas you could do better", the reaction is usually, "Please show me how." Once they have got over any initial disagreement and concern, they want to be shown how to do it. It is frustrating if a person says, "It's not up to scratch" and then disappears in a cloud of dust, leaving people unsure of where to get support and advice. Of course, local education authorities have an important role to play in providing post-inspection support, but I was interested to discover when I visited a high school in my constituency last year that it had paid money from its own funds to get an inspector to return to give precisely that post-inspect-and-go advice. It found that arrangement most satisfactory.

I know that it is difficult to strike a balance so as to provide sufficient resources to perform inspections to cover all schools, but more needs to be done to bridge that post-inspection gap between the judgment—what inspectors have found— and practical, down to earth support for schools and teachers to act on that judgment.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am sorry to have missed the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks. Does he recognise the potential for a conflict of interest in the role of an auditor of an operation who returns and is put in charge of putting matters right? Is there not something to be said for a system in which a group of people independently assess and identify problems and leave to the school the choice of who to introduce to help resolve those problems?

Mr. Benn: I do not believe that it is a question of asking the inspector to return and putting him or her in charge. Under the system, the head teacher and the governing body are in charge of dealing with issues identified in an inspection. I feel that we have not struck the right balance and that schools need better support in tackling issues that have been identified.

All systems that are intended to measure and quantify process and output face a future challenge. In essence, that is where the debate began. We needed to introduce such systems for education because we lacked detailed information about developments. The challenge for schools, the examination system and the inspection framework is to establish precisely what we are trying to measure and whether we are absolutely confident that we are measuring the right factor.

Employers tell me, "Yes of course we want young people who have literacy and numeracy skills.", but they also say, "We are looking for young people who have curiosity, aspiration, creativity, imagination and flexibility"—in other words, the very qualities that in another age might have been described as essential to a rounded education. We need to reflect on how the system of qualifications and inspection captures those qualities, given what we know about their importance to young people's chances of finding a job on leaving school. We also need to consider the link—which my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield has mentioned in debates on the Floor of the House—between that and the contribution that those qualities, combined with good standards of literacy and numeracy and a good basic education, make to our economic future as a nation.

I was forcefully reminded of that point during the second of the two Ofsted inspections that I experienced as the chair of a governing body. The inspectors felt that there were insufficient opportunities for awe and wonder in religious education. That left us slightly mystified. I believe that the head teacher said, "Well, I'm very sorry, but awe and wonder didn't happen to be on the curriculum that week." It is an interesting phrase to use, because part of what characterises excellent teaching and successful learning is the stimulation of awe and wonder, which can be combined with purposeful application and the acquisition of knowledge and new skills.

I am not suggesting that if we open the equivalent of this report in 10 years' time we shall see that a 10 per cent. increase in episodes of awe and wonder has been observed by Ofsted inspectors—

Ms Estelle Morris: Why not?

Mr. Benn: Well, perhaps I am being too cautious. I am merely observing that we must value what is important to us as parents and to our children and recognise that that may change over time and that the inspection framework will need to do so too as it evolves over the months and years ahead.

4.19 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I am delighted to have the opportunity to speak in the debate. I apologise for the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who has a long-standing interest in such issues, having been a member of the Select Committee on Education and Employment, and who would have been present had the debate been on another day, is unable to attend due to a long-standing constituency engagement.

We have had an interesting exchange of views. It started with a helpful, clear and characteristically balanced introduction from the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Chairman of the Education Sub-Committee of the Select Committee on Education and Employment. He set the scene for our debate. That was followed by a typically robust contribution from the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn). He made several points that need to be heard; both sides of the argument are needed to have a debate. Although I, like others, do not agree with everything that he says, the hon. Gentleman certainly challenges us to justify our position.

The contribution by the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) was excellent. She spoke about the possibility of more self-assessment during inspections. I share her view about the unsatisfactory interaction between Durham county council and Ofsted. Furthermore, I agree that it represents a failure of the system. People who feel hard done by should know that a fair overview can be taken and that an appeal system is in place.

I was disappointed that the Government did not respond more clearly to the fact that, regardless of the merits of the Durham case, which many of us thought were strong, we still cannot be certain of fairness. The Government say that they will ensure that the person who is to be taken on to hear appeals at Ofsted will be appointed from outside. It remains to be seen whether that will give sufficient distance in the working relationship.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West suggested that inspectors should spend some time teaching. It would not only benefit them, because they would be able to keep in touch with developments and new challenges, but give them more credibility and help them to tackle the relative shortage of experienced teachers. I hope to explore the feasibility of that excellent idea. I hope that the Minister will consider encouraging that, although not necessarily compelling it, and perhaps linking the prospects for promotion and reward in Ofsted to regular classroom experience and what might be seen as in-service training for inspectors.

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) gave us the benefit of some sensible ideas to improve the employment arrangements of Ofsted staff. Many people recognise that the credibility and effectiveness of Ofsted depends on the competence and ability of its inspectors and of school inspectors generally. The way and settings in which they work are crucial.

The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn), who has continually impressed hon. Members during his time here, raised some important points about inspection that were hard to disagree with. He compared the inspection of schools with the inspection and the verdict that hon. Members receive at elections. That analogy was a little stretched, especially as the two fundamental factors for surviving that inspection—the size of one's majority and the performance of one's party—are, for better or worse, more important than one's own performance. To use the election result as a judgment of one's performance seems a little unfair on those of us in more marginal seats. However, the point that he makes is taken.

Many people ask whether the inspection is a traumatic experience for schools. Although perhaps it is not more damaging than the verdict and advice resulting from the inspection, they want to know whether the mode and style of inspection could be altered, so that the experience provided maximum value.

The stress of an impending inspection is not the only consideration. It would probably be the same regardless of the time scale. I suppose that giving less warning leaves people less time in which to feel stress, although it may accentuate it by concentrating it in a shorter time. Another fear is dislocation of time—which is not in the interests of the children—to prepare for the inspection. Something that is more continuous and perceived as less of an event might not give rise to the problems that we have heard about. That is why there is some validity in the arguments for an element of self-assessment and for inspection and quality assurance on the self-assessment mechanisms. Those points were well made in the briefing that many hon. Members received from the National Union of Teachers, which cited evidence to support its view.

The effect of putting schools in special measures should be examined by the Government. We have all heard stories of such schools being unable to retain staff, particularly in a market that suits those in search of employment, rather than those advertising posts. It is difficult to recruit teachers to schools in special measures because of prospective teachers' concern about the future of the school, the extra pressure on people working in such a stressful environment, and parents and pupils voting with their feet. Much funding is based on capitation, so a cycle of redundancy or lost posts is created. Together with difficulties in recruitment and retention, that makes matters very difficult.

I am the governor of a primary school in my constituency that was put into special measures following an inspection some time ago. Since then, there has been a huge turnover in teaching staff. Regular vacancies have had to be filled on an ad hoc basis, which is traumatic for the children, who rely on continuity, and for the rest of the staff, who must box and cox to fill posts. That makes it even more difficult for the school to emerge from special measures.

Schools that move out of special measures are almost certainly doing an incredible amount right and making a huge effort, because being in that position creates even more barriers to progress. We need to make abundant support available to overcome the problems. Another approach would be to change the way in which language that is used in that context: the implied threats and blame that, not unnaturally, arise stigmatise special measures.

I do not propose to discuss at length the rigour of inspections, because comments about that should be based on evidence and I have expressed concern in that regard in previous contributions on the subject. The school where I was involved was asked to set a target for the percentage of lessons that would be deemed satisfactory. That target was 85 per cent., based on a sample of about 20 lessons to be inspected over several days. That was the ball park figure. Each lesson represents 5 per cent. of the total. Any statistician knows that, when the sample is so small, 85 per cent., 90 per cent. and 95 per cent. are all much of a muchness. The

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conclusions are determined by the random circumstances of one or two lessons, which might have been satisfactory on other days.

On one inspection visit, all 20 lessons could be considered satisfactory, but, on another, only 17 or 14 might be so considered. If one considers, for example, 200 lessons, the average percentage will be 97 per cent. Choosing a day at random could lead to the school being unfairly assessed as providing fewer satisfactory lessons than the requirement. Conversely, it could lead to the school being judged as providing a higher percentage of satisfactory lessons than it actually does. That brings into question the validity of conclusions based on inspections that do not use a big enough sample.

There is the issue of the effect that having an inspector in the lesson has, for better or for worse, on standards. If we are to stress, as we do, the importance of evidence, we must ensure that qualitative opinion is translated into quantitative targets. Scrutiny of the inspection process by someone competent in the validity of sample sizes would be useful.

The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands welcomes, as I do, the change of style that we have already seen, and that we are likely to continue to see, from the new chief inspector. She pointed out that the confrontational style of Mike Tomlinson's predecessor, Chris Woodhead, was a problem. I agree. However, for me, the main problem with the work of the previous chief inspector was not his style. It is important to put that on the record. I certainly had run-ins with him, but I did not mind robust exchanges in Select Committee, involving interrogation, questioning and an exchange of views. I never complained about what was said. However, I was, and still am, concerned about chief inspectors making comments that are not evidence-based, or straying too far into the role of party political commentators. Some of the views expressed by Mr. Woodhead were of the sort that one would expect to hear, and indeed one does hear, from people such as the hon. Member for Guildford. However, that is a politician's role, not a chief inspector's.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am interested to know which of the comments that I have made this afternoon, or on other occasions, have not been evidence-based. Is the hon. Gentleman sure that he is happy for politicians such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer to stray into the educational world with their opinions, which turn out not to be based on any evidence?

Dr. Harris: There is a lot in that. Any criticism that I make of chief inspectors making comments that are not evidence-based should not be taken to imply that anyone else who makes comments—I am prepared to include myself in this—without adequate evidence should not be criticised. I am concentrating on the matter before us. In his comments, the chief inspector often strayed into areas on which he had no evidence or on which he might have had evidence, but made political pronouncements. Sometimes, he committed only one of the offences that I have described; sometimes, he committed both. I was not referring to any of the remarks by the hon. Member for Guildford today. However, generally speaking, politicians on all sides will make remarks that are highly political in nature, with or without the evidence to support them. We should not expect that from the chief inspector.

Mr. John Butterfill (in the Chair): Order. I hope that we will not stray too far into the realms of history. We are debating the report.

Dr. Harris: Not at all, Mr. Butterfill. Several parts of the report relate to the issues that I will now talk about. The first issue is A-level standards, the second is degree standards, the third is the role of LEAs and the fourth is section 28. My earlier remarks were simply to explain why I was concerned about the conduct and role of a previous chief inspector, who is criticised in the report that we are discussing alongside the Government's response.

I do not want to discuss the detail of our points on A-level standards, but it is worth pointing out that the Government's response to it is encouraging. The response points out that the job of checking those standards does not belong to Her Majesty's chief inspector of schools, and that evidence suggests no wide-scale problem of declining standards. The response provides some clarity. We expect that more able students will be stretched by existing exams. That is separate from stating that A-level standards have declined, or making comments in the press that can be interpreted by any normal person as implying that. It is important that the inspectorate concentrates on its job, which, as hon. Members have said, is big enough without straying into other areas.

The same applies to degree standards, about which the previous chief inspector of schools made comments that implied concern. Those were then reported in the media. I welcome the Minister's response in her letter:

"The standards of degree courses, other than courses of teacher training, are outside the remit of HM Chief Inspector of Schools."

The terseness of that should send a message—I wish that it had been sent earlier—that the chief inspector's ability to comment on issues within his remit is extremely valuable and valued, but that he will have difficulty retaining credibility if he strays outside his remit without evidence.

The role of LEAs is party political. LEAs' standards, which are set out in the annual report for 1999-2000, are rightly within the remit of the chief inspector. Far too often, however, Chris Woodhead commented or implied that LEAs should not have had their current role. I do not believe that to be anything other than a political judgment, on which we can have a debate. We have now started that debate.

One of the values of an LEA is that it is democratically accountable. We often pray in aid such democratic accountability, when the LEA is not too badly capped, to add resources. Sometimes, as in Bristol recently, that leads to decreases in the amount of funding. That affects standards, as the chief inspector and inspectorate may discover when they go to Bristol. Democracy is a good thing and we must follow it in every way.

Mr. Hilary Benn: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a chief inspector questioning the validity of such

structures leads others to question the independence of judgments by someone with a statutory responsibility to inspect those structures' effectiveness?

Dr. Harris: I agree. The hon. Gentleman has, characteristically, put the problem well.

The credibility of the inspectorate depends on evidence. That is why my final example of concern about the previous approach is homophobic bullying in schools. The chief inspector was significantly questioned on the issue, as the report shows. There is clear evidence of a problem and of section 28 perhaps impeding measures to tackle it. A bullying policy is well within the remit of the chief inspector, so before he makes public comments on its relevance, one would expect him to ask inspectors to ask schools about it, or to judge from his own experience. Information may not easily be volunteered about the subject, due to its sensitive nature.

It was extremely disappointing that the previous chief inspector made assertions about section 28 that were not based on evidence, that were directly ascribed in *The Sunday Telegraph* of all places, when the issue was highly political, and that he could not substantiate when questioned later by the Committee. It was fortunate that the timing of our interview with him enabled that issue to be raised.

As regards the inspectorate's accountability, there will always be a temptation for anyone who holds such an important position to make pronouncements, based on the evidence and his independence, which some may feel go beyond what is appropriate. I would not want a chief inspector who thought that he had the evidence and that a matter was in his remit not to feel able to make such comments.

Because of the confrontational nature of the accountability mechanisms, which arise partly because the Select Committee has only limited opportunities to ask questions and only limited time within those opportunities, I worry whether the chief inspector's role, style and evidence will be adequately scrutinised or, conversely, whether, to avoid the problems caused by the nature of the exchanges between him and the Select Committee, the chief inspector will feel that what he says must be curtailed or trammelled. Neither situation is satisfactory. It is therefore with regret that I as a Select Committee member see that the Government have not accepted our recommendation to establish a board to supervise his role.

In their response, the Government say that there are arguments in favour and against such a board, as we accepted in a previous report. However, on further consideration, we judge from experience that the arguments are now in favour of establishing such a board. The Government simply say that there are arguments for and against and do not give a detailed explanation of their reasons for rejecting the recommendation. Nor is their vague reference to value for money enough to convince me, and I suspect other members of the Committee, that the point has been adequately evaluated.

Finally, I want to refer to the future of the school system. Something that is now in the public domain and which many hon. Members have commented on—it relates to standards and the role of the chief inspector—is the Prime Minister's use of the term "bog standard" to refer to comprehensive schools generally.

Mr. Sheerman: The Prime Minister did not say that.

Dr. Harris: I believe that the Prime Minister's spokesman did, and the Government did not take the opportunity to apologise or to say that that was not what was meant. Not only was it a generalisation, but it was not clear on what evidence the view was based that comprehensives generally are bog standard. I can find no reference to the term in the report. Word searches on the internet will probably reassure me that it is not referred to by the chief inspector, or any chief inspector; usually, chief inspectors do not mince their words.

We can criticise, and have criticised, Ofsted and chief inspectors for making generalisations without evidence, but the Government should take this opportunity, the first that a Minister has had, to clarify what was meant by that comment. As the inspector has found—the hon. Member for Guildford made the point—schools are excellent, coasting or under-performing, rather than comprehensives or not comprehensives. It is impossible to make that generalisation. The Minister must take the opportunity not necessarily to make the apology called for by the National Association of Head Teachers, but to clarify what was meant and on what evidence it was based.

This has been a useful debate and I welcome much of the Government's response to our recent report, although I wish that they had done more. I look forward to Government responses to future reports that are even more helpful.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I hope that my brief contribution will inspire awe and wonder, although it remains to be seen whether I shall succeed in either case. This has been a welcome debate to which many hon. Members have made useful contributions. The hon. Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn) made a telling contribution about the need to ensure that the focus of schools is not too narrow. I think that it was Mark Twain who said that he never let schooling get in the way of his education, and although I would not go so far, it is certainly true that we need to develop in young people the flexibility, creativity and imagination that the hon. Gentleman describes. Although such qualities are hard to measure, schools should nevertheless try to engender them, and of course, good schools do.

My hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn) spoke of the need to share good practice, and of the innovative and creative partnerships that stem from city technology colleges and similar schools. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) made a similar point and it is worth repeating. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) always brings an unusual and remarkable view to debates such as this, and although he got in a bit of a tangle I welcome his contribution. Minority views are not always popular but they have a place in our considerations.

It would churlish, probably inappropriate and certainly unwise to begin without making some concessions. First, I would be foolish not to

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acknowledge that the reports suggest that standards have risen during the lifetime of this Government. Secondly, the Select Committee has played a helpful and useful role and its Chairman, the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), always brings a profound interest to such debates. Thirdly, it must be said that the Government have bought a good deal of the Tory education agenda. The Government's current language—I am mindful in particular of the Green Paper, of which all hon. Members present will be conscious—is reminiscent of Conservative party thinking some 10 or 15 years ago. Some of the Government's comments might have been found in the education black papers that were condemned by the Labour party in the 1970s.

There has also been movement in terms of standards, raising expectations and delivering excellence. When a sinner comes to heaven, one must acknowledge that a significant road has been trod and obstacles overcome, but in debating Ofsted we must not assume that everything in the garden—be it a secret garden or not—is rosy. The reports have alerted us to significant problems with school standards that require amplification in this debate. There is welcome acknowledgement throughout the House that Ofsted does a good and valuable job. For the most part, the fears—some of which were reasonable and realistic—that pervaded schools in Ofsted's early days have begun to dilute.

Like the hon. Member for Leeds, Central, I was a member of an education committee in the mid-1980s and beyond. I remember well that any measurement of output was regarded as slightly bizarre; indeed, measurements that were independent, published, available, comprehensible and comparable were regarded as extraordinary. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, we have made a great deal of progress since then, and I know that the Minister shares that view and the concern that I and other hon. Members who have participated in the debate have expressed.

I want to draw attention to three aspects of the problem facing education, which are highlighted in the Ofsted report. First, there is concern over the morale and status of the teaching profession, which is reflected in the problem of recruitment and retention. Secondly, there is the Government's over-prescriptive approach, and thirdly, there is the quality of life in many schools. Denial is not useful, so we should not pretend that the problems are not profound or deny the specifics. I want to make a couple of points, and I shall mention them fleetingly. I realise that the Minister will not have time to respond to them in detail, but perhaps we can continue the debate on another occasion.

Specific issues have been raised about the teaching of religious education and information technology, the setting of homework, and the achievements of boys generally, especially in writing. Those issues are reflected in the tables in the first and second reports. It is interesting that in the context of both teaching quality and pupil achievement some of those subjects consistently and regularly appear at the bottom of the league table. There is also a problem with subjects such as history and geography, which because of the proper concentration on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, may receive lower priority in schools. We know that there are problems with recruitment in those subjects.

Mr. Tomlinson, the new chief inspector, refers to significant recruitment and retention problems and states:

> "Most vacancies are eventually filled, but heads report that there are few good applicants, and sometimes few applicants at all, in an increasing range of subjects."

He also said that one consequence was that,

> "for the first time in many years, inspectors report increasing levels of poor behaviour"

They reflect the response of pupils to poor teaching.

The correlation, albeit not a direct one, between teacher recruitment and retention, poor behaviour, and the risk of decreasing standards and progress needs to be acknowledged. It should not be denied. It is emphasised in the report and Mr. Tomlinson is flagging a significant danger. We know that there are 4,000 to 5,000 vacancies and that vacancy rates are increasing. We know that the demographics of the teaching profession suggest that, despite the golden hellos, we are storing up problems for the future, particularly in subjects such as history, geography and religious education. There has been progress in maths and English but not all those problems have been addressed and some may even be exacerbated by some of the proposals in the Green Paper.

If an arts graduate is considering a postgraduate certificate in education in English or history and knows that his student loan will be paid off if he trains to teach English, what incentive is there to be a history teacher?

Mr. St. Aubyn: I have in my hand an e-mail from a constituent who is a new teacher. She states:

> "Watching teenagers achieve and gain confidence is a pleasure that is difficult to quantify.
>
> What is easier to quantify, however, is my mortgage, council tax, student loans' repayments and travel expenses."

She goes on to say that three of the four people she studied with have now left the profession and financial pressures are forcing her to consider doing the same. She is very sad about that.

Mr. Hayes: We must understand that when people move from working for a degree to teacher training, the available options are affected by circumstances and incentives. It may be that, perversely, encouraging people to plug the gap in English is opening an even bigger gap in subjects such as history, geography and religious education. With the addition of the demographic problem—the profession is getting older—we may be unable to deliver even basic requirememts for teaching those subjects.

Standards fall when teachers teach subjects that are not their natural specialism. The Ofsted report states:

> "Urgent action is more than ever needed on the recruitment and retention of teachers. There is growing evidence of the adverse impact of high staff turnover, the widespread use of temporary teachers and a poor match between teachers' qualifications and the subjects taught."

Interdependence kicks in again because the problem is especially profound in the most disadvantaged areas. It is no surprise that there is difficulty with teacher retention and recruitment where quality and standards

are the biggest problem. That causes problems with disruption and discipline, which makes it harder to attract teachers and pupils. There is a relationship between behaviour and staying on rates because people can be put off education as a whole. The Minister ought to acknowledge that several significant and growing problems in education are interdependent; the Government should acknowledge that with a more coherent policy.

I have already alluded to the report's stark remarks about behaviour. I was in a good school this morning that has problems with retention and recruitment, even though it is known as a good school. Such problems stem from teaching becoming a harder job. Indeed, in some cases home-school relationships are breaking down. We hear that behaviour is deteriorating in one in 12 of our schools. It may be one in 12 as an average, but if one visits the most disadvantaged areas, it is considerably more than that. We must not mask great problems with blind averages. The head teacher and chairman of governors of the school that I visited today said that that problem was under-recognised—I shall not say unrecognised because that would be unfair to the Minister, but the Government are not responding with sufficient vigour. That is the line that Ofsted takes when it states that "urgent action" is needed.

Mr. Tomlinson's remarks on the subject of behaviour were stark:

"for the first time in recent years, inspectors report increasing levels of poor behaviour...a few pupils disobedience and disruption can undermine the work of the whole class."

He also stated that a small but significant proportion of pupils

"are very demanding and challenge even the most competent teachers."

He continued:

"Poor behaviour and negative attitudes towards work are significant issues in half the schools making poor progress in raising pupils' attainment."

Mr. Sheerman: I participated in an earlier education debate with the hon. Gentleman when reference was also made to bad behaviour. Members of the Select Committee try to strike a balance in these matters because it does no one any good to exaggerate the problem. In that debate, I asked him and his hon. Friends to dissociate themselves from the wild remarks made by the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who claimed that the role of the teacher was merely to try to keep order. It was a dreadful comment, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take this opportunity to repudiate it.

Mr. Hayes: I would not want to repudiate anything that I had not read or heard.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman was there.

Mr. Hayes: Well, I shall examine the record carefully.

I can inform the hon. Gentleman, whom I know brings a considered view to these matters, that I am not describing the situation in every school. I have emphasised that the problem is worse in certain areas and is especially significant in areas that suffer from other problems. That is not my view, but the view expressed in the Ofsted report. The report draws attention to problems with, for example, ethnic minority pupils and deprived areas. We have a poisonous cocktail of recruitment and retention difficulties, poor behaviour and a difficulty in achieving high standards.

I agree that it would be wrong to suggest that that was the daily experience of every teacher, parent, head and pupil in every school. Equally, the hon. Gentleman would agree that it would be wrong to sweep the problem under the carpet, given what Ofsted has said. It has warned us that the problem may become injurious to standards. All hon. Members and the Government must take that warning extremely seriously. There is a vicious circle of disruption, under-achievement and retention problems.

Teachers feel embattled due to an excess of schemes and initiatives, which is also a threat to standards. Teachers' daily experience is one of pet-project fatigue, as was made clear to me in two schools today. They want a period of stability, and do not want to be over-burdened by excessive regulation and red tape. We need to collect data, as has been said, but it must be used effectively so that it is not just collected for its own sake. We must not become more obsessed with collecting data than delivering results. There is a worry that each new scheme and initiative puts additional pressure on hard-pressed teachers and schools, especially as such schemes sometimes overlap and contradict one another. Head teachers and governors will often protect their teachers from such schemes because they are mindful of those worries, which have been expressed to me as I have visited schools around the country.

The standard of achievement is good in the vast bulk of our schools, and we must achieve a balance between proper reservation and celebration. We must celebrate the work of our teachers. It is extraordinary that every civilisation that I can think of—ancient Greece, ancient Rome, China, Persia, Egypt, and hon. Members may be able to think of others—valued and revered the role of the educator, yet western society has denigrated teachers in the second half of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st. That is inappropriate. It is not good for teachers and worse for our civilisation. We should celebrate the achievements, efforts and endeavours of teachers who do excellent work in our country every day.

I want to draw attention to what Ofsted said about the need to be vigilant in maintaining standards. In education—in an individual school, an LEA or a nation—complacency is always a danger. We must think about how we can maintain the improvement. I suggest that we do so by recognising that teachers are creative and innovative people who need to be given the freedom to express that creativity.

We need to exercise a greater degree of good judgment in the powers that we give to schools. That is difficult, because where there is freedom, there is the freedom to disappoint and not to deliver. However, there is also the freedom to excel. Some schools are desperate for the freedom to set their own means by which to achieve targets. We can set our desired targets, but we can also give schools the freedom to meet them in their own way. I am concerned that an over-prescriptive attitude will be injurious to standards. We must have the courage, energy and foresight to trust our teachers to innovate, to allow our governors to manage and to

[Mr. Hayes]

allow our heads to lead. That seems to be the next step on the road that we have travelled, sometimes apart and sometimes together.

A measure of agreement seems to have been engendered today. Unless we achieve it, we will not move forward. I am frightened that we shall not achieve it, certainly not through the Green Paper, but unless we do, not only will our schools suffer, but our children—our very future.

5.4 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Ms Estelle Morris): I thank hon. Members for a very useful, supportive, sensitive and sensible debate. I agree with much of what has been said, but disagree with some things. I will try to respond as fully as I can in the time available.

I begin with three sets of thanks. First, I join members of the Select Committee in thanking the teachers, head teachers, governors, parents, pupils and communities of the 24,000 schools in this country. Most of those schools get very good results and we have a right to be proud of them. Hon. Members have quoted the figures in the Ofsted report. They are on the record, correct and a joy to behold. I add two further statistics, which have not been mentioned and which touch on many of the issues that hon. Members have drawn on.

The first figure fills me with awe, wonder and amazement—I say that partly for the benefit of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Mr. Benn). No local authority is performing, in terms of literacy or numeracy, at a level at or below the national average of three years ago. That merits our awe and wonder and shows what teachers can achieve if we get things right, support them well, put resources into the system and base our work on good evidence.

The second set of statistics shows that the greatest improvement in GCSE performance and in literacy and numeracy is in areas of the greatest deprivation. For many years, what is basically a good national education system has had the flaw of allowing the difference of attainment between those who achieve and those who do not to grow and grow. We all strive for excellence, and even the best can be better, but I pay tribute to and acknowledge the improvement of the children in those schools that have traditionally under-achieved.

Secondly, I thank Ofsted. I particularly thank the chief inspector, the inspectors—whatever guise they come in and wherever they inspect—and the Ofsted staff, without whose effort and work we would not have a report to discuss. Without them, there would be no inspection system and no statistics from which to learn and of which to be proud.

Thirdly, I thank the Select Committee—its Chairman and its members—for its work throughout the year. I would be lying if I said that I looked forward to appearances before the Select Committee. That would be less than truthful. It is not with awe and wonder that I sit before them; it is, rightly, with some trepidation. Perhaps appearing before the Committee is a better analogy for the experience undergone by teachers and governors during inspection than the analogy of a general election. Inspection is useful—it is good to be questioned in depth, to read the report and to have to respond to it. I welcome our dialogue and I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and to Committee members for their work.

I confirm that we have now decided that, at the end of the term of office of the present adjudicator, in June, whoever gets the post will be appointed by the Secretary of State. To add something that perhaps has not been picked up, the new term of office will be for three years, to give more stability. I trust that members of the Select Committee will welcome that.

It is tempting to respond to every point that has been raised and to get into a battle over things that I support, things that I want to quibble about, the odd percentage point or the wording of a particular phrase in the Ofsted report. I will try not to do that. Perhaps the best way in which to respond is to deal with the general themes of the Committee's proceedings and of our discussions.

Every hon. Member has said that Ofsted inspections are okay, but what really matters is what happens after the inspectors have gone. There has been an interesting debate. In this country, we no longer have to argue the need for clear inspections and for information to be put into the public domain. The debate about what should be done when the inspectors have gone is interesting and we have heard both sides of the argument.

Obviously, if nothing happens, a golden opportunity has been wasted. My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central said that, in both the inspections in which he had been involved, the teachers were left saying, "It has got us right, but it has told us nothing that we did not know." I had another interesting conversation with a mutual friend of ours, who shall remain nameless, who said of LEA inspections, "Not one of them has been a surprise to me." My question to him and to the schools is, "What did you do about it?" It will be no good knowing about it and saying, "They have not surprised me" if nothing is done about it. The fact that they knew about it but the situation is still the same leads me to think that what was missing was the ability to do anything about it. The difficult part, with respect to Ofsted, is knowing what to do about it.

I am proud to say that the Government have opened that debate. I acknowledge, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield, that the last Conservative Government introduced some of the key measures for assessing performance—SATS, end of key stage results, performance tables and inspection. All that accountability information had to be put in place. What the previous Government never put in place was a school improvement package to go with it. Schools were therefore left on their own.

I agree with most of what my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central says, but on this occasion I agree with the hon. Member for Guildford (Mr. St. Aubyn). It is crucial that Ofsted remains independent. What I worry about most is inspectors coming back and inspecting again. They are not so perfect—no one is—that they might not be tempted to think, "They have done what I said, so it must be right." It is more complex than that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central hit on what I think is the answer—the local authority and the Government have a responsibility to ensure that the school is not left by itself. The worst thing about a bad

Ofsted inspection report is the loneliness the staff must feel on Friday night and on Monday morning when they return to school. It is the feeling of being alone; they are not one of the majority with good inspection reports and wonder what to do about it. The measures that we have introduced to support those schools are showing results. The local authority must move in, not so much to tell the school what to do, but—this is the key point—to ensure that it learns from other schools that are already doing well. Successful schools are the best teachers, not Ofsted inspectors, advisers or Ministers.

Dr. Harris: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Estelle Morris: I shall when I have finished my train of thought.

Part of the challenge is to make successful links through the extension and spreading of good practice, which enables schools to learn from each other. My hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) referred to a deputy head who had gone to work with a struggling school. That is one way of spreading good practice.

The best way to achieve objectives—whether twinning of heads, or twinning with other schools that have had similar experiences, enabling staff to share good practice or professional development—must be determined not by academic research, but by what works in schools in similar circumstances. We are beginning to build that in. We have developed beacon schools with the mission of sharing good practice. We have given specialist schools the role of working with schools that may not be as strong. We have set up the standards website. Our advisers spend days and weeks phoning schools and saying, "You're weak on that. Do you know the school down the road that is slightly better?" I acknowledge that we are just beginning to try to develop connections with good and improving schools. However, I would sooner go down that road than only have inspectors who inspect, advise and inspect again.

I applaud the school in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central, which said to an inspector, "Can you come in and tell us what went wrong?" I have no problem with that as long as the same inspector does not come back to inspect. In that situation, an individual took on a different role and I have no problem with that. Inspectors, in a different part of their life and wearing a different hat, might contribute to advice about school improvement. Their expertise should not be ignored. I do not care whether inspectors assume a different guise. The key point is that the follow-up must be outside the Ofsted framework.

Dr. Harris: I do not disagree with anything that the hon. Lady has said. I just want to take her back to the thought that some schools knew that there was a problem, so the report would not tell them anything that they did not know. The report allows such schools to access the funding available under the statutory duty of LEAs to support those that are deemed to be "failing". Would it be sensible to ensure that schools can either access that help directly, if they accept that there is a problem, without having wait for an inspection, or call in an inspection, rather than just hope for improvements?

Ms Morris: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Ofsted report states that schools in special measures have a good record. They are leaving special measures more quickly than they did under the regime of the previous Government. For the first time, fewer schools are going into special measures than are coming out. If I remember correctly, about 68 schools went into special measures in the autumn term of 1998 and 47 went into special measures in the autumn term of 2000. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that schools with serious weaknesses are not making sufficient progress. If schools go into special measures, the support mechanism will be there to get them out. The really good news is that they stay out and grow from strength to strength.

Mike Tomlinson said that schools with special weaknesses on the second inspection round sometimes slip into special measures. We recognise that that is a real challenge. As I said, schools and the LEAs should know if they are heading on the downward trail and do something about it. The hon. Members for Guildford and for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) were right: there is so much good quality information in the system that we should all know if a school is heading for serious weaknesses or special measures.

I can ask for the most elaborate performance data on any one of the 24,000 schools in the country and receive the details in two minutes. We have responsibilities to assist such schools, to monitor them before the inspectors visit them and to stop them going into special measures. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is right that the schools have to key into better resources and support.

In January at the north of England conference, I announced up to £70,000 extra for all schools in which less than 25 per cent. of pupils were achieving five A to C grades. The excellence in cities clusters are not just magicked out of the air. It is not a case of, "Where shall we have the next excellence in cities cluster?" They are areas with a high level of free school meals and under-achievement. Our policy is to pile on with the basics of effective literacy and numeracy strategies for all students. An effective key stage 3 strategy is to come. The hon. Gentleman is dead right. Let us use the extra money to pinpoint support for schools that need it most because of deprivation and under-achievement. To date, there has been a tendency to think that those matters go together, but they do not. That has been a failure in the system. We have piled in the money after the failure has taken place.

We must become brave enough to say that, whenever a school goes into special measures, the system has failed—someone should have kept the school out before that occurred. Not until then will we be able to say that we have a good school improvement system. We have put in place a lever that will take us in that direction.

Mr. St. Aubyn: I am grateful to the Minister for her generous comments. As she said, given all the available information, she should know what is going on. Does

[Mr. St. Aubyn]

she agree with the chief inspector's assessment of the situation in last week's report that the increase in standards is at risk?

Ms Morris: Good teachers are essential to the improvement in standards. We have high standards only because teachers are teaching more effectively. We have played a role in bringing that about. If we did not have sufficiently well-qualified effective teachers, standards would be at risk. The Government have introduced golden hellos, training salaries and the paying off of student loans. They have achieved more routes into teaching and developed courses so that people can obtain a degree and be teachers in three years instead of four. We would not have done that if we did not acknowledge the existence of a problem. A lot of resources must be devoted to the issue because, if it is not addressed, standards could fall. We have always made the link between having sufficient well-qualified teachers and high standards.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings is right to say that the 1994 statistics show that teacher numbers were going down until last year, when the situation began to improve. It has just occurred to me that this is the first report since the last occasion on which the economy was strong. Teaching recruitment fell at the end of the 1980s and the start of the 1990s. Her Majesty's inspectorate did not produce reports then, but it did produce them all the way through the period of economic decline and recession, when teacher recruitment was easier.

The Secretary of State, my boss, always says three things to me. Have we recognised the problem? We have. Are we doing something to solve it? We are. Is there evidence that that is producing a result? There is. I am not going to repeat what I said in two debates on the Floor of the House, but the link to which I referred explains why we are spending so much money. Evidence is beginning to show that it is having an effect: applications are 12 per cent. up on this time last year. Expressions of interest, which have increased greatly, are not included in that figure. Applications have risen by 7 per cent. in secondary schools and by the balance in primary schools.

People should not be churlish, because we admit that there is a problem. Everyone in the House should be honest about teaching with those who are considering careers in the profession. Those who exaggerate the problem by saying that Government measures are not working dissuade people from entering the profession, which does kids, parents and teachers a disservice. The measures are beginning to work, but I am not complacent.

Mr. Hayes: Far from being churlish, I revered the role of the educator during my speech. The Minister has made a good argument in respect of retention, and I acknowledge that there has been progress in maths and English. However, will she now address the problem subject areas? The Library figures show that retention for teachers under 30 is a problem; the proportion of that age group leaving the profession has increased annually since 1995.

Mr. John Butterfill (in the Chair): Briefly.

Mr. Hayes: Paying off student loans of new teachers will not deal with that problem.

Ms Morris: I do not have the figures with me, and I will clarify later if I get them wrong. However, I believe that application numbers rose for all but two subjects—I do not remember which ones—and that applications for those two had fallen by only a small percentage. I am not complacent, but application numbers were up, and the golden hellos caused the first reverse for a while in the decline of maths applications.

I do not want to get bogged down so, if hon. Members will excuse me, I will move on to the subjects of education action zones and pupil behaviour. Too many Opposition Members have missed out the same sentences while quoting from a paragraph of the Ofsted report. The report acknowledges that, for the first time, the instances of bad and destructive behaviour have increased. That provides a warning, because it is evidence based, and we will investigate. Opposition Members have quoted the sentence:

"This year, for the first time in recent years, inspectors report increasing levels of poor behaviour."

However, no one has gone on to quote:

"This is still far from a general malaise, since the proportion of good behaviour far outweighs that which is unsatisfactory, but it is an early warning."

We have taken that early warning, which is why we have been developing initiatives and spending money for the past three years. Bad behaviour does not start on the first day of the academic year—it builds up. There is general building up of bad and niggly behaviour. Low level disobedience sometimes becomes more problematic and teachers find that they can no longer cope. Teachers do not go home in the summer and come back in September and find that behaviour has worsened. There is a general decline, which is why, over the past three years, we have made money available so that we will have pupil referral units within full-time education.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings omitted the sentence from the report, which states:

"The improving performance of pupil referral units should help with this challenge."

I pay tribute to those who work in our PRUs. They cope with difficult jobs, and their performance has improved—although from too low a base. There are also learning support units—1,000 on-site learning support units—and the mentors in excellence in cities. I cannot find a soul who has a bad word to say about a mentor. Teachers are glad that mentors are there because they can begin to work with children as individuals. We must consider that package of measures together: learning support units, on-site units, full-time education for excluded children, more PRUs, more qualified teachers in them and more money to help teachers to work with the disaffected. I do not want to see worse behaviour. I take the early warning, but I have

every confidence that the measures that we will continue to put in place will help us to overcome such problems, although I am not complacent.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield that what will contribute most to reducing bad behaviour is better literacy and numeracy results at key stage 2. Many children who misbehave at secondary school do not have the basic skills to access the secondary level curriculum, and poor behaviour often derives from that.

I shall now deal with education action zones, excellence in cities, key stage 3 and fresh start. The difficult end of the school improvement market is, and always has been, in those areas to which the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings referred, which face a multiplicity of challenges. There is acute poverty, low expectation, and no experience of going to university. There is the failure to master skills—often, historically, there has not been an opportunity for good quality early years education. Yet, parents in those circumstances are as aspirational for their children as parents in the more affluent areas.

Some kids who are born into this world with the potential to achieve have almost lost that ability by the age of five. Where there is such multiplicity of disadvantage, it sometimes takes longer to get it right. I have always said, and will say to my dying day, that I would rather try and not make it in the first year than turn my back, which is what happened for decades under previous Governments. If, for example, Ofsted says that in the fresh start programme three children have shown progress and five have not, then I thank God that three are making progress. That means thousands more children will have a better life chance, because in some circumstances, schools have been failing the kids, sometimes for decades.

Where children are not making progress, we will try something different. Some of those referred to in the Ofsted report as not making progress, are now doing so—I receive fortnightly monitoring reports on them. We should never give up, we must be open and honest—just as schools have to be with Ofsted reports. The performance of our initiatives should be put on the table for debate. However, the general spread of the initiatives to raise standards is working. It is working because we have shown leadership as a Government and because we have committed the resources. Above all, it is working because we are lucky enough to live in a country where we have a profession that is prepared to stand up and be counted, to acknowledge good practice and to learn from it. Although sometimes it does so with reticence, it is professional enough to change its practice where necessary to raise standards.

The end result is an education system that is far from perfect, but improving. Certainly, after three or four years under this Government, many more children have the good fortune to be educated in many more good schools. I am happy to acknowledge that Ofsted is one of the organisations that helps us to celebrate that progress and achievement. I pay tribute to it, as I do to both the education service and the Select Committee's work.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Five o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 27 February 2001

[MRS. SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Revenue Support Grant (Norfolk)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Mike Hall.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): I am pleased to be sitting here under your eagle eye this morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I am grateful to have the opportunity to discuss the important matter of the revenue support grant for Norfolk, and local government finance support for Norfolk in general. I welcome to the debate my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) and my right hon. Friends the Members for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) and for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), as I do the hon. Members for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) and for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson), who is sitting where the Liberal Democrats usually sit. I do not know whether he is making a statement by so doing.

I also welcome to the debate the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth). I am loth to congratulate him on his promotion because, as a Whip myself, I prefer to think that he has been translated into another sphere. The military historian in me believes that he is in the position of a German general staff officer in about 1942, involved with planning operations and training, who finds himself translated to command a division in the Stalingrad pocket. The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions could be roughly compared with that.

My theme today, which I hope is shared by colleagues, is a fair deal for Norfolk. I say that against the background of the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Fortunately, to date, we have not yet had such a case in Norfolk, but the constituencies of many colleagues have. Many people in the rural communities of Norfolk are terrified of the possible impact that the disease may have on their lives and on our economy. Norfolk is special to its Members of Parliament, not only because we represent constituencies there, but because it is an outstanding county. It is the second largest county in the United Kingdom. Its population is in excess of 700,000—a population that is concentrated heavily in the three major towns of Norwich, King's Lynn and Yarmouth, but one that is spread out over such an enormous county.

The county has an extensive coastline, which reminds me of the joke made by the late Professor Malcolm Bradbury. When he was lecturing at the university of East Anglia, he said that Norfolk was cut off on three sides by the sea and on the fourth side by Anglia Rail. One of our most famous sons, Horatio Nelson, used to talk about going into Norfolk and coming out of Norfolk, as though it was a separate country. At times, the people of Norfolk feel that they are apart from the rest of the United Kingdom. During the past four years, they have faced several severe constraints. Due partly to our geography, even those in the major towns are reliant on the use of motor vehicles.

I found out from the Library that the average availability of one or more cars in the United Kingdom is 66.6 per cent. In my constituency of mid-Norfolk, it is 83.1 per cent. That is not because people in mid-Norfolk have more money than others in the United Kingdom, but because cars in mid-Norfolk are a necessity, not a luxury. Therefore, anything to do with the cost of running a car has a major impact on individuals' finances and on how the county councils and district councils deliver their services. To enable people to move around Norfolk is an added cost that the major unitary authorities do not face.

Understanding local government finance is like understanding the Schleswig Holstein question in the 19th century. As hon. Members may know, the late Lord Palmerston said that only three men understood the Schleswig Holstein question; one had died, one was now mad and he, Lord Palmerston, had forgotten what the question was. If that is true in general, it is so specifically when considering the present Government and the way in which they have financed local government since 1997.

Our debate must be seen against a background of a Government who, I am sad to say—I note that the Minister is trying not to smile about this—have achieved a reputation for spin over substance, and a habit of announcing and re-announcing measures. That also applies to the revenue support grant and local government finance. The way in which the Government have organised local government finance has been detrimental to the shire counties, especially Norfolk. I remind the House that, as a direct consequence of the Government's changes in methodology introduced in 1997, the shire counties will have lost out to the sum of approximately £700 million. Norfolk must face part of that, which puts us at a disadvantage.

Since 1997, council tax in England has increased by three times the rate of inflation. This year, council tax payers in Norfolk will see an increase of 6.25 per cent., which is almost three times the rate of inflation. The Minister for Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), estimated that the average band D council tax bill would rise by 5.1 per cent., yet Norfolk county council has been forced to agree to an increase of 6.25 per cent. Commenting on this year's local government finance settlement, the Minister said:

> "Given these government increases in grant, I would therefore expect the majority of local authorities to be setting a lower Council Tax this year than last year, when the increase was 6.1 per cent."

Unfortunately for Norfolk county council tax payers, last year the rise was 9.8 per cent., not the Minister's guesstimate of 6.1 per cent. The local government finance settlement that Norfolk has received during the past four years has, with one exception, meant cuts in real terms and progressive increases in council tax. This year, Miss Celia Cameron, leader of the Labour-Liberal coalition running Norfolk county council, has written to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions

[Mr. Keith Simpson]

because she is concerned that Norfolk's revenue support grant will be £4.5 million lower than the council's estimates.

If one examines the RSG allocation for Norfolk in the local government finance budget over the past four years, one sees that, for the year 1998-99, there was a decrease of 0.41 per cent. In 1990-2000 there was an increase of 3.53 per cent., and in the period 2000-01 there was a decrease of 3.48 per cent. This year, surprise, surprise, there is an increase of 9.78 per cent., although I do not suspect that that has anything to do with a general election. Until this year, Norfolk has been in deficit and that has had a major impact on council services. In addition, during the past four years we have received inadequate local government finance settlements, and the council tax payers of Norfolk have seen a reduction in the quality and extent of services that they receive from the county council, for which, ironically, they have to pay more.

Councillors in Norfolk have told me that one of the principal causes of the council tax rises is the impact of Government stealth taxes, such as higher fuel tax, higher landfill tax and new taxes on pension funds that are passed on to council tax payers. Increases in the cost of petro-carbons for Norfolk county council this year are DERV, 6 per cent.; petrol, 4 per cent.; gasoil, 11 per cent.; and kerosene, 29 per cent. I remind colleagues that, in a county such as Norfolk, with a population that is spread out, transport costs are crucial. Those additional costs are separate from any local government finance or settlement. All sorts of extra costs for consultation must also be added, relating to, for example, best value, community strategies, verification frameworks and performance indicators, all of which will cost the council large sums.

Although I approve of the management techniques and robustness introduced by the previous Conservative Governments and continued by this Government, many of us feel that many levels of government are now being managed to death and that there is no direct relation between management costs and output and quality of service. For example, Norfolk police authority is only too well aware that best practice costs it several hundred thousand pounds a year and ties up several valuable members of staff for what is ultimately no real increase in the deliveries not only that it would like but that people in Norfolk expect.

During the past few years, there has been an enormous increase in cuts or deferment of services in Norfolk. We have a £90 million-pound backlog in road maintenance. We have experienced severe cuts in social services, to which I shall return shortly; chaos in our schools, with children being bussed around the county; and badly thought through school reorganisation. We have had a muddle over the waste disposal strategy, and that strategy, along with the moneys allocated to it, will be a major issue in future. Library hours and the availability of books have been reduced.

I should like briefly to touch on an example from the past four years. A result of local government finance awards and council policy was the closure in 1998 of many youth centres throughout Norfolk. In my constituency of mid-Norfolk, the youth centre in the small market town of Aylsham, which has a population of about 4,000, was closed. Colleagues from Norfolk know only too well that, outside the major cities, there is not a lot for young people to do in the country. The closure of a youth centre, where young people congregate to get away from their parents, will probably result in their going elsewhere and trying to get into pubs, which invariably leads to trouble. The gap left by the youth centre that was closed is now being ably filled, at a cost, by a small community centre financed entirely by local churches and surviving from hand to mouth. It is used by not only young people but mothers, in the mornings, and pensioners, and I salute that. I realise that the Government and councils are under pressure for money, but I firmly believe that youth centres are a good way of investing in the future and ensuring that young people have an opportunity to do what they want without being tempted into casual violence and drugs.

The impact on the people of Norfolk is not entirely consequential on Government policy. I believe, as might be expected, that the problem has been compounded by eight years of a Labour-Liberal coalition running Norfolk county council. Obviously, the council has had to make decisions within budget, and we are now living with the consequences. We have seen a growth in bureaucracy, a borrowing of money from the reserves, and time and energy wasted on talk about visions and stakeholders rather than spent considering the quality of service that can be delivered.

The Government recognised that, this year, many county councils faced the prospect of a disastrous rise in council tax, and have attempted to come to those councils' rescue with extra resources. It may seem churlish, but I regard a lot of that money as funny money with strings attached, as do many local councils. We estimate that Norfolk county council should have levied a 10 per cent. increase in council tax this year, but it has levied only a 6.25 per cent. increase. I say "only", although that is three times the rate of inflation. The council has been able to do that largely because it has received extra money from the Government, but also due to some creative accounting in its budget. For example, money has been moved out of the highways reserves and cuts have been made in social services.

I come briefly to the impact made by the Government's failure properly to fund Norfolk, and to the effect on my constituents of the council's problems. The impact will be at its greatest in social services, on which there has been an estimated overspend of £2.7 million. The Government's area cost allowance criteria contain a bias against counties such as Norfolk, where sparsity of population creates problems. The Government have failed to take into account a steady increase in population, especially among the elderly. In my constituency, some 20.8 per cent. of the population is of pensionable age compared with 18.7 per cent. nationally. One might say that that is only a 2 per cent. difference, but on tight budgets such as Norfolk's that can make all the difference between just about getting along and failing to deliver.

Under the council's proposals for next year's budget, the social services budget will see increased charges and cuts. Charges for meals on wheels will rise from £1.80 to £2, the cost of transport to day centres will rise by approximately 50 per cent. and the cost of delivering occupational therapy equipment to people's homes will double. The level of day care is to be cut, and the number

of people aged over 65 admitted to residential and nursing homes is being reduced by 150—so do not get old in Norfolk. Rex Humphrey, the chief executive of Age Concern in Norfolk, said:

"We have known for a long time that there are going to be more and more people, particularly over 85 and 90, and we have to recognise that ... My main concern is that the social services is reducing day care while at the same time reducing residential care and there is a mismatch in that position."

It would be no exaggeration to say that we are approaching a crisis in residential care and nursing homes in Norfolk, as a consequence of the policies to which I referred and the 2 per cent. fee increase approved by Norfolk social services. Denise Denis, chairman of the Norfolk Independent Care Homes, said that the rise of 2 per cent. was minimal and that homes would be forced to make staff or maintenance cuts. That is placed on top of the Government's proposed legislation, which places an even greater financial burden on care homes.

As Members of Parliament, we are in favour of the highest possible standards for residential care homes, because elderly people demand the best. However, those who run care homes, in both the public and private sectors, are being driven to distraction by the increasing bureaucracy, which places further demands on such minutiae as the size of rooms, and other matters connected with the facilities.

I began by saying that my theme today was a fair deal for Norfolk. I hope that, by outlining the revenue grant support element of the local government finance settlement, I have shown that Norfolk has done poorly compared with other parts of England. Norfolk, along with other shire counties, is collectively £700 million worse off than in 1997. Council tax in Norfolk has risen by three times or more the rate of inflation to provide either stand-still services or cuts in services. That has been compounded by the way in which the council has taken decisions and examined priorities during the past eight years. I ask the Minister to re-examine the way in which the area cost allowance is calculated, taking into account the particular problems faced by a large rural county, such as Norfolk, with a dispersed population.

People in Norfolk often view London as foreign. In fact, they view Bury St. Edmunds as foreign, but they view London as foreign because our discussions and decisions do not relate to their experience. They think that they come fairly near the bottom of the list when the Government are developing policy. They seek a fairer deal for Norfolk. They do not necessarily want more money than everyone else, but they would like a fair deal in which some of the problems that I have been spelling out are considered.

Norfolk is a marvellous county and I am honoured to have represented Mid-Norfolk for the past four years. We want to do better for its people.

9.50 am

Dr. George Turner (North-West Norfolk): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing this debate. I served on Norfolk county council for more than two decades and was chairman of its education committee prior to the 1997 election. I therefore especially welcome the opportunity to contribute to this morning's debate.

The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk has provided a mixture of facts and—as often happens in debates on local govt finance—highly partisan comment about support grant for Norfolk for this year and the preceding three or four years. I shall leave it to my hon. Friend the Minister to deal with much of what the hon. Gentleman had to say about this year's settlement. My hon. Friend already knows of my support for major reform of the standard spending assessment and rate support grant systems that we inherited.

Indeed, the Government have already gone some way to deliver a fairer deal for Norfolk and that should be acknowledged. I was especially pleased when the Government not only initiated research work, but recognised the need and delivered resources for rural policing, taking proper and better account of the sparcity problems. I was also pleased with the grant made available for my part of Norfolk, shared with cross-boundary policing in the fens. Of course, the bottle is only half full; more needs to be done. However, we know from the consultation that has been under way for some time that further reform is on the way. Given the history of dispute across party lines over local government finance, the Government are right to take the time to seek to maximise consensus on introducing a new system.

I have argued for many years—mainly under the previous Government—for a fairer deal for counties such as Norfolk; I shall continue to do so. However, I want to take a different tack from that of the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk. He painted a picture based on recent RSG settlements that distorts the reality and would have the nation conclude that we should change the Government and, by implication, I suspect, return to the old regime under which I suffered.

An analogy with football suggests itself to me—I am not sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, whether you are a supporter, but I find that it helps when discussing financial issues with my constituents. As the season draws to a close, many fans will criticise their team's performance. Few managers or players approach perfection, and armchair critics have an especially clear concept of the ideal, but before calling for the manager to be sacked, most are fair minded and consider various questions. What problems and financial constraints did the management inherit? Is performance improving or deteriorating under the new management? What alternative management is on offer, and with what track record? I wonder whether many fans would turn with enthusiasm to a former member of the worst team in living memory; a man of maturing years but inclined to mimic the young—baseball hat and all—populist to a fault and with a self-confessed 14 pints a day drinking problem. That may not represent the ideal management.

I shall have to be selective this morning, even given the modestly greater time that may be available. I therefore turn to some other facts that were not mentioned by the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk. In particular, we should consider the track record of the present management compared with the previous management. The fairest way of doing that is to ask some of those who are directly responsible for the data that I have used. I asked the financial director of the county council and the treasurer of the borough council in my constituency for a summary. I wanted to compare the four years of the budget set by this Government with the previous four

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years, which seemed a fair-minded approach. If one makes that comparison, the picture of what has been happening is very different from that painted by the hon. Gentleman.

Before doing that, I want to say that the attack made this morning on the merits of the present county councillors—and, by implication, the attack on King's Lynn and West Norfolk borough council in my constituency—was deplorable. There has been considerable improvement in management and the way in which budgets have been handled in Norfolk recently. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported on Friday 23 February that an assessment undertaken by Cranfield university school of management, *Sunday Business*, British Telecom and *Management Today*, listed Norfolk county council as one of the top 100 UK visionary organisations. It said:

"Norfolk County Council—once one of the worst performing of the rural shires, it has driven itself to the top by an aggressive and ambitious strategy. It is now a reference point for good practice in local government".

The report continues:

"When the Conservatives lost control of Norfolk County Council in 1993 for the first time in 100 years, the new Lab/Lib administration set about reviewing services and overhauling the organisation.

Under new chief executive Tim Byles, the council set up a change management programme, transforming the way it works with schools and forging public/private partnerships and strategic partnerships for economic development and health improvement. A senior manager worked exclusively on communicating the vision to the council's 25,000 staff.

School test results show that pupils in Norfolk are improving faster than almost anywhere else in England, and the region's roads will benefit from a £19.2 million increase in spending—the highest in the country. Technology specialists Capita will help meet targets for e-government and improve the way the council deliver services and communicates with local people."

That is a somewhat different picture of the county council than that painted by the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk.

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): Does the hon. Gentleman think that it is good practice to increase the council tax four times more than the basic state pension?

Dr. Turner: I shall come to the hon. Gentleman's point. To be fair, we should compare what has been happening with the track record of the previous Government on council tax and what pensioners received.

First, I want to refer to the information provided by the finance director of Norfolk county council on changes to budgets during the past four years. Local government finance is notoriously difficult. It is necessary to consider not only changes in the headline figures, but changes in underlying rules and changes in responsibilities. I asked for a summary of changes in the revenue budget. The figures this year are remarkably good, which has been commented on. The net figures show an increase in expenditure of £27 million. Hon. Members will not have noted from the speech of the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk that that included a £5.7 million increase in expenditure for social services.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that matter?

Dr. Turner: I am not taking interventions for the moment, because I want to put the figures on the record.

The figure for 2000-01 is plus £8 million, for 1999-2000 it was plus £9 million and for 1998-99 it was minus £7 million, giving a total for the four years of increased net growth to the council of plus £37 million. I also have the figures for the previous four years, determined by the capping regime, when local democracy was removed by the Conservative Administration. The net growth figure for 1997-98 was minus £11.8 million, for 1996-97 it was plus £4.2 million and for the previous two years it was minus £6.2 million and minus £2.1 million, giving a grand total for those four years of minus £15.9 million in the council's delivery of services. I repeat, that is minus £15.9 million for the last four years of the previous Administration, and plus £37 million in the first four years of this Administration.

I am the first to admit that the bottle remains half empty and that more needs to be done, but the bottle is filling: we are addressing people's needs in Norfolk. I especially welcome the dramatic increases in school investment. The figures are amazingly different from those under which I had to struggle when I was chair of education. The education capital allocations have risen from £4.7 million in 1996-97 to £27.8 million in 2000-01; we do not yet know the full figures for the coming year.

As chair of education, I faced a backlog of £40 million in much-needed work to be done on school buildings. Now, I go to schools and see work in progress, with further funding to come. Improvements are visible to anyone who visits the schools—there are new classrooms, improved decoration, and better staff facilities. Under this Government they have a rosy future.

I want to give right hon. and hon. Members the figures that relate to my borough council, King's Lynn and West Norfolk. The hon. Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) intervened to ask about increases in council tax. Yes, his colleagues in my borough jump up and down, pointing to the 29 per cent. increase in band D council tax and hoping that people's memories are short, but they do not remind the electorate of the 55 per cent. increase in the four previous years. There was a 29 per cent. increase in the past four years under this Government and a net increase in the council's expenditure of about 7.5 per cent. However, there was a 55 per cent. increase in the last four years under the previous Administration, but a net decrease of 6.3 per cent. in the council's expenditure.

Not all is ideal in north-west Norfolk, or with the borough council's budget, but in the last four years of the previous Administration there was an increase of 7 per cent. in capital resourcing, which is most important in respect of the dilapidated housing provision in my constituency, compared with an increase of 79.6 per cent. in capital expenditure in the past four years under the present Govt. To pretend that that is not a dramatic improvement is to ignore the facts, which is what the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk would have us do.

Finally, I want to speak to an issue that is close to the heart of many of my constituents, the policing of crime. I had a meeting last week with the chief constable and the chairman of the police authority to look at what was really happening without the gloss put on it by the Opposition. The chief constable told me that the new money now available to the police authority would increase the number of front-line police officers from 1,400 to at least 1,475 by the end of the year. He explained that the run down in police numbers in Norfolk had been as a result of his policy, initiated ahead of the last election, to address the dramatic need for improved IT and back-up equipment. With the funding now available, not only can he and his chairman continue to invest in that equipment, but they can provide the extra police on the beat that people want to see.

In addition to the extra 75 police officers, the chief constable can free up a further 23 police officers by introducing civilians to do their work. That means there will be another 23 police officers on the beat at the sharp end of policing. He also has extra funding to provide two mobile police stations in my part of the county, each equipped with radio and communications systems. He tells me that he will be able to invest £250,000 into the vehicle fleet. He describes it as old, but I would describe some of the vehicles that I have seen as dilapidated.

The chief constable went on to explain further planned improvements in policing. They include better intelligence services and the potential use of helicopters for some chases, which are notoriously difficult in the fenland area because of the nature of the roads. There are clearly gains from the increases in the Government's support for policing in Norfolk and the changes in the council tax. Under the previous Administration there were far larger increases in council tax and a net decline in spending. Now, although there has been an increase in council tax, which is less than the rate that we inherited, there are also real improvements.

The local Conservatives would have us believe that the improvements to policing, schools and education are as nothing. They say that there is virtually nothing to show for the increases in taxes that they are paying. That implies that one could cut the council tax by 30 per cent. without doing any damage. They need to be open about that, certainly ahead of a general election. It is uncertain whether under the Tories there would be £23 million, £12 million or £6 million for my constituents. It depends on which month it is, whether it is a Tory tax promise or a Tory tax guarantee and on their current wriggling to pretend that they can both spend and cut at the same time. My constituents should beware. The Tories' pretence that there have been no improvements in services implies that cuts are possible. I know that they cannot make cuts without damaging the services.

In summary, returning to my football analogy, not all is perfect with the team and its management. There may be changes in the team, which may have to raise its performance. There are tasks to be completed. We may be in the middle of a league table and have yet to reach the top, but if we compare what is happening under the present management with what happened under the previous management, we can see that progress is being made. It will take time to complete that process. When the fans out there come to take their decision, they will realise that they need to stick with the present team for a little longer if they are to achieve their ambitions.

10.10 am

Mr. John MacGregor (South Norfolk): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on initiating the debate and on the admirable way in which he spoke. He covered so many points that I wanted to cover that I shall be fairly brief, although I want to re-emphasise some of them.

People in rural areas, including my constituency, are astonished that hon. Members in the main Chamber will spend today debating the Hunting Bill. That shows a ludicrous sense of priorities, an astonishing unawareness of what is happening in rural areas and a ludicrous lack of sensitivity. The issues being debated in this Chamber are the ones that concern people in rural areas. That feeling runs very deep and I shall return to it later.

The Government and the ruling parties on Norfolk county council—Labour and the Liberal Democrats—have achieved a combination of heavily increased council taxes. I say to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) that vision is all very well, but the facts and the impact on people on the ground are what matters. The heavily increased council taxes have a real impact, while we receive poorer services and there is a further running down of reserves.

I shall deal first with services. Just before Christmas, the leader of Norfolk county council approached us all, I believe, to protest strongly about the impact of Government decisions on this year's rate support grant settlement for Norfolk. We were asked to make representations, which we all did. The hon. Gentleman talked about making adjustments to the area cost adjustment and changes in the formula. However, the change in the formula that the Government have introduced has greatly disbenefited Norfolk. I understand that it is the main reason why we received £4.5 million less in this year's settlement than Norfolk county council had accepted. The Government introduced a change that greatly disadvantaged Norfolk. I just hope that we will not have more such changes.

The implications for services are serious. I shall pick out three services, the first of which is social services. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk said, there is a deficit of more than £2 million in this year's social services budget. The implications for pensioners and other poorer people in my constituency are very serious.

I want to draw particular attention to the effect on residential care and nursing homes. We all know that private sector residential and nursing homes are facing serious difficulties through a combination of insufficient fee increases on the one hand and heavily increased costs on the other. I join my hon. Friend in commenting on the impact of the Government's changes in regulations for higher standards in residential homes. We all want higher standards, but we need to be practical and realistic.

I have seen nursing homes in my constituency, both in the public sector—financed by the local authority—and in the private sector, which face substantial increases in their capital costs. That will lead either to fewer places or to the closure of those homes for comparatively minor adjustments over the next few years to comply with improved standards. I have talked to the residents of rooms in those homes, who cannot see how a big

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increase in costs will greatly benefit them. I have protested about that before. It is important that the Government take on board the need for a sensible transition, because Norfolk risks a massive loss of places in care homes in both the private and public sectors in the next few years. There is a particular issue with Dennyholme care home in Diss, but the situation will be much more serious for private sector care homes.

In the *Eastern Daily Press* a few days ago, in response to protests from independent care homes, Joan Fowler, the portfolio holder for social inclusion and care in Norfolk county council, said:

"I would have liked to have given them more than 2 per cent. but there simply isn't any spare cash around. The social services overspend is coming down but it is still £1.5 million. Everyone is having to cut back."

That is the reality for social services.

I have some specific questions about highways and fire services. I congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) on his appointment. He is certainly moving into a heavily embattled sector. I acknowledge that he did not take part in this year's RSG settlement, but I shall put my questions to him because he is now responsible for defending it.

Norfolk has a considerable backlog of maintenance requirements for its highways. Norfolk is one of the largest counties and has a huge network of roads, yet our settlement for highways this year is 1.8 per cent. That is not only below the rate of inflation, but well below our neighbours' average of 4.5 per cent. and below the shire counties' average of 3.3 per cent. I simply do not understand it. I am told that one reason is the weighting given to heavy goods and the high gearing effect that that exerts. I fail to understand, however, why Norfolk, with its huge requirement for maintenance on highways and its substantial highways network, should receive an increase of only 1.8 per cent. this year. Will the Minister explain why in his reply?

Dr. George Turner: I wonder whether the right hon. Gentleman is ignoring the £19.2 million—almost two and a half times the allocation for previous years—for capital investment in Norfolk's highways? Should not that be taken into account when assessing the moneys available for improving roads in Norfolk?

Mr. MacGregor: The highways maintenance figure, which is important, shows only a 1.8 per cent. increase. That is why I am worried that the working out of the formula is substantially disadvantaging Norfolk.

I also want briefly—so that my right hon. and hon. Friends can join the debate—to mention the 2.8 per cent. increase allotted to fire services for a county whose rural spread imposes heavy demands. The shire counties' average increase is 4.8 per cent. and that of our neighbouring counties is 3.9 per cent. Once again, in view of Norfolk's huge requirements, I do not understand why our county should fare so badly.

The facts on council tax are clear, but the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk did not explain them correctly. Before the general election—apart from 1995-96, which saw an 8.5 per cent. increase—all the increases in Norfolk's council tax were below 4 per cent. Subsequently, the increases have all been way above the level of inflation. It is worth spelling out the details. In 1998-99, the increase in band B council tax was 15.6 per cent.; in 1999-2000, it was 9.76 per cent.; in 2000-01 it was 6.25 per cent. and in 2001-02, it is projected to be 6.25 per cent.

Those are substantial cumulative increases, which take a great deal from pensioners who are reliant on the state pension or have just a little above it. When people move out of council tax rebate, it takes a great deal out of any net increase in incomes gained during the year. Pensioners may well protest further as a result of these increases. They complained during the past three years and I expect them to do so again. The county council has not properly dealt with a major concern that affects pensioners.

The wider impact on rural communities is another issue. We all know that farmers are facing a disastrous crisis with foot and mouth disease. In East Anglia—and particularly in my and neighbouring Norfolk constituencies—swine fever is an additional problem. Furthermore, we all know that farming incomes have declined significantly in the past four years. Yesterday, the Minister, in response to requests for help for beleaguered farmers through monetary compensation or other ways, said in the Chamber that no previous Government had given assistance on foot and mouth disease other than to those whose herds had to be slaughtered. That is true, but previously, particularly in regard to the outbreaks that have occurred during my time in the House, the general position of farmers was very much better. Unlike in the past, farmers have no spare capacity whatever to cope with the current crisis. The relevance of that significant fact to agriculture and all allied trades in Norfolk is often misunderstood: in terms of the national figures for the numbers employed in agriculture, we are much more dependent than other parts of the country on the income flowing in to such activities. Further council tax increases on such a scale, on top of those of the past three years, will be a further huge burden for many families.

My protest is that the Government appear to have removed £4.5 million from Norfolk as a result of some of their formula changes, with particular impact on social services. Like other rural areas, but more than most, Norfolk has suffered at the hands of the Government in the past four years—which is why we are having the debate today, for which I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that the Government will take note of it.

10.21 am

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am grateful to be called in the debate, which I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) for having initiated, because the issues raised obviously touch on the lives of people in Norfolk. He gave an admirably clear account of how the Government and a Lib-Lab controlled county council are, between them, failing the people of Norfolk.

I congratulate the Minister on his position and I believe that he will bring good experience and a steady hand to a difficult task. I would like him to answer a question that is being asked in my constituency: are the

Government treating urban areas favourably in terms of the revenue support grant to their local authorities? There is a strong suspicion that what happened in the first couple of years of the Government's term of office has happened again this year—rural areas have lost out.

I shall concentrate on the effects of the cuts that my hon. Friend so eloquently described and, like my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor), on the care of the elderly and the vulnerable. Ministers like to speak of the continuum of care provided by health and social services, particularly in regard to bed blocking and hospital care.

My right hon. and hon. Friends, and the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner), will know that the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital is being completed in Norwich and has been hailed by Ministers and others as the means to end bed blocking. It is also an excuse to close several smaller community hospitals such as the Wayland hospital in my constituency. The *Eastern Daily Press* reported on 16 February that the centre is giving no funds for the additional revenue costs of the new hospital. The chief executive of Norfolk health authority said:

"The centre has been highly prescriptive about what it wants to be achieved but there does not appear to be latitude to pick up the additional . . . costs of the new hospital."

We may have a new hospital, but now the debate is about how people will get there. I do not mean that access and road provision will be a problem, but that the funds will not be available to open the hospital.

Against that sad saga must be set the cuts in Norfolk's social services. One would have thought that, with the seamless and joined-up government that we are now said to enjoy, a situation of the sort that I have outlined would not—indeed, could not—be combined with the cuts in social services that elderly and vulnerable people in Norfolk are having to face this year. Yet, sadly, that is the position.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk quoted the portfolio holder for social inclusion and care on Norfolk county council, who said that there is no cash to spare. She claimed that because 351 beds had been closed last year in Norfolk care homes, money would not be available to increase the number of beds in the residential sector to provide more support for people in their homes. At the same time, of course, she is increasing charges for meals on wheels, for home visits from occupational therapists and, even more disastrous, for day care.

At one and the same time, the elderly and vulnerable in Norfolk face the prospect of a new hospital that cannot be opened because the money is not available, a reduction in the number of beds in the residential sector, an increase in the charges that are designed to keep them in their own homes and an increase in council tax for the privilege. I would call that social inclusion. In effect, Norfolk social services department is passing on to the elderly the funding cuts that were imposed on Norfolk people by the Government. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk asks us to approve the barrage of statistics that he produced; but I am concerned with the experience of people in my constituency, not with a recital of statistics.

Dr. George Turner: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: Not at the moment.

Like many other areas in Britain, Norfolk has an increasing number of elderly and vulnerable people. About 25 per cent. of my constituents are over retirement age. As my right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk pointed out, the social services department is having to fund a possible overspend of £2.7 million by cutting the level of day care. What does that mean? Who deals with day care? A vast army of volunteers give their own time to transport elderly and vulnerable people to day-care centres. The impact on them of increases in fuel costs has already been described. The number of people aged 65 and over being admitted to residential and nursing homes will be cut by 150 and, as I said, those people will face increased charges. It is extraordinary.

The leader of the council said that the council would have to make "tough choices". That is fine for her; her choices are made on paper. The choices that face the families of elderly and vulnerable people are also tough. If their relatives cannot be admitted to care homes—and as we have heard, 150 fewer places will be funded this year—they face tough choices in trying to make up the shortfall, and the anxiety of wondering whether it would be possible to cover the increased charges. Their choices are as tough as those facing Liberal Democrat and Labour councillors in Norfolk. The leader of the council was quoted in the *Eastern Daily Press* on 15 February as having commented that

"the Revenue Support Grant from the Government had been disappointingly low and setting the coming year's budget was a difficult balancing act."

We do not seem to have heard much in the way of solidarity with her from the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk.

The problem that we are considering is not confined to Norfolk. The National Care Homes Association will be lobbying Parliament on Monday. It is concerned about the combined effect of a squeeze on public funds, the national minimum wage, the working time directive, pay increases for nurses and the proposed national standards for care homes. While each of those is justifiable, the outcome last year was the loss of 351 beds in the residential sector in Norfolk; less nursing care in the residential sector, because homes could not afford to employ nurses; less choice for elderly people and their relatives; more travelling for those people, with the closure of homes; and less employment in residential homes.

The National Care Homes Association has posed an interesting question. In Norfolk in 1999 the fee for care was £227 a week. In 2000, the Department of Social Security awarded each person in a residential care home sponsored by social services an increase of £5 a week, which was rightly trumpeted by Ministers as a way of helping the elderly and vulnerable. However, the association points out that the contract price in Norfolk for 2000 remained £227 a week. Where did the money go? Norfolk county council should answer that question.

The current state of affairs in Norfolk is a cause of fear among elderly and vulnerable people and their relatives. Elderly people wonder what will happen to them if they cannot enter a residential home, and how their relatives will cope with caring for them. They wonder how the money will be found to support them at home. Above all, elderly people want to avoid feeling

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that they are a burden, but the factors that we have heard about this morning will combine inevitably to engender that feeling in their hearts.

Mrs. Marie Farrelly, the co-proprietor of the Feltwell Lodge nursing and residential home, wrote to me on 15 February. She said:

"We are very worried about our business, we haven't had a referral from social services since before Christmas."

She went on to comment that her husband

"has contacted . . . the manager at Downham Market about this and has been told that they are only allowed to refer six people per month for West Norfolk. It looks as though this government has put the elderly at the bottom of the pile and the local government in Norwich are just as bad."

She puts it well and I agree with her.

10.34 am

Mr. David Prior (North Norfolk): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing this important debate. There is a danger when one speaks last in a debate such as this that everything has been said but not everyone has said it. I should like to make some extra points.

We hear a lot from Norfolk county council about visions, strategies, long-term plans and best value, but we and others in Norfolk will judge the council on results, not on promises for the long term. People in Norfolk, are interested in how much council tax they are paying and what services they receive in return. During the past four years, council tax has risen by about 40 per cent., which compares with a rise of about 10 per cent. in the basic state pension and 13 per cent. in inflation. So there has been a massive increase in council tax. What have we got for it? The roads maintenance backlog now runs at £90 million. We have heard about pressures on the social services budget and about how vulnerable old people are in Norfolk. Many schools in North Norfolk and elsewhere still have mobile classrooms, and public transport has almost collapsed in many areas. Few people in Norfolk today could put their hand on their heart and say that services have improved during the past four years; on the contrary, for many of us, services have considerably worsened while council tax has increased.

I shall dwell on only two aspects of county council activity. The first is residential homes. A number of traditional residential homes in North Norfolk in places such as Sheringham and Cromer, which have for many years provided wonderful care for older people, now face huge cost increases deriving from future proposals and from employment costs—in particular, the need to pay full holiday entitlement to part-time carers in those homes. There will be a collapse in the number of beds provided in private sector residential homes in Norfolk, which is of real concern when the resources made available for looking after people at home are also under pressure. As my right hon. Friends the Members for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) and for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) have mentioned, many old people are extremely worried.

However, that matter has already been covered; I want to focus on young people. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk said, "Don't be old in Norfolk." He could also have said, "Don't be young in Norfolk". During the past four years, many youth and community centres have closed, and the few youth centres left—for example, one in Hickling in my constituency—are hanging on by a thread. What has replaced them? The answer is, very little. I can give examples of voluntary groups in North Norfolk that, despite everything, have hung on, but they do so by a thread. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk probably knows the Carpenters Arms in North Walsham, supported by the Methodists, which has to beg, borrow and steal a few hundred pounds every week to keep the project open. The Holt youth project is trying to raise money from the East of England Development Agency and the lottery—spending more time trying to raise money through hugely complicated and difficult routes than it is looking after and providing facilities for young people. Another example is the Fakenham sports centre. I can give the Minister hundreds of examples of people who are trying to provide activities for young people, but who are doing so in an extremely arid environment.

It is one thing to provide facilities for young people, but they must also be able to get to them, and there are problems with the availability of public transport in rural Norfolk. There has been a significant reduction in the number of bus services in North Norfolk and no replacement for them through a more highly developed community transport system. As my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk said, for many people the car is a necessity, not a luxury, yet about 25 per cent. of families in Norfolk do not have a car. They face serious deprivation.

There is a general feeling that the Government have understood the deprivation faced by many people who live in big towns, but that they have not come to terms with how many people in rural areas have to live. That is sad. I am particularly sorry that the countryside march on 18 March will not now take place. That would have brought home to the Government how fed up and frustrated those who live in the countryside are.

My final point concerns policing. The lack of local policemen on the streets is probably the biggest single worry for many people living in the market towns and seaside resorts of Norfolk.

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): During the past two days, the *Eastern Daily Press* stated that there will be 75 new police officers in Norfolk, many of whom will be located in rural areas. The hon. Gentleman seems to be denying that move in the right direction.

Mr. Prior: The Government are making up for lost time. The hon. Gentleman made a cheap point. He knows that there has been a significant reduction in the number of police officers on our streets over the past four years. Of course, I welcome any improvement, as I do the extra police officers who have now been promised, but the increase is small. The people of Norfolk want more police officers who live in the local community to be on our streets, not just catching criminals, but preventing crime from happening in the first place. The past four years of Liberal Democrat and Labour-controlled councils have shown how easy it is to spend money and to receive little in return.

10.41 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to the debate. I join other hon. Members in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing it. He has made good use of such a timely opportunity. Others who represent Norfolk constituencies have made excellent contributions to our discussion. It is significant that the Liberal Democrat party has made no contribution to the debate, despite its complicity in some matters that have concerned Norfolk.

My hon. Friend described a serious state of affairs. As he reminded us, Norfolk is the second largest county in the United Kingdom. It has an extensive coastline. It has all the problems that are associated with large distances, sparsity, rural transport and so on. He was right to pinpoint the crucial change in SSA methodology when the Government came into office. That has resulted in £700 million being diverted away from shire counties such as Norfolk. The net result is an increase in council tax of more than 6 per cent., three times the rate of inflation. It was 9.8 per cent. last year and it is not as though that is balanced by any increase in local services. The opposite is the case.

We heard a depressing litany of cuts in services throughout the country. My hon. Friend described in detail some of the other stealth taxes that have affected the council. In many ways, council tax has now become a stealth tax, affecting as it does particularly the elderly and the most vulnerable in Norfolk. My hon. Friend referred to the backlog in road maintenance, which amounts to about £90 million for the whole of the county. He spoke about problems in schools and libraries, the closure of youth centres, real reductions in care and social services, the crisis facing care homes—a problem that is replicated throughout the country, such as in my own constituency—and higher charges for services.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) referred to the big jump in council tax, cuts in services, the running down of reserves and how he, along with my right hon. and hon. Friends, had been asked by the leader of the Lib-Lab pact in Norfolk to make representations to Government about the poor deal that Norfolk has received, the £2 million deficit in social services and the significant increase in council tax rises since the Government came to power. He spoke knowledgeably about the combined effect of those and other factors on farming in a community that depends heavily on that industry.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) said that rural areas had been losing out, as proved by the figures. She referred to problems with the local NHS, cuts in social services for the elderly and most vulnerable, and increased charges. She said that politicians have tough choices to make, but that individuals and families face even tougher choices, as a result of which people suffer real fear. That situation can be summed up as joined-up incompetence as opposed to joined-up government.

My hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) also referred to worsening services, focusing in particular on the problems with care homes—not only cuts in funding and references to homes but problems caused by "Fit for the future", and other regulations, which are apparent to the banks as the financial supporters of the homes. He mentioned the effect on the young of closing youth centres. The situation affects people across the spectrum—the young, the old and everyone in between.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner), who spoke from the Government Back Benches, proved graphically that any analogy could be taken too far, in talking about the capping regime under previous Governments having removed local democracy. I will turn to this Government's attitude to local democracy in a moment. With respect, I thought that many of his remarks were intemperate. His final, feeble conclusion was that not all is perfect in Norfolk.

We are discussing a wider set of issues that affect other places apart from Norfolk. The inexorable rise in the proportion of specific grants means that the money made available to Norfolk is often spent on the basis of Ministers' priorities rather than those of local communities. The Government panicked over the impact of its settlement on many local authorities this year. *The Times* talked about "crisis talks" between the Deputy Prime Minister and the Chancellor, which resulted in an emergency package of £100 million being diverted from the neighbourhood renewal fund, as well as extra bits of money for social services and education. Some of those bits of money are actually recycled or reannounced cash—in the customary style of this Government.

Across the country, a significant difference exists between living in a Conservative-controlled authority area and those dominated by other parties. Conservative councils still have the lowest council taxes; in the coming year, a typical band D household will pay £724 under an average Conservative council, compared with £124 more under a Labour-controlled council, a figure not dissimilar for Liberal Democrat-controlled councils. Norfolk, of course, suffers from the double whammy of a Lib-Lab pact.

Shire councils such as Norfolk have lost out by up to £700 million under the Government, who make a virtue of their so-called freeze on SSA methodology on the grounds that it delivers stability. However, if one is treated unfairly at the beginning of the process, one is treated just as unfairly at the end and during the course of it. The policy cements the unfairnesses that the Government imposed in the SSA settlement when they came to power. We have heard of floors and ceilings, but the Government have tried to tinker on the margins.

When we strip away the rhetoric, there is an element of cross-party consensus, although it seems to have been lost on the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk. My right hon. and hon. Friends and the Lib-Lab pact that control Norfolk all take the view that the county has been treated unfairly. That is true across Norfolk. Clearly, the current administration in Norfolk feels that it has been treated badly. The Government have treated Norfolk shamefully, and there is now a £4.5 million black hole in Norfolk's finances thanks to their approach. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk asked for a fair deal for Norfolk. Everyone in Norfolk seems to agree that the one thing that Norfolk does not have is a fair deal. I am happy to endorse the call for a fair deal for Norfolk.

10.50 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) on securing this debate. I thank him and other hon. Members for welcoming me to my new position, even if, as he suggested, it is like moving from the staff college to the Stalingrad front. His analogy fails to recognise that while von Paulus was up against the Red Army, backed up by material from the British empire and United States of America, we are up against the modern Conservative party, if that is not a contradiction in terms. It may be a little different. One never knows.

The national spending review in 2000 provided good news for local authorities, with continued increases in grant. The first year of the review set the baseline for the coming financial year, within which we have been able to increase Government grant by £3 billion. In the four settlements since we took office, we have been able to increase the amount of Government grant given to local authorities by £8 billion in total. That is a real terms increase of 14 per cent. compared with a 7 per cent. cut in the four years preceding the 1997-98 settlement. Our priorities, of course, are education and personal social services. As a result, provision for education spending will increase to £1.9 billion next year, which is an 8.1 per cent. increase, and social services will receive an extra £576 million, which is a 6.2 per cent. increase.

There can be no doubt that levels of investment have greatly improved since 1997-98. There is general agreement that the settlement provides welcome grant increases for local authorities. The hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk complained about spin, but was very selective in the figures that he gave for Norfolk. He chose to use those for the revenue support grant settlement rather than those for the total grant settlement. He knows well that that is not the whole picture.

The hon. Gentleman should be pleased to note that in 2001-02, under the settlement, Norfolk county council will receive a 4.2 per cent. increase in general grant, which amounts to £16 million. That is a good increase, which is well above the current rate of inflation.

The hon. Gentleman will also be pleased to note that, on top of that, Norfolk will receive a 26.8 per cent. increase in ring-fenced grants, which is an additional £7.786 million. When those amounts are added together, Norfolk will receive a total increase in Government grant for 2001-02 of £23.867 million or 5.8 per cent.

Mrs. Shephard: I am of course impressed by the Minister's figures. Will he explain how such marvellous news has apparently escaped the Labour leader of Norfolk county council? Why has council tax increased by three times inflation?

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall try to deal with that point. I shall also, in the time available, try to cover all the issues raised by hon. Members. Before I do so, I shall finish setting out the facts. In terms of the total SSA, Norfolk has received an increase of 4.9 per cent., which is in line with the national average increase. Norfolk's education SSA has increased by 5.1 per cent. and its personal services SSA has increased by 5 per cent. The right hon. Lady may wish to note that all those increases are well above the rate of inflation. In the past two years, Norfolk has also received good settlements for its SSA increase: 6.2 per cent. in 1999-2000 and 5.3 per cent. in 2000-01. In the four years since we took office, Norfolk received an average SSA increase of 4.5 per cent. each year, compared with an average annual increase of 2.1 per cent. in the four years prior to that. No one would suggest that inflation has got worse in the latter four years; in fact, it has got considerably better.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Dr. Turner) did a good job of explaining the inheritance that Norfolk county council has had to deal with and the priorities that it is trying to implement. As with local government the length and breadth of the country, it is trying its best to juggle its priorities, meet modern needs, move services in the direction of need and catch up with backlogs such as that which my hon. Friend mentioned in education services. My hon. Friend made apparent that backlog and the real problems that the council faces.

The situation in Norfolk will not be all roses—no one suggests that—but it is not as the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk suggested with his partial citing of the figures. There have been bigger increases in central Government support for Norfolk under this Government than there were under the ancien regime that the hon. Gentleman supported, and he should recognise that fact.

Mr. Keith Simpson: The hon. citizen—I am sorry, the hon. Gentleman; I got that in—has not yet replied to the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk. Given what he has just said, how does he explain the rise of 6.25 per cent. in council tax and the vehement protests of the leader of the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition that the grant is not enough?

Mr. Ainsworth: I hope that the hon. Gentleman recognises that I am trying, in a relatively short time, to answer the points raised in the debate. I have been asked many questions.

The right hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. MacGregor) asked me about the highways and fire calculations—two elements of grant in which Norfolk appears to be well below both its neighbouring authorities and the national average. All I can tell the right hon. Gentleman is that there has been no change in the method of calculating SSAs. We have tried to use the most up-to-date data, so Norfolk's lower than average SSA increases must mean that Norfolk's figures have fallen compared with the national average. The figures have surprised the right hon. Gentleman; if they have surprised the council and it wants to raise the issue because it believes that there is an anomaly, the Department is prepared to consider the matter, but there has been no change in the formula used.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) asked whether there had been a bias in favour of urban areas under this Government. That is not the case; there have been no changes in methodology, as she knows. Indeed, since the 1998-99 settlement, the increases for shire areas have been 4.4 per cent. compared to 4.2 per cent. for London and other

metropolitan areas, so there has been no bias whatever against the shire areas. Hon. Members know that there have been changes in the area cost adjustment. We have done no more than previous Governments. We have updated the data regarding area cost adjustment. I have not yet heard that it is the position of the Conservative party that we should not have done so. It would be strange if that were its position, because that is not what the Conservatives did when they were in office. Equally, they know that we are due to publish a Green Paper to examine local government finance and these issues will, hopefully, be dealt with at that time.

Mr. Barry Jones (in the Chair): Order. We must now move on to our second debate.

Aviation and the Environment

11 am

Mr. David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I note the depth of versatility lurking in our Whips Office. It is remarkable that a former member should spring to a ministerial seat and have responsibilities for such a varied selection of topics as North Norfolk and night noise. It is great to see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), in his new role with responsibility for aviation. Indeed, among the rich and varied bequests left in the pending tray for my hon. Friend by his predecessor is the hugely important Green Paper "The Future of Aviation". It invites ideas and views on a wide range of aviation and airport issues that will underpin the publication later this year of the first White Paper on aviation since 1985. During the intervening period, the economic, environmental and political framework within which airports and airlines operate has changed in the most dramatic way.

Today's debate is the first parliamentary opportunity for Back Benchers to flag up their own concerns. In my case, those concerns will be restricted purely to civil aviation and will not include military or defence activities. The changes during the past decade and a half to which I referred include a doubling of the number of planes using United Kingdom airports. Unless that rate of growth is dampened down, in the next two decades Britain will need four new airports each the size of Heathrow, and the number of passengers will rise from 180 million this year to more than 400 million by 2020. "So what?" say those who regard growth in economic activity as an unmitigated good. I expect that they would point to the report in 1999 by Oxford Economic Forecasting that asserted that aviation increased United Kingdom productivity, and that even limited restraints on growth would have serious negative effects. The report included charts demonstrating that the economy in 2015 would be £30 billion or 2.5 per cent. larger if passenger numbers were to be allowed to soar into the stratosphere unchecked by social and environmental constraints. Those forecasts were buttressed by the astonishingly complacent view of the London Chamber of Commerce that "capacity must be provided to meet all reasonable demand."

I believe that the previous Minister responsible for aviation made it clear that the Government reject the predict and provide strategy and are opting for a demand management approach that recognises environmental considerations and political realities and listens to the important aviation lobby.

Present growth rates are not sustainable. Issues that the previous aviation White Paper failed to predict or tackle have been in a holding pattern for too long, circling high above the political arena, although they are now starting to land in the Government's lap, whether or not the Government want them to.

I declare an interest to the extent that East Midlands airport is in my constituency. Last summer, East Midlands airport's own survey showed that there are 5,400 employees in firms on or near the airport site, perhaps 10 per cent. of whom are my constituents. No hon. Member with an airport in his constituency is

[Mr. David Taylor]

unaware of the economic significance of aviation and its contribution to constituents' standard of living. Equally, hon. Members' e-mail in-boxes are probably bulging with examples of how those living in airport communities experience damage to their quality of life. The main types of environmental impact are: the effect of aircraft noise on communities near airports or under flight paths; the effect of emissions from aircraft on climate change; local air quality; the effects of emissions from aircraft at airports and of the airport infrastructure that serves them; noise, emissions and congestion arising from surface access to airports, especially from road transport; land take and urbanisation resulting from airport development; and, other environmental effects of airports such as water quality, energy consumption and contaminated land and waste.

Other hon. Members will want to consider noise and climate change, so I shall refer to those matters only briefly before speaking about other concerns in more detail and suggesting the way ahead for the Minister and his colleagues.

Noise from aircraft, especially at night, arouses the strongest feelings of those who are affected by it. Ten days ago, in Kegworth, I addressed a local meeting organised by People Against Intrusive Noise—PAIN. It really is a pain when excessive noise occurs because there is inadequate international regulation to enforce limits on aircraft or inadequate local regulation to control impact around airports.

Last year's consultation paper on noise included some useful suggested changes to the existing noise control powers in the Civil Aviation Act 1982, and my first question to the Minister is: when will those changes be put in place? British tolerance is beginning to stretch very thinly over the cauldron of public protest and there will be direct, European-type action if something is not done soon, especially about night noise.

My local planning authority, North West Leicestershire district council is consulting on night flying limits, which it will ask the Deputy Prime Minister to impose using his powers under section 78 of the 1982 Act. It thereby seeks to safeguard the amenities and the environment of people living around East Midlands airport, not only in its own area but in the South Derbyshire, Rushcliffe and Charnwood local authority areas. The council's proposed controls address the litany of complaints so frequently encountered: a ban on movements by aircraft with high quota-count noise levels; a limit on aircraft movements at night; a reducing night-noise quota; monitoring and track-keeping; early phasing out of the noisiest aircraft; a noise management system with surcharges and penalties and a noise insulation scheme.

Those are challenging topics for debate, but I hope that the new owners, Manchester airport, with its long track record of striving to be responsive to community concerns, will be able to agree a modus vivendi that recognises and resolves those local problems promptly and effectively. The airport recently introduced a consultative forum and noise-preferential routes, and noise and track monitoring equipment will soon be introduced. There is a foundation on which the new owners can build.

The impact of a rapidly changing and expanding aviation industry on global warming and climate change is probably the main threat to the wider environment. In a recent report, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change expressed anxiety about carbon dioxide emissions from aircraft and about the possible increase in global warming due to condensation trails. Globally, aircraft emissions of carbon dioxide already account for about 3.5 per cent. of all human-induced global warming; in comparison, current United Kingdom emissions contribute 2.5 per cent. More worryingly, with those emissions set to rise at about 3 per cent. a year, the IPCC estimates that aviation's contribution to global warming will be about 7 per cent. by 2050.

Aviation is not covered by the Kyoto agreement and I put it to the Minister that it can no longer be excluded from the policy discussions on climate change as its emissions are now clearly implicated. A recent report entitled "The Plain Truth: Aviation and the Environment", commissioned by Transport 2000 and the Ashden Trust, argued powerfully that aviation must respond as other industries are beginning to do to the challenge of climate change. I hope that the Minister agrees.

At a lower level in terms of height and detail, is local air pollution. Large airports and their aircraft can be major polluters because so many aspects of their operations produce toxic emissions that are a major threat to human health. The Government state in their Green Paper that the effect of emissions from aircraft on air pollution in the vicinity of airports is in most cases less than that from road traffic to and from airports. That may broadly be the case, but as road traffic becomes progressively cleaner, the proportion of total emissions from aircraft will grow and aviation emission standards will have to be raised.

Official data on UK airport emissions is hard to find, but the general American experience and the European experience show seriously heightened levels of air pollution around larger airports. Research in the United States and mainland Europe reveals that airports are comparable to large industrial plants in respect of their toxic emissions. In the US, the top four emitters of nitrogen oxides and volatile organic compounds are chemical factories, refineries, power stations and airports. A study of Frankfurt airport showed that it was responsible for three quarters of all unburnt hydrocarbons in the city. In an area measuring 9 by 12 km around the much smaller Zurich airport, almost 30 per cent. of nitrogen oxides were found to be of airport origin.

One exception to the near invisibility of British data on the all too detectable air pollution around airports is Heathrow. The nearly interminable terminal 5 inquiry heard from the British Airports Authority that present levels around Heathrow were not unlike those at Frankfurt airport. Present air pollutants in a 6 by 8 km area around Heathrow are, according to the BAA, largely attributable to the airport—three quarters of sulphur dioxide, 60 per cent. of nitrogen oxides and almost half of carbon monoxide and volatile organic compounds.

Growth in air traffic linked to the construction of terminal 5—I shall not press the Minister for his predictions about the outcome of the inquiry—would

have a worrying effect on air pollution, especially from nitrogen oxides whose levels could be expected to more than double.

Two other pollutants in and around airports are ozone, formed in the presence of sunlight from VOCs and nitrogen oxides, and the particulate matter frequently produced by airports and aviation activities. Both pollutants are associated with a wide range of respiratory diseases and loss of lung function.

When does the Minister expect the publication of the interdepartmental group report on the costs and benefits of measures to improve air quality, which should help to achieve the targets in the national air quality strategy? Will he confirm that demonstrable health benefits to residents in airport communities as a result of reduced air pollution will be a significant factor shaping the development of our future aviation policy?

One of the most insidious and depressing effects frequently linked to airport development is the loss of, or damage to, natural habitats, attractive landscapes, biodiversity and heritage sites, collectively caused by land take—a phrase as unattractive as its impact. Evidence in my own constituency is not difficult to find. When those hon. Members present today are next on the Leicestershire section of the M1, I urge them to look carefully as they drive north from junction 23A—in other words, leaving the civilisation of the midlands or Leicestershire behind—and they will see the beginnings of an urban sprawl that threatens in the medium term to engulf the attractive villages of Castle Donington, Isley Walton and Kegworth. The location of those villages lying close to the east midlands nexus of the A42, the A50 and the M1 has been a key factor, but the nearby airport has certainly been a catalyst for the worsening position. Will the Minister reassure my constituents that much tighter requirements for the use of brown land will reduce to a minimum the land needed for any developments required by the airport and related activities?

Finally, I draw attention to the occasional problems associated with waste disposal and the discharge of water into inadequate drainage systems and water courses, which contributed to the serious flooding experienced last year in parts of the north-west Leicestershire villages of Hemington and Lockington.

What can the White Paper do to reduce the significant environmental costs that are being largely met by those outside the aviation industry? The Minister is a keen walker, and one useful short walk that he might make this afternoon is along the ministerial corridor in Eland house to the office of the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Mr. Hill)—it might even be next door—whose richly varied brief includes responsibility for the nation's rail network, which he seems to be standing up to very well.

The two Ministers might then examine the report "From Planes to Trains", which was commissioned in October 2000 by Friends of the Earth. That looks at realising the significant environmental potential from shifting short-haul flights, both domestic and European, to rail. The pre-Hatfield findings are that the rail routes in the UK that offer the greatest scope for cutting large volumes of air traffic are the east and west coast main lines. There is some limited potential to develop the midlands and the Great Western main lines, but as the majority of domestic air traffic is between the regions and London, rail links between airports outside London offer less scope for substitution.

The extent to which the transfer can take place depends crucially on the level of investment made in the rail network and rolling stock to reduce travel times, and on the provision of rail links to all major domestic airports. That would be achieved most easily in a rail network back under public control, as I am sure that the Minister would agree although he may not confess it now. Obtaining modal shifts from air to rail is one way to apply a gentle brake to unrestricted and harmful aviation growth. I hope that the White Paper will also take a more direct route to regulate environmental impact by improving the planning regimes and policies at local, regional and national level that have proved so ineffective in the past two decades.

The present planning system for airport developments is totally inadequate even when it limits its aspirations to mitigation packages to offset some of the environmental impacts or at most to attempt to slow the rate at which they worsen. I said that I welcome the abandonment of the predict-and-provide planning regime, which seemed continually to approve expansions or to pre-determine them. Long-dormant permissions, granted on appeal with few environmental constraints, as was the case in 1983 in my area after a decision by the right hon. Member for Bridgwater (Mr. King), the then Secretary of State for the Environment, can still be reactivated to the chagrin of those affected.

Statutory environmental impact assessments are not the whole answer either. EIAs, especially when they are commissioned and financed by developers, are immensely variable in their scope, accuracy, detail, clarity and transparency. Those that cover airport developments cry out for a standard, more rigorous and well-defined approach. In any case, EIAs predict a level of impact of activities a decade or more in advance. Whether those estimates are borne out by future events, and whether the mitigation measures imposed prove to be adequate, never seems to be reviewed. I therefore urge the Minister to ensure that the White Paper totally overhauls the airport planning system, which satisfies neither the developer in its speed, cost or flexibility, nor the airport communities in delivering environmental safeguards, nor the planners in providing adequate opportunities to enforce them.

It is generally agreed that the aviation White Paper must be target driven. As the Aviation Environment Federation argues, tough but realistic targets for noise and emissions would protect the environment, reassure residents living under flight paths and ensure that the industry had clear incentives to obtain a much more sustainable and socially acceptable approach. All campaigners recognise that aviation is largely dependent upon a complex arrangement of European and international agreements, so collective action at those levels is crucial.

Britain must press hard for international aviation to become part of the Kyoto agreement on global warming and we must persuade the international community to adopt and implement the standards recommended by the World Health Organisation on noise. The Government also need to legislate for local targets for noise and air pollution levels.

[Mr. David Taylor]

After modal shift and tighter planning and legislative regimes, there remains one powerful way of levelling the uneven airfield that favours the interests of the aviation industry against those of the environment and airport communities—charges and taxes. It is therefore appropriate that this debate is taking place a week before the Budget. I shall send a copy of today's *Hansard* to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. If we are to manage the demand for air transport in a sustainable way—the present regime clearly cannot—we must ensure that the polluter pays, not just pay lip service to the principle. The aviation industry does not pay the costs of the noise pollution and climate change that it causes. A 1995 study assessed those externalities for the EU at an annual cost of £11 billion. Although charges and taxes seem to be best co-ordinated at European level, the Dutch have shown, through a noise tax at Schipol airport, that it may be feasible to introduce local environmental charging at national level.

The aviation industry does not pay for its pollution or its fair share of taxes. In fact, it is heavily subsidised. The White Paper must spell out the levels of that unjustified subsidy. There is no VAT on the purchase of planes or airline tickets. Vast sums are spent providing surface access to airports, particularly on roads. Worst of all from an environmental perspective is the fact that no duty is paid on aviation fuel. Indirect subsidies at EU level have been estimated at £20 billion annually. Again, changes in fiscal regimes can be achieved only by agreement at European or international levels, but the Government must start to move down that path, lobby for change and negotiate. Aviation has been a tax avoider for far too long. We must be realistic. In the short term, it will be impossible to reach global agreement on fuel taxation, but an OECD aviation fuel tax or a harmonised climate change levy on landing fees should be possible. Some of the revenues raised could go into international funding of projects to tackle climate change.

I hope that the White Paper will draw a vapour trail in the sky beyond which future growth in aviation must not go without addressing the serious environmental concerns that I have described. The frequently heard argument that restriction of aviation growth would inhibit general economic growth must be seriously scrutinised, but many observers believe that it will not stand up to examination. Indeed, it is probable that planning for limited growth would achieve the double top of improved quality of life for airport communities and enhanced standards of living for those who work both in the aviation industry and in the wider economy.

The new owners of East Midlands airport envisage that passenger numbers will treble to 6 million a year and that the number of jobs will double to more than 11,000. It is undeniably a major regional spur to help economic development to take off, but more than 40,000 people live near the airport and are deeply concerned about its impact on their communities and lives. That dilemma is repeated up and down the country as regional airports brace themselves to absorb the surplus growth decanted by the London airports.

I have shown how economic growth versus environmental protection can be made a win-win game. We need clear policies to reduce greenhouse emissions from aviation; fiscal changes to ensure that air travellers and freight hauliers pay the full environmental and social costs of their decision to fly; regulatory measures and incentives to invest in cleaner, quieter aircraft; investment in inter-city rail to reduce short-haul demand; stricter application of regulations governing airport use; and, vital to many constituencies such as mine, a more strategic approach to the consideration of plans for new airports like Finningley in Yorkshire, or expanded ones, such as East Midlands airport. A greater public debate, which does not pit the well resourced aviation industry against cash-strapped communities, is of the essence. There is a pressing need for a huge change in public attitudes and policy towards aviation. The forthcoming White Paper provides an opportunity to address that need for change. I have every confidence that the new Minister will not miss that opportunity.

11.24 am

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): I am pleased to take part in the debate as I represent Farnborough, the birthplace of British aviation.

The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) spent the best part of half an hour criticising one of Britain's greatest 20th century success stories. We were one of the first countries in the world to master the art of flying when, on 16 October 1908, Samuel Franklin Cody took to the skies from Laffan's plain in Farnborough. We remain one of the world's leading aerospace countries, through our manufacture of air frames and aero engines. Our airlines are also second to none. It is therefore astonishing that the hon. Gentleman, who has an airport in his constituency and who has been on innumerable councils in Leicestershire, should tell us what bad news that is.

I hope that he will tell his constituents the bad news that he has in store for them. If his recommendations to his ministerial colleagues were accepted—although I do not expect for a minute that they will be—the price of his constituents' air tickets to Ibiza, Florida or wherever would go up by 50 per cent. The hon. Gentleman's speech was seriously devoid of practical suggestions, other than that we should switch from plane to rail. That process is already happening and the privatisation of the rail industry will ensure that the process accelerates faster than it would have done had the railways remained under the dead hand of nationalisation.

Mr. David Taylor: No one, least of all me, is suggesting that the economic and social importance of East Midlands airport to the people of the region, and south Yorkshire and beyond, is not considerable. The proposed measures would enhance the profitability of the airport and its value to the region. Conflict between improved environmental considerations and economic performance is not inevitable.

Mr. Howarth: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman flatly contradicting himself. He said earlier that we needed to increase taxes on what he calls the polluters, that people need to pay more, that the cost of aviation in terms of its alleged pollution needs to be

more transparent, and so on—and now he says that of course he welcomes that investment in his constituency. I am sure that he does, and that when he goes back to his constituency he will find that the Conservative candidate there will, like the Chancellor of the Exchequer, be armed with a copy of *Hansard*, showing the hon. Gentleman's rather Luddite view on the development.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Does the hon. Gentleman deny aircraft pollution? Does he deny the effects on global warming or the effects of environmental pollution generally, particularly noise pollution, of which my constituents in north London are well aware? Surely it remains the policy of his party, along with others in the House, that the polluter should pay.

Mr. Howarth: I had hardly got into my remarks when the hon. Lady intervened. Of course I recognise that there is inevitably some pollution. There is a degree of pollution from motor cars, for which the motorist pays. Under the Government, the motorist pays extremely heavily—much more heavily than under the previous or the next Conservative Government, after May or whenever that will be.

However, Parliament needs to try to balance out the conflicting interests. I fear that, in trying to achieve a balance, the hon. Gentleman has skewed his argument so far in one direction as greatly to inconvenience the travelling public, whether the business community or holidaymakers. Air travel is a necessity for business people and one of the great joys of life for leisure travellers. It has opened up the world and given people easier access to distant regions, which once would have been impossible. I suppose that one could go to the far east with P&O, but one would need more than the four weeks holiday that most people get. Air travel gets people to such destinations more quickly.

Mr. Taylor: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way yet again; he is most generous. The core worry and our dominant concern is the night noise produced by freight aircraft, particularly the older variety. Dealing with that will not imperil or threaten package flights or holiday makers.

Mr. Howarth: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. When in London, I live about 300 yd north of runway 27 right. I happen to be an aviator, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman understands my description; I mean the northern parallel runway at Heathrow. I am well aware that jumbo aircraft arriving at 4 am during the summer can disrupt people's sleep patterns. I understand that; I am talking about getting the balance right.

The hon. Gentleman seems unwilling or unable to acknowledge the efforts that the industry has already made, particularly in the United Kingdom. For instance, improved burn technology and air frame efficiency and better operating procedures have cut the consumption of fuel per passenger mile in the past 40 years by no less than 70 per cent. That fantastic achievement was achieved in part by the International Civil Aviation Organisation regulations on noise, and the fuel crisis of the 1970s may have helped; but it is also the result of the industry's determination to operate more fuel-efficient aeroplanes. It did not happen by accident. It needed investment.

The Government have lauded their investment in the aerospace industry. For instance, Rolls-Royce has received another £250 million to develop the 900 and 600 variants of the Trent engine. It is hoped that those engines will produce even further efficiencies in power performance and reduce fuel consumption and, therefore, pollution. The aircraft will also become quieter. Everyone must know that aircraft have become less noisy. One needs only to hear a Boeing 707 go past to know that—although the only ones to be seen nowadays are probably owned by corrupt and incompetent African dictators, of which there are quite a few. However, at air shows one can hear the difference between a 707 or a B52 and an Airbus. It is amazing to see an Airbus go overhead at that incredible angle and seem just to hang in the sky.

Credit ought to be given to the aerospace industry, and we should certainly sing the praises of the British industry. I am sure that you would be extremely upset if I did not mention the contribution made by your constituents at Hawarden, Mr. Jones, where the Airbus wings are made. They have joined others across the United Kingdom to ensure the success of the British aerospace industry by making more efficient and quieter aircraft. The aircraft entering airline fleets today are typically 20 decibels quieter than comparable aircraft of 30 years ago. Ours is a success story.

I agree with the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire about the ludicrous nature of our planning arrangements. I congratulate the Minister on obtaining his position as Aviation Minister. Will he please ensure that the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions looks urgently at the matter? We cannot go on dealing with planning procedures in this Neanderthal fashion. The terminal 5 inquiry has been going on for five or six years and has cost hundreds of millions of pounds. The issue is simple. Of course there are passions on both sides, but there are arguments for T5 and against it; let us hear them and make a decision. We should stop fiddling around in this extraordinary way, damaging the United Kingdom's economic effectiveness and continuing the uncertainty for people who live in the environment of Heathrow.

I agree with the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire on the planning issue. If he wants to stop night flying at Heathrow, then fine; let us find a brand new airport, as has been done in Munich. We would need a brand new greenfield site. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to tell us what part of North-West Leicestershhire would be suited to the new site.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): Finningley.

Mr. Howarth: I shall be happy to give way if the hon. Lady wants to tell us about that. I gather that she will do so later. I flew in and out of Finningley when it was an RAF airfield, so I know it.

South-east England will not be given another airport. Under present planning arrangements, another airport is not realistic. The attitude of the antis is understandable. Who wants a socking great six-runway aerodrome taking up square miles of crowded

[Mr. Howarth]

countryside in south-east England? We must maximise the benefit of what we have. Heathrow was the most successful airport in Europe because it was revolutionary. It had two parallel runways when no other airport in Europe did. Charles de Gaulle now has six and we are being overtaken by our continental partners. It is not realistic to consider an alternative new airport for London. We need to make the most of our assets and try to accommodate the demands of business and leisure travellers within the constraints of existing airports.

The hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire talked about people who live near airports. We have new arrangements at Farnborough, which is the designated business airport for the south-east of England, as the Minister knows. It has now been agreed that a company called TAG, more familiar to the public as TAG McLaren, the Formula 1 operation, is to turn the aerodrome into the executive jet centre for south-east England, with 28,000 movements. That figure is causing my constituents some concern. The figure for Heathrow is something like 420,000. My constituents are concerned that the site will turn into another Heathrow, although that is simply not going to happen. I understand the worries that people express, but in any estate agency properties are marketed on the strength of easy access to Heathrow or East Midlands airport or the prospect of easy access to Finningley. The public want that access. What is at stake is the reconciling of the different demands.

We have a great deal to be proud of in our aerospace industry. It has served our people well and enhanced Britain's competitiveness. Good air links are a vital factor in companies' investment decisions about the United Kingdom. Without them—if we price those involved out of the market—we shall seriously damage the economy. That is the context in which we must consider the burdens that we are willing to impose on our industry, to its detriment against competitors.

11.39 am

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Noise is one of the prime problems for Londoners today. Despite what the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) has said, it is not only the noise produced by an individual aircraft that needs to be considered but the overall pattern of aircraft movements in London.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on having secured today's debate. I agree with absolutely everything that he said about wider environmental damage and climate change taxation. However, I shall refer to noise.

HACAN ClearSkies, the Londonwide campaign on the matter, suggests that 1 million Londoners are now affected by aircraft noise. Some of that noise comes from City airport, but the vast majority comes from Heathrow, where between 75 and 80 per cent. of the year prevailing winds mean that aircraft fly over London.

Like the hon. Member for Aldershot, the Department asserts that there has been a decrease in the amount of noise. We have reason to believe that the investigations and records that the Department makes and keeps are inadequate in assessing the current position, as I shall explain.

The noise data maps collected by the Department measure only the noise of take-offs, not landings. Take-offs have become quieter, but the big increase in complaints in recent years has related to landing aircraft. The data do not include noise of less than 57 decibels, yet in large areas of London people are complaining about noise levels of 54 decibels or less. The data do not take account of the number of planes, which is a continuing problem despite individual planes becoming quieter. The area measured is based on a study conducted more than 18 years ago, and it takes no account of what is happening today. Parts of London that were not previously affected are seriously affected this year and have been for the past five years, my constituency, Lewisham, Deptford, in south-east London being a case in point.

Furthermore, the hour between 6 am and 7 am, the busiest and noisiest hour of the day, is not measured. Londoners want the few aircraft that fly in and make the greatest noise in the early hours of the morning to be completely banned. I am sometimes woken in bed in south-east London, many miles from Heathrow, between 4 am and 5 am. The economic value of such flights is extremely small, and Londoners are insistent that that economic price is too great a price to pay for people constantly being woken in the early hours of the morning.

The numbers affected are much greater than the Department's data suggest. The United Kingdom data suggest that only 158,000 people are affected by noise of more than 60 decibels around Heathrow and Gatwick. However, there are several reasons for believing that that is a serious underestimate. Most notably, no account is taken of people who live under flight paths but not in the immediate vicinity of airports, my constituents being a case in point. A more recent study of noise levels around Heathrow shows that many more people are disturbed by aircraft noise. That study, which was conducted by the European Environment Agency, found that 440,000 people around the airport are exposed to noise of more than 55 decibels.

I have several questions to ask the Minister. I wanted to refer to the World Health Organisation, but I know that other colleagues want to speak. The WHO has shown the severity of problems ranging from insomnia and stress to mental disorders in adults and retarded learning among children subjected to intense aircraft noise around airports. The WHO proposals specify safe noise levels that are well below those operating at our major airports. Do the Government or industry have plans that offer a realistic prospect of reducing aircraft noise to the safe levels recommended by the WHO? What progress has been made on the European Commission's plans to draft a noise directive that would have further implications for aviation in this country? Can the Minister confirm that radar controllers' video map centrelines have been extended from 15 miles to 20 miles from Heathrow? When will the new night-time arrangements that his predecessor announced on 21 December last year be put in place? Does he have any idea when we will hear the result of the terminal 5 inquiry? Finally, what plans are there to extend proper

noise monitoring to areas such as my own, in south-east London, which are not near an airport but are under flight paths?

11.45 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on introducing this important subject into the debate today and for the comprehensive way in which he covered the subject.

I shall concentrate my remarks on the effect of aviation on climate change. As we had a debate in Westminster Hall on climate change before the COP 6 talks in the Hague, it may be best if I do not read into the record all the effects of climate change. I simply note that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has recently said that the effects of climate change in its worst-case scenario have doubled. The Government acknowledged that, when the Deputy Prime Minister said that the report from the IPCC showed that we risked major irreversible changes unless we significantly cut emissions of greenhouse gases.

Some 96 per cent. of the deaths from the changes resulting from natural disasters happen in developing countries. We in the western world must think about the impact of our activities on those countries.

Does aviation have an effect on climate change? International freight is projected to grow by 70 per cent. between 1992 and 2004 because of increased global trade. That is one of the fastest-rising causes of greenhouse gas emissions at the moment. In effect, international trade is getting a free ride because those emissions are untaxed and excluded from the Kyoto principles. Members of the Conservative party who have great concern for the farmers, as I do, know that a reason why our farm produce is under-priced is that it is so cheap to import by air freight. Therefore, there is a good sustainable environmental reason, as well as a local economy reason, to support British farmers by reconsidering what aviation is doing to farming in this country.

Aeroplanes emit 2 per cent. of all man-made CO_2 released into the atmosphere and some nitrogen oxide, which creates ozone—a potent greenhouse gas. The IPCC has developed a measure for calculating the effect of aircraft emissions, which the organisation calls "radiative forcing". The emissions, being at a higher altitude, have a higher warming capacity. Using that formula, the IPCC calculated in 1992—since when we have experienced growth—that aviation emissions contributed 3.5 per cent. of the effect of global warming. That is the equivalent of the entire CO_2 output of Canada. Canada is involved in Kyoto, but aviation is not. Clearly, that situation needs to be addressed in future talks on global warming.

Emissions of CO_2 are set to double by 2015, and nitrogen oxide emissions will rise by 96 per cent. The Government have acknowledged in their global change programme that by the year 2050, we should have reduced CO_2 emissions by some 50 or 60 per cent. The Deputy Prime Minister said that that should be our target, but I cannot understand how we can approach that target without including aviation within it. The aircraft industry has made a huge social and economic impact. We have until 2050, but let us start planning now so that there is an incremental change within aviation. No Member has suggested an overnight change that might frighten many whose economies and livelihoods depend on aviation. However, we have an opportunity to start planning now within international agreements to include aviation, as with any other form of transport, in environmental considerations.

Some argue that economic benefits are such that we cannot curb air growth. The same arguments could be advanced about the economic benefits of road traffic. However, during the past 20 years, road traffic has increased at a greater rate than economic growth. Air traffic is increasing similarly because it is so cheap to use air for both freight and passenger traffic.

Freight, in particular, undermines our own local economy. That was brought home to me by a recent constituency case. My local authority is considering an application to allow an MOD facility at Aberporth to become a civil aviation facility. Although it would be located in Blaenannerch, a rural village in remote west Wales, it would become the second largest civil airport in Wales—second only to Cardiff. I echo the comments of the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire about the planning process, which seems completely inadequate in terms of allowing local residents to have their say and make a real assessment of the impact of such a facility.

The environmental impact assessment has been funded by the developer, which means that local residents have no faith in it. It talks of reaching 8,800 flights from Aberporth within two years, increasing by 10 per cent. each year thereafter. That is clearly taking United Kingdom statistics and applying them to a remote site in west Wales. I do not share the same worry as some local residents about such figures, although I appreciate their concern at the potential growth in air flights. However, we are not talking about west Wales decanting from London. Aberporth is a five-hour car journey from London, so I doubt whether people will fly into west Wales to relieve pressures in south-east England. We are two hours from Cardiff.

Will the Minister explain the role for small civil airports, particularly in remote areas such as west Wales? I have some faith in the application because it is linked to a technology park and a move away from an MOD facility to a Civil Aviation Authority-controlled facility would be an improvement. In terms of the environmental impact, I have slightly more faith in the CAA than the MOD. My constituents want to know how the Government see aviation fitting into sustainable development. The Green Paper entitled "The Future of Aviation" mentions regional plans, and places them in a Welsh economic context.

There is no doubt that aviation has an effect on climate change, but that it is missed out from all international considerations. That is a clear sign that the problem must be addressed. The aviation industry must be part of sustainable development. All other industries are, and the aviation industry—important though it is in the economy—should not have an advantage over other parts of the economy. Several steps can be taken. As the hon. Gentleman said, there is no tax on aviation fuel. That may be prohibited under the Chicago convention,

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

but an emission charge tax may be considered in terms of how we can internalise the full costs of the flight, including the environmental costs.

The industry has improved noise emissions. It has done so because it knew that the Government were interested in noise. Until now, not so much attention was paid to noise emissions. Perhaps the industry can work with the Government in improving emissions, but I should like to see some form of charges so that some of the older freight aircraft that are in use pay for their effect on the environment. We must also examine the removal of unfair state subsidies. There is a VAT exemption on air tickets. It is possible that Air France puts direct state subsidies into its operations. Let us consider the infrastructure involved in constructing an airport. A road alignment must take place for even the small airport that has been suggested for my constituency, and that will have to be paid for by the local taxpayers, many of whom are upset that we are using objective 1 money.

My understanding is that airports are excluded from the provisions of integrated pollution control, which were introduced by the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Will the Minister reconsider the matter? Why should airports be excluded when factories and other industrial processes are not? Airports have an effect in terms of local air pollution and climate change. It is worrying that airports are not included in IPC, which is the highest standard of pollution control in this country. Airports should be included.

The autumn assembly of the International Civil Aviation Organisation will provide an opportunity to press such issues. The Government have at least flagged up some of the concerns in their Green Paper, and I am grateful that they are aware of those matters. International standards for aircraft emissions have been agreed in the past through the ICAO, and it can be done again. With more work, international aviation can be included within our Kyoto targets. Given the disappointments in the Hague, some might feel that, if we cannot even address the current situation, more should be done on climate change. However, it is a clear omission if international aviation cannot be included in our Kyoto targets. I hope that the Minister will listen to the concerns expressed by Members today, and consider how to factor them into the Government's future programme and the White Paper.

11.52 am

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) to his new position as Minister, and I thank my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) for securing the debate. I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), one of my local colleagues, who shares my interest in seeing Finningley fulfil its potential in the growing industry of airports and aviation.

As Members may have become aware, the proposed Finningley airport is in my constituency. I am pleased to hear that the hon. Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) flew in, and I am also pleased to hear that he flew out again. There is no doubt that many Members who have an interest in aviation are aware of the superb facilities at the Finningley site, which has one of the longest runways in the United Kingdom. It is a shame that the previous Government, who decided to close that excellent facility and advanced a proposal for yet another prison—there are already three in the area—did not use joined-up thinking to realise its potential for recycling millions of pounds of public investment. Stories abound that Manchester airport was interested in Finningley as its second runway at the time. We might have avoided a huge public inquiry in relation to that site if Finningley's potential had been recognised earlier.

I understand that airports must be good neighbours. I am not naïve enough to believe that there is never a conflict between short-term commercial interests and effective environmental controls. I have made a detailed submission to the Department in relation to its paper on the future of aviation and the separate consultation on aircraft noise.

More than 50,000 people have written to the council in support of Finningley being developed as a civil airport, and 500 people have written in against it. That is 100 to 1 in favour of the site rising from the ashes to be a major contributor to the local economy. That is what it signifies to many people who lived and worked with the RAF for many years. Whether the site meets its potential again is a question of sustainability. Considering the numbers who are against it, never have so few tried to thwart the ambitions of the many. I think that I am the only Member of Parliament who has presented to the House a petition of more than 20,000 people, in this case against a public inquiry into the proposed airport development.

Several simple proposals could significantly improve the environmental sustainability of UK airports. First, on a macro level, the Government should aim to reduce the average journey made by consumers to airports that provide an appropriate service. Each region should seek to provide suitable services for the majority of its residents. Government policy should deal with those regions where existing airports demonstrably fail to achieve the level and range of services to meet local needs. Yorkshire and the south-west are two such regions where new air services are desperately required. Where necessary, Government should recognise the availability of suitable brownfield sites—the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) made that point well in respect of the development of the Ministry of Defence site in his constituency—and we should certainly consider using former RAF airbases. Where new airports are needed, we should avoid greenfield development.

Each region should guarantee a long-haul capacity. At present, we have too few airports capable of long-haul travel, unevenly distributed throughout the United Kingdom. Our objective should be to have between 12 and 15 long-haul airports. Without those, there will be a rising trend of passengers travelling to the south-east or Manchester to take long-haul flights.

All of that is fully in keeping with the Government's other worthy objective of maximising the potential of regional airports to assist in economic regeneration for each region. The Government should develop sustainable access to airports and financially reward those that achieve the highest rates of access via public

transport and means other than cars. Rail-bus-air intermodal hubs should be created wherever possible. Two means of achieving that are diverting major inter-city rail lines through airports and locating parkway stations at such interchanges. One Government target should be to reduce long road journeys to airports—mainly in the south-east—and the overall distances travelled to airports.

Every airport should have noise quotas applied and all new airports should match or better the noise controls of comparable airports. All airports should be given a timetable for meeting agreed minimum standards via nationally determined quiet operation policies and noise control programmes. Enforcement of noise controls should be separated from commercial considerations. The imposition of penalties on airports and airlines for breaches of noise controls or departure from noise preferential routes should be independent of the airport and local authorities, and should perhaps be administered by the Civil Aviation Authority. The present system discourages enforcement of noise controls for commercial reasons—especially, I regret to say, if the airport is partly or wholly owned by the local authority. Minimum noise standards should apply irrespective of how few or many residents are affected. Each household should be accorded the same minimum protection.

Freight should be encouraged by rail and then by air, rather than by road, and each region should be able to offer appropriate air freight services—Yorkshire and Humber makes a poor contribution in that respect, thereby adding to the number of freight-related journeys by road to airports further afield. The Government should deter and discriminate against internal flights that can more sustainably be undertaken by rail. However, the Government should not cap passenger numbers, which would only thwart legitimate consumer aspirations for international travel and have the effect either of driving up the price of travel as supply was restricted, or of driving passengers abroad to meet their air travel needs—neither is in the national or consumer interest.

The best way to improve airport capacity is to adopt policies to increase the number of regional airports that can provide long-haul as well as European flights, thereby increasing the chances of significant market penetration. That would assist in meeting the objective of reducing internal flights and short flights to European hubs, such as Amsterdam and Brussels, before a long-haul leg.

Government policy should seek a diversity of ownership and market penetration in the interests of competition and of the consumer, and of raising standards, including environmental standards. Policy should prevent a duopoly developing, with BAA and Manchester dominating the market and preventing the growth of other airport consortiums, especially in long-haul travel. By ensuring that, we will not only increase consumer and airline choice but raise standards through competition in this growing area of our economy.

12.3 pm

Mr. Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on securing this debate. It is important that airport authorities never underestimate the impact of airports on local communities, nor should they evade their environmental responsibilities. However, I stress that we should not view developments at Birmingham international airport as totally a gloom and doom story, because the airport authority has made strides in recent years and provides a model of airports engaging in sustainable development but still entering legally binding agreements that protect the local community. Credit should be given for that.

Like my hon. Friend, I am conscious of airports' impact on jobs. Birmingham international airport employs as many people as MG Rover's Longbridge plant. Hon. Members will recall the shock waves that went through this House when Longbridge recently came under threat.

I want to focus on a couple of matters relating to noise. I, too, have noticed that noise levels in general are reducing thanks to the introduction of quieter aircraft, which is particularly important. My hon. Friend mentioned PAIN, and said that night flights are one of his core concerns. Birmingham airport operates what is probably one of the most stringent night flying policies in the country. Operators whose aircraft exceed agreed levels are fined the equivalent of a full runway charge, and the money thereby generated is diverted into local community schemes. Those sums are reinforced by a £50,000 annual grant paid by the airport, so it is not true to say that air operators do not pay. Stringent agreements can be entered into, and by and large operators observe them. Where they fail to do so, the money generated through fines can be recycled into local communities.

As is doubtless true of airports throughout the country, Birmingham has invested a lot of money—about £500,000—in monitoring and tracking equipment to ensure that aircraft follow noise preferential routes. In 1999, about 98 per cent. of aircraft taking off from Birmingham did indeed follow such routes. By investing in the right equipment and engaging in the right agreements, it is possible to ensure that local communities are protected.

Reference was made to American studies on pollution and the impact on health, but Professor Roy Harrison of the University of Birmingham, who is a leading authority on the subject, has also done some interesting work. His two-year study of respiratory disease in the area around Birmingham international airport, which involved some 9,000 people, concluded that there were no significant health risks. In fact, where respiratory illness and similar conditions were found, they were as likely to be associated with smoking and housing conditions as with the airport itself. The air quality monitoring scheme at Birmingham international airport has revealed pollution levels that are lower than those at other sites monitored by Birmingham city council. Therefore, we should not automatically make such claims about airports.

Reference was made to surface transport, which is a crucial factor in ensuring that local communities do not suffer as a result of attempts to develop airports. The bus network in Birmingham has been expanded extensively to serve most of the surrounding areas. The airport itself is building a dedicated public transport interchange that is linked to Birmingham railway station, and as my hon.

[Mr. Steve McCabe]

Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) said, such developments are crucial. It is also investing £10 million in an environmentally friendly people mover, and is engaged in green commuter plans that are crucial for staff who commute to the airport. It is therefore clear that there are steps that airports can and should be encouraged to take.

In conclusion, I agree about the importance of protecting local communities and ensuring that the environment does not suffer when airports develop and expand. However, we should not underestimate the positive impact—in terms of jobs and other factors—of airport developments and we should not negate the efforts of airports such as Birmingham international to respond to the concerns of local communities.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), may I ask him to be extremely brief? I had intended to call him earlier, but he did not rise in his place. We must allow the Opposition spokesman and in particular the Minister adequate time to reply.

12.10 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): I am grateful to be called, Mr. Winterton, and I apologise for failing to catch your eye earlier. I thought that I had made my intentions clear. I acknowledge that significant contributions are yet to come from the two Front-Bench spokesmen and I look forward to hearing them.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on securing the debate and raising an issue that is vital to this country's transport debates, but is regularly ignored in debates about sustainability. We must acknowledge—and I do nothing to detract from it—that aviation is a great UK success story. Its growth has been phenomenal and is expected to intensify in the next few years.

Too often, however, the environmental and social aspects of the sustainability equation have been either less well understood or not debated at all. The Green Paper, "The Future of Aviation", sets out some of the important arguments. I look forward to hearing the Minister's response and I belatedly welcome him to his position. Last year, he and I spent some time considering the transport legislation. As he was often not able to speak at all, it is a rare treat to hear him twice in one morning.

The Oxford economic forecasting report has already demonstrated the economic success of the aviation industry but, as the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire pointed out, many serious concerns have been expressed about the limitations of that report.

We have had a measured debate, which has taken account of the delicate balance between environmental and economic issues. Hon. Members representing constituencies with airports have made valuable contributions. However, there can no longer be any escape from the need to tackle noise pollution, local air pollution and, as the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) pointed out, the effects of global warming and climate change.

The Liberal Democrats accept that—directly or indirectly—aviation contributes hugely to the economy of this country and of the world, but it is not without cost. The British Airports Authority itself recently suggested the need for a sustainable aviation forum.

The "polluter pays" principle cannot be ignored and should be closer to the heart of aviation policy than it has been in the past. My hon. Friends have been vigorous in their opposition to terminal 5. Perhaps we can tempt the Minister to comment on it today. Urgent measures should be taken to deal with climate change in the international context, which means considering the introduction of an international aviation fuel tax.

The Green Paper starts the debate, which we hope the Minister will continue; and when the White Paper finally arrives, we hope that it will measure up to the task.

12.14 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Thank you, Mr. Winterton. Let us hope that you are soon appointed Mr. Deputy Speaker officially.

I congratulate the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on securing this important debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said, aviation is one of Britain's greatest success stories—not only in manufacturing aircraft, but in respect of airlines and airports. British aviation is second only to the United States of America. It contributes £10 billion to our economy, 1.4 per cent. of gross domestic product, and it directly employs 180,000 people and supports the jobs of a further 380,000 people. Despite criticism during our debate, it contributes £2.5 billion in taxes and represents 11 per cent. of UK export services.

The industry has been successful because it has allowed itself to innovate. In recent years there have been developments such as low-cost airlines, the growth of the charter market and the expansion of some regional airports. The Confederation of British Industry said that airport links with the rest of the world are crucial for any company or business that wants to invest in the United Kingdom. The industry has an excellent safety record, which I hope will continue.

There is no question but that air transport has an environmental impact and the forecast growth in air travel requires steps to be taken to tackle the issue. A rational debate is required, the starting point of which is that global aviation consumes 12 per cent. of fossil fuels burnt by the transport sector, and road transport 75 per cent. As a result of improved burn technology, air frame efficiency and better operating procedures, consumption of fuel per passenger mile over the past 40 years has been cut by 70 per cent., which is a substantial improvement.

Aircraft are becoming quieter, and aircraft entering the fleet today are typically 20 decibels quieter than comparable aircraft 30 years ago, a reduction in noise annoyance of about 75 per cent. and a massive shrinkage of noise footprints around airports. Great progress has been made in the matter.

The industry's role has changed, and aircraft manufacturers appreciate what they must do in future years. My hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) spoke about aircraft noise recently. He said:

"At present, aircraft noise is assessed against an absolute measure: decibels. However, the disturbance a noise causes depends upon the loudness in relation to the background noise. The noise of flights into Heathrow has little impact over West London, alongside traffic and other, daytime noise. But at night, London's suburbs are deadly quiet, and there are parts of the countryside that are noted for their tranquility. Some special areas are designated as such, citing their tranquility. There is absolutely no provision for tranquil areas in present policy. Public support for aviation depends upon the way these questions are addressed. The next Conservative government will not only expect the growing number of aircraft in our skies, as technology continues to improve, to have less and less noise impact. We will also adopt relative systems of measurement for assessing the impact of aircraft noise. Furthermore, we will create a presumption that low flying air traffic should avoid tranquil areas and tranquil periods. This will not change much—or indeed anything— quickly, but it may lead to some significant changes at the margin."

That is a good start.

Terminal 5 and airport policy have been mentioned; if we have a difficulty, it is with strategic planning for airspace and airports. Governments of all colours have not always been willing to grasp the nettle, because of the four or five-year cycle of parliamentary elections and the longer-term cycle required to develop airspace. The terminal 5 inquiry cost between £70 million and £85 million and since it began, Charles de Gaulle airport has completed a third runway and started a fourth. Schipol will have five runways by 2003, yet the five London airports combined have only six runways. There is a problem, especially in the south-east, of ensuring that capacity is met. Those issues need to be addressed and it is difficult to set out a sensible regional strategy; it is a pity that we cannot look at things strategically, across the whole country, until we know the result of the terminal 5 inquiry.

Airport operators can do a great deal about improved surface access; we heard that pollution caused by cars going to and from Heathrow may be more than that caused by the aircraft. The airline industry is a profitable industry, and so are airports; what is needed is a balancing factor to ensure that profits go into improving the infrastructure for passengers and reducing the environmental impact around airports. There are numerous examples, such as the London to Heathrow express rail link and Manchester airport's development and public transport strategy, which should be pursued to develop a more sustainable policy.

Overall, if air traffic is increasing, it is sensible to try to accommodate it with investment. The only effective way to dampen down demand, as the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire recommends, is by taxation or by putting people off flying. People have a right to travel. We hear stories about rip-offs in the selling of cars and fuel, but here is an efficient industry that is delivering good value in terms of flights and packages so that people can move around the world. The criticisms we have heard today are unfair. We have a successful industry and if we work with it to ensure improved environmental standards and investment it should not be beyond the wit of the fourth largest economy in the world to allow people to travel and to improve environmental standards.

12.20 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Mr. Robert Ainsworth): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire (Mr. Taylor) on securing the debate and on the comprehensive way in which he dealt with both the global and local issues. I will try to answer the points that were raised, but I am fairly certain that I will not get them all in. I give a commitment to write to hon. Members about any that I miss.

Our consultation paper, "The Future of Aviation", published in December, raises a comprehensive range of issues for the longer term, with the environmental implications of the industry right at the heart. We must seek to minimise the impact of aviation on the environment. At the same time, our present and future policies must and do take account of the economic benefits from a strong and competitive airline industry and from enabling capacity to be provided where it is economically and environmentally justified. That is emphatically not the same as what has been termed, perhaps simplistically, "predict and provide".

We must look critically at the environmental dimension, and that is what we are doing. However, we must also recognize that demand arises because people want to fly for business, for holidays and to visit friends and relations. Whether aviation growth is sustainable is a decision for Government. We have recognised that responsibility, but it also involves personal decisions on how, and how often, we want to travel. We are therefore consulting very widely.

Responses to the consultation paper are due by 12 April. We are not just waiting passively for people to respond. We are actively involving representatives of the industry, and environmental and residents' groups, in the various strands of work as they are developed. We have commissioned a series of studies of airport issues in six regions of the UK. The studies assess the economic, environmental and social impacts, and we shall balance all those factors before reaching a view about whether additional capacity should be provided, either at a particular site or at all. Again, I stress that there is not a blanket commitment to meet demand and then just to mitigate the environmental effects. The demand management option is on the table.

We are working towards a White Paper on air transport looking about 30 years ahead, which will set a course that the aviation industry, its users, and those affected adversely by its operations, can follow. As most hon. Members here will know, jet aircraft are subject to noise certification requirements agreed through the International Civil Aviation Organisation. The noisiest subsonic jets—those certificated to chapter 2 standards—are already being phased out and, apart from minor exemptions, may no longer operate in Europe beyond March 2002. That has already delivered significant benefits, but we have to move on.

The Government have been prominent among those in ICAO who have argued for tighter standards for new aircraft. After much hard technical negotiation, in January this year CAEP—the Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection—agreed on a set of recommendations to the ICAO council. The headline in respect of noise is the agreement on a new noise

[Mr. Robert Ainsworth]

standard for new jet aircraft 10 decibels lower—cumulatively across the three certification points—than the present chapter 3 standard. The new standard will apply from 2006.

I make no secret of the fact that we had argued vigorously for an even more stringent standard than the new one, which will consolidate the technical progress in engine and airframe design achieved by the industry. We shall continue to work in CAEP for a more stringent long-term standard and for action to prevent noise from increasing in the short term. For three years we have been arguing for a standard that ensures improvement in future designs and for a phase-out programme covering the noisiest chapter 3 types. They are generally the oldest aircraft, including many of those hush kitted to meet the standard.

As well as reducing noise at source, our policy includes mitigating its impact around airports. Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted are designated under section 80 for the purposes of section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. That provision gives the Secretary of State powers to impose requirements on the operators of the airport, and of aircraft using it, for the purpose of limiting or mitigating the effects of noise. The requirements imposed include departure noise limits—which for daytime have been reduced with effect from this week; the new night-time limits come into effect next month—night restrictions, noise preferential routes for departures and certain regulations for the management of arriving aircraft.

Hon. Members will be disappointed if they expect me to comment on the Heathrow terminal 5 decision process beyond noting that the inspector's report is being carefully studied in the Department. A mass of evidence on environmental matters was submitted to the T5 inquiry, which the inspector has had to consider.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire expressed a keen interest in the possibility of East Midlands airport being designated for the purposes of section 78, as North West Leicestershire district council and others have requested. Although I am not entirely unacquainted with the east midlands region, I am sure that everyone will understand that I cannot comment in detail on that request. The council and the airport are still discussing the noise controls at East Midlands airport. Now that the airport's sale has been completed, subject to clearance by the Office of Fair Trading, it may be possible to expedite the dialogue somewhat. We shall take a decision when all parties' representations have been considered.

Currently, the Government impose controls only at the three London airports. Elsewhere, we continue the long-standing policy that operational noise controls are best addressed at local level as far as possible. Many larger airports tend to model their controls on those at the designated airports, modified to suit local circumstances. Noise charges, set by airports themselves, are also used at the London airports and elsewhere.

We are considering improvements to the regime for non-designated airports. Separately from the consultation on the strategic issues for the White Paper, we have consulted on legislative proposals to strengthen those aerodromes' powers to control noise. We propose to repeal section 5 of the 1982 Act, whereby the CAA could be required to address environmental factors when licensing an aerodrome, and replace it with a new power of designation with an emphasis on locally agreed noise amelioration schemes. That will continue the broad policy of local resolution and add to the incentives to find effective and appropriate voluntary controls, with the possibility of central Government intervening where necessary. The paper was published last July, and the consultation period closed in October.

I apologise for being unable to move on to the issue of emissions, which is very important and was raised by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Leicestershire and the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas). I make a commitment to write to my hon. Friend about the situation with regard to emissions and about where the issue fits into Government policy in international negotiations and the work being done in the run-up to the publication of the White Paper. I shall write to all hon. Members who have contributed to this debate.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. We now move to the next debate.

Regional Policies (Dorset)

12.30 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I am grateful to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions for agreeing to respond to the debate. I understand that on Friday she will address the south-west regional assembly in Exeter, in a debate on the south-west; she comes from the north-east, and both it and the south-west are badly affected by foot and mouth disease. I hope that she agrees that the current foot and mouth crisis shows that regionalism is an irrelevance. In the jargon of the management consultant, Government regional policies add no value; indeed, the bureaucracy, centralisation and interference with local decision-making involved in regionalism engender a significant waste of scarce resources and are a drain on local communities. Nowhere is that truer than in Dorset.

I am also grateful to the Minister for responding because she has the greatest responsibility for decisions on the distributions of taxpayers' money to local government. Today I am giving her the opportunity to apologise to the people of Dorset for the consistently unfair discrimination that the Government have exercised against them. Why does a band D householder in Dorset pay 50 per cent. more towards the cost of the police than a similar householder in Hampshire? It is not because the police service in Dorset is any better than that in Hampshire but because the Government's formula is unjust. Why does a band D household in Dorset pay some £45 more towards its county council than such a household in Hampshire?

Hampshire can afford to spend more per pupil on education. One might think that that would suggest that Hampshire council tax payers had higher bills, but the reverse is true. Why is that? This year, Dorset's education standard spending assessment has risen by less than the national average. The county council is forced to spend about 5 per cent. above that SSA, but is still not able to afford to fund its pupils on a basis comparable to that of Hampshire. That is partly because the Liberal Democrat county council insists on holding back too much money at the centre, but also because the Government's funding formula discriminates against Dorset for being in the south-west. In 2001-02, £132.50 less per pupil was spent in Dorset than in Hampshire on pupils aged between 11 and 15 and £82 less per pupil was spent on pupils aged between five and 10.

Why have the Government awarded a special cost-of-living supplement to nurses working in Hampshire when they have denied it to those in Dorset? My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) has campaigned strongly on that issue because he has Poole hospital in his constituency. All Dorset Members of Parliament are united in their opposition to the Government for their unjust handling of that. When Dorset and Hampshire were both members of Wessex health authority, they received equal treatment. However, now that the Government have forced Dorset into the south-west, nurses living and working in Dorset not only pay higher council taxes, for the reasons that I have just given, but are paid less.

To add insult to injury, for the third year running, the additional funding made available by the Government to Dorset health authority is significantly below the national average, despite the fact that Dorset has a rapidly expanding population, a high proportion of whom are elderly. Indeed, Dorset receives less than its fair share on many counts—not only for health, education and police, but for district council services. One is bound to ask whether the Government are engaging in pork-barrel politics. It seems that because no Labour Members of Parliament represent Dorset seats, the Government are taking it out on the Dorset people by starving them of an equal share of resources.

Why else are the Government discriminating against the two district councils in my constituency—East Dorset and Christchurch—in their concessionary fares policy? No less than £54 million of taxpayers' money was made available to pay for the Government's compulsory concessionary fares policy. How much of that money reached the people who live in the East Dorset and Christchurch district council areas? Not a penny of that £54 million has been made available to East Dorset council, despite the fact that a high proportion of pensioners live there, and only £20,000 has been made available to Christchurch council; yet the additional burden of concessionary fares costs about £150,000 in East Dorset and £93,000 in Christchurch.

Christchurch has been running a system targeted on those in greatest need, which costs about £72,000 a year. The Government have now imposed a new system that would cost up to an additional £230,000 if the council could afford it. Christchurch has thus been forced into providing the minimum reduced service laid down by the Government, and many of those who benefit under the concessionary fares scheme will now lose out because the council can no longer afford it. The Government do not seem to realise that many elderly people cannot get on buses—it is physically impossible for them—and that a voucher scheme that would enable them to use taxis would be much more attractive. The Government have removed Christchurch council's local discretion; they have instead imposed a new burden, and they expect that burden to be funded through the council tax.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his robust defence of Dorset, which I fully support. It is ironic that many of the elderly who are supposed to benefit from concessionary fares will now be paying far more in council tax for that benefit.

Mr. Chope: Indeed, they will. In Christchurch, about 32 per cent. of households are pensioner households; in East Dorset, the figure is about 25 per cent. The Government are expecting those pensioner households to pay more council tax. Council tax poverty—when householders have to pay more than 10 per cent. of their income on council tax—is a fast growing problem in Christchurch and Dorset. I suspect—my hon. Friend the Member for Poole will know—that it is probably at its worst among pensioners who live in the more rural parts of Dorset. While the Government continue with such regional policies, we shall have to work within that framework when representing our constituents.

I gave the Minister of State's private office notice of some of my concerns about the impact of the latest draft regional planning guidance on my constituency. After extensive consultation and an independent panel inquiry, it seems that planning guidance is being altered

[Mr. Chope]

at ministerial whim. I shall illustrate that by referring to the status of Bournemouth international airport. In 1999, the south-west regional planning conference proposed as part of policy 12 that

"Policies should support the further growth of Bournemouth International Airport as a sub-regional Airport and employment location."

After consultation and public examination before a panel appointed by the Secretary of State, the panel reported that the regional policy guidance should contain a policy to achieve

"the continued development of Bournemouth International Airport as an important airport for the region and as a major strategic employment site".

The Secretary of State now proposes a further change in the wording, so that the policy would support

"the continued development of Bournemouth International Airport as an important airport for the region and as a site for airport related development".

That last minute change of wording has caused consternation in Christchurch district council and Dorset county council, and among local businesses. It is also opposed by the regional development agency. The change is not supported by evidence, yet the process purports to be evidence based.

I have given the Minister notice of my intention to ask where the proposed change of wording originated, so I hope that she will be able to answer. The introduction to the paper that set out the proposed changes in December stated:

"This consultation draft is based on the draft approved in July 1999 . . . It takes account of comments from consultees in autumn 1999 and, in particular, the panel report on the public examination held in March 2000 of key issues raised by consultees."

However, neither the planning conference nor the panel suggested the changes that are now being proposed for incorporation by the Government. Indeed, the Government seem to be making up the rules as they go along.

Why is the Secretary of State proposing the change in status? The reason that he gives is that

"the role of Bournemouth Airport should be recognised but its development potential should not be minimalised by the development of inappropriate activities on the site. It is important in this location, therefore, that future development should have a strong need to be located at or near this facility".

No one really knows what those words mean. Surely the best judges of how to use the airport should be its owners and the present tenants and lessees of the land. Suspicions are mounting that the significance of the Secretary of State's wording was not thought through. Indeed, in the latest draft the Secretary of State

"invites comments from parties on how this might be achieved".

Perhaps he could begin by explaining, through the Minister of State, why the change is necessary in the first place. At the same time, he could explain what the words mean.

The Government say that they want Bournemouth international airport to be recognised as having regional importance. However, the regional air service studies that are being undertaken clearly envisage the airport serving a catchment area far beyond the confines of the south-west region. Indeed, some people fear that the aim of the regional air service studies is to meet airport demand in the south-east by supplying additional capacity in the south-west. The results of the regional air service studies could be of major significance, yet they are not to be published until after the date of the expected general election and after the closing date for further representations on the regional planning guidance. Is it unduly cynical to view the Government's timing as calculated to deny local people and their elected representatives effective input into the major decisions that may already have been taken within Government but which have not yet been shared outside, for fear of frightening the electorate?

The A31 presents another example of the Government's high-handed treatment of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Poole, as well as the rest of the people of Dorset. The south-west regional planning conference said that policies should

"support the Port of Poole and associated regional and local transport links, particularly the A31-Poole link."

The panel reported that the regional planning guidance should seek to achieve

"the continued development of the Port of Poole including the improvement of regional and local transport links and in particular the A31-Poole link."

The A31-Poole link is important to my constituents in Ferndown, because it will bring them traffic relief. However, the Secretary of State has proposed in his latest draft regional planning guidance that references to the A31 link should not be included,

"as this scheme is being progressed through the local transport planning process".

If only it were. However, it is not.

On 14 December, the Secretary of State issued the results of the first full local transport plan settlement, which was undecided about the Poole bridge scheme. Care was taken to explain that, even if a favourable opinion were to be adopted on the Poole bridge scheme, there should not be a read-across to the Poole-A31 local link. All that has been offered is the possibility of a meeting between the local council and the regional office. All that I can say is, "Big deal." That is another example of the Government's ignoring the recommendations of the planning conference and the report of the panel, which examined the issue in detail and the evidence. What is the point of an evidence-based process if the Government tear up the recommendations and do what they like?

The boundary of the south-west region does not serve Dorset well, but I do not have time during this short debate to discuss that in great detail. The Government have decided to divide the south-west into four sub-regions. I have asked some parliamentary questions about that and have been told that the sub-regions cannot be defined by constituency or even by which constituencies are situated in more than one sub-region. We know that there are four sub-regions, which overlap. I have asked—I have not received a reply—whether the south-east spatial sub-region of the south-west extends into the south-west spatial sub-region of the south-east. The Minister has refused to answer that question, which is important to my constituents. The Government are imposing rigid, regional boundaries that are creating a host of anomalies.

If the Government want to insist on this regional nonsense, they could try to make the people of south-east Dorset feel part of the south-west by improving the road links between south-east Dorset and Exeter and Bristol. I do not know what means of transport the Minister will use when she goes to Exeter on Friday, but when she gets there, she might bear it in mind that to travel from Christchurch to Exeter takes the best part of two and a half or three hours in the summer. Someone representing Christchurch at a regional assembly would have to spend five or six hours travelling. It would be quicker to travel to London for a meeting and even quicker to travel to the so-called south-east regional headquarters that is emerging in Guildford.

Regionalism does not work in the south-west. We know that it is the means by which the European Commission hopes to destroy the individual nations of Europe; its agenda is to divide the United Kingdom and then to divide England by imposing top-down structures. The model that suits Dorset and England better is one in which local communities govern themselves through a network of truly local councils and are represented in Parliament by Members of Parliament who can hold Ministers to account. That is what our debate is all about.

12.47 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Ms Hilary Armstrong): I congratulate the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on again obtaining an Adjournment debate on Dorset. Not much of his speech was about regional policy and most of it concerned local government, which is not part of the regional programme. He obviously could not find enough to say about regional policies to fill the time available. I shall attempt to deal with the substance of his comments.

The hon. Gentleman continually says that the Government have already made decisions; the conspiracy theory survives. The only reason for his believing that is that he acted in that way when he was in government. I have no experience of the Government working in that way. I am sorry that he continued to push the cynical conspiracy theory until, eventually, we heard his real reason for fearing regionalism. He believes that it will draw us closer to the European Community. His hatred of that is such that it totally colours his perspective. That is very sad. If he ever comes to the north-east, he will see that people were interested in regional policy long before the European Union became interested, and long before the Government introduced a regional policy.

The hon. Member for Christchurch probably cannot remember, but when his Government took power, there were strong protests from people who sought a more regional approach and the equivalent of the Scottish Development Agency for the English regions. That suggestion was rejected by the Conservative Government. The regional policy is not just a whim of the Government but one that comes from a clear understanding of what is going on in the regions now. It is important to address imbalances from a regional perspective.

Our commitment to opportunity for all demands a new regional policy. Greater prosperity and rising employment, which I know has been a feature of life for many people in Dorset in the past three to four years, does not automatically mean fairer sharing of prosperity across regions, cities or neighbourhoods. We know that all too well. However, unemployment and child poverty have fallen in every British region since 1997, although I accept that unemployment remains higher in some regions than in the south-east.

Six out of eight English regions have incomes per head below the European average. We can ill afford to view regional prosperity as an optional extra, to be established only after we have established another tier of government. There is nothing inevitable about regional inequalities and incomes, employment or opportunity. We can achieve balanced growth and rising prosperity not only in one or two regions but in every region and city. However, that requires a new approach to regional policy.

Mr. Syms: Does the Minister realise that regional inequality is growing because the Government are giving us less grant? Hampshire gets more money; Dorset gets less. That applies to both Christchurch and Poole.

Ms Armstrong: I shall come to inequalities in local government funding in a moment. Given what the hon. Member for Christchurch said, I need to make it clear why the Government have approached these matters from a regional perspective. It is necessary to back regional and local enterprise and initiative by exploiting indigenous strengths in regions and cities. Regional policy must be bottom-up rather than top-down, and further steps are required to deliver greater accountability and scrutiny both regionally and locally.

The hon. Member for Christchurch referred to local government finance. He will know—I am criticised by my hon. Friends for this—that we have not substantially changed the local government funding system since the general election. We use the system that the Conservative Government operated of standard spending assessments that are linked to need, levels of scarcity and many other things that reflect the position in different areas. He will know that I am not content that that always gives us the best outcome possible, but we have been able to ensure that in Dorset there are now only 219 infants in classes larger than 30, whereas there were 3,736 in such classes in 1997. There are 9,314 people waiting for in-patient operations compared with 12,371 in March 1997. I understand that there was an increase of 8.3 per cent. in 2000-01 and 7.9 per cent. in 2001-02 in the Dorset health authority allocations. The hon. Member for Christchurch will acknowledge that no such increases occurred when his party was in power, and I reject his view—

Mr. Chope *rose—*

Ms Armstrong: If I am to answer the hon. Gentleman's questions, I must make progress.

I was somewhat confused by the hon. Gentleman's remarks about Bournemouth airport. The wording of the regional planning guidance is subject to a

[Ms Armstrong]

consultation process that will not be completed until 14 March, so it would be inappropriate for me to say what the final wording will be. As with all consultation exercises, it is important that we listen to the views of everyone and respond to them, and the views that the hon. Gentleman has expressed today will be taken into account. He asked why we rejected the local panel's recommendation on the green belt around Bournemouth airport. The matter was recently reviewed through the development plan process, and green-belt status would not prevent development of the airport. For example, its situation in the green belt has not inhibited extensive expansion of Bristol airport, which has significantly higher throughput than Bournemouth airport.

The hon. Gentleman said that the change to a policy to support "airport-related development" was not recommended by the panel. However, as he subsequently acknowledged, that phrase was intended to indicate that no one was anticipating general development. I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman himself would want housing or industrial development on that site. As I understand it, he wants effective development of the airport and its associated functions, but as he knows, availability of land for development on the periphery of Bournemouth is limited. If land were used for general development, the growth of the airport might well be restricted, which is why the draft regional planning guidance supports airport-related development. However, that does not preclude other development. Primarily, the matter is one for the local district plan, which, as I understand it, states that land with airport access should predominantly be used for aviation-related activities that require such a facility. If the hon. Gentleman can demonstrate that the planning guidance runs contrary to the genuine concerns that he has expressed, we will be able to achieve the right wording. However, I suspect that rather more heat than light has been cast on the issue today.

The hon. Member for Christchurch also referred to the road and transport plan for Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth, and asked why the proposed A31 link to Poole had been cancelled. With the reinstatement in 1995 of the A31-A35 trunk road, Poole has retained a core trunk road that is in close proximity to its port. The Government Office, Poole borough council and Dorset county council have discussed the matter constructively, and in the light of those discussions the councils will consider how best to take the matter forward. The local transport plan settlement recognised the importance to the area's regeneration of a second crossing for Poole harbour, and we look forward to examining the councils' proposals in July.

Dorset, Poole and Bournemouth submitted their first local transport plans in July 2000 and subsequently received substantially increased funding, but it is for Dorset county council to determine its local investment priorities and to bid as part of the local transport planning process. No proposals were made for improved links to Christchurch, so we could not fund them. Cross-boundary issues must be considered by Cornwall, Dorset and Hampshire county councils and by the Government offices. They are discussing those matters, and it is important that they do so. The hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to see questions settled locally. Those are precisely the mechanisms that we have put in place, and I hope that those involved will work co-operatively to address the issues.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. Time is up. We must move on to the next debate.

National Minimum Wage

1 pm

Angela Smith (Basildon): I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Minister for Competitiveness here. I know of his commitment to issues affecting the rights of those at work, and I hope that he will give a sympathetic response to the debate.

We all have days when we wonder why we wanted to be Members of Parliament in the first place, and it is easier to find the reason on some days than it is on others. When I was appointed as a member of a Committee that considered a statutory instrument about daylight saving hours, I did not feel—important as that matter is—that such matters were a motivating factor in my having become a Member of Parliament. However, when I was appointed as a member of the Standing Committee that considered the National Minimum Wage Bill, I felt that I was dealing with one of the major reasons why I got involved in politics, because it was an issue of fairness and equality.

During the 1997 general election campaign, the Conservatives claimed that the minimum wage was one of 10 good reasons not to vote Labour. On that basis, during the next campaign they will probably say, "Don't vote Labour because it will spend money on schools and hospitals." We believed the minimum wage to be economically and morally right. The Tory party believed that it was wrong and predicted gloom and doom for the economy. It is worth spending a few minutes assessing which of those two views was accurate. Someone recently said that in theory, theory and practice should be the same, but in practice they rarely are. In this case, the Tory theory certainly did not work in practice.

In Basildon and East Thurrock more than 1,400 people have benefited directly from the national minimum wage. In reality, the figure is probably much higher, because many employers, when they realised that the legislation was about to be introduced, raised their wage rates to the amount that they expected the minimum wage to be—or, indeed, higher than that. Low pay is more widespread in Essex than it is in the south-east as a whole, and my constituency has benefited significantly.

One of the biggest fears was that the minimum wage would cost jobs. The scaremongering story was put out that creating a floor in wages would price the low-paid out of employment. We were told by the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) that it was the height of irresponsibility, and the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow)—I have notified him that I am quoting his comments—confidently asserted:

> "The truth is that a national minimum wage will not create jobs, but destroy them".—[*Official Report*, 1 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 103.]

and that it would be a "calamity". A Conservative party press release stated:

> "The minimum wage, even if set at £3.60 an hour, will fuel inflation and necessitate further interest rate rises."

I am sure that at the time those who made such comments believed them to be true.

The Committee that considered the National Minimum Wage Bill has the distinction of having had the longest sitting of this Parliament, and probably of other Parliaments. It sat throughout the night more than once, on one occasion until 1 pm the next day. Conservative members of the Committee left us in no doubt that they were appalled and horrified by even the suggestion of fair pay. They argued against a minimum wage for pensioners, the disabled and those in the voluntary sector—all tactics to try to prevent anyone from benefiting from something that they now cannot say that they would do away with. They argued late into the night, through the night, into the next day, through to the next day and into the next.

That was not merely token opposition but full-blown opposition to the minimum wage, based on the deep-rooted belief that it was wrong. Their acceptance of the policy must be one of the biggest U-turns in history—although I admit that my experiences on the Committee give me some cause for doubt. However, they were right to make the U-turn. The evidence is there for all to see. The minimum wage was welcomed by businesses across the country that had previously been undercut by cowboy workers. Before the introduction of the legislation, a man who owned a private security firm that employed quality workers was a regular visitor to one of my surgeries. He was desperate to see the national minimum wage introduced because he feared that cowboys would undercut him and his business would go bust. I am pleased to say that he has not felt the need to come and see me since the introduction of the legislation.

Fears that enforcement would be too difficult were unfounded—only six enforcement orders have been needed in the eastern region. The Low Pay Commission thinks that the majority of businesses have met their obligations on the minimum wage.

What of the other predictions? There has not been a sharp upwards step in earnings and inflation has not soared—in fact, it has gone down. Unemployment was the issue that caused the most worry. Tory scaremongering that the national minimum wage would cost more than 1 million jobs was unfounded. Since its introduction, we have more than 1 million extra jobs in the UK economy, so by any standards—even Tory standards—it has been a success.

The Minister will agree that the rate will continue to be debated. I support an increase in the overall rate, but the issue that I want to address today is the youth or developmental rate. When the national minimum wage was introduced, workers aged 18 to 22 were covered by a lower developmental rate. Last year, the adult rate increased by 10p an hour, while the developmental rate increased by 20p to £3.20, which narrowed the differential from 60p to 50p. That was welcome, but the time has come to consider removing the developmental rate to ensure that workers aged over 18 are covered by the adult rate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey) will recall a debate on the subject when the National Minimum Wage Bill was in Committee. The proposal would not mean that everybody was paid the same, but it would ensure the same floor under everybody's wages, which would prevent poverty pay. The then Minister of State, Department of Trade and

[Angela Smith]

Industry, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), stated that the clause allowing for a lower rate for those aged under-26 was

"essentially an empowering measure . . . It is important that we have the flexibility and discretion to ensure that when the Low Pay Commission comes forward with any proposals on young people in this category, we can take account of them if we are desirous of accepting them."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee D*, 27 January 1998; c. 367.]

It was made clear that there should be no differentials for location or type of employment. The Government wanted the opportunity to listen and take account of the specific recommendations of the Low Pay Commission on younger people. The commission feared that the national minimum wage would price younger workers out of the employment market. Therefore, it was right to be cautious and monitor the employment market to see what occurred. I understood the fear that there would be problems in the youth job market, but those fears proved to be groundless. Youth unemployment has fallen to levels that many doubted were possible. In my constituency—the new deal has played a great part in this—youth unemployment has fallen by 94 per cent. The figures sound unreal, but the evidence is clear if one talks to young people in Basildon, where employment has risen to record levels.

The Low Pay Commission reported:

"We propose to monitor the progress of the developmental rate with the longer term expectation of linking it only to formal, accredited training."

That link has not yet been made for young workers. The second report of the Low Pay Commission in February 2000 stated:

"The developmental rate for young workers has meant a pay rise for many young people while not affecting their employment opportunities."

Ministers have rightly stressed that the developmental rate should be kept under review. Therefore, I hope that the Minister accepts that there is evidence to review the operation and consider making changes.

Modern business trends show a move away from age-related and time-served pay scales towards those based on performance and competence. In 1996, 51 civil service organisations abolished age-related rates—including the Cabinet Office and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, neither of which is known for being ahead of its time. Even McDonald's does not make a distinction on pay for those aged over 18.

The Trades Union Congress has found isolated examples of employers cutting their rates of pay for young adults as a result of the new law. The practice is not widespread, but it is not in the spirit of the law. The British Youth Council has said that workers should be paid equally for work of equal value. They do not want to encourage the employment of young workers on short-term contracts as cheap labour, displacing more expensive, older workers. The youth forum of the Trades Union Congress has taken an active role and it has described the national minimum wage as a landmark achievement. We all concur with that. The youth forum welcomes the right to a minimum wage, but believes that it stops short of delivering for younger people. Its argument is simple and based solely on fairness: to introduce a blanket exemption from the full minimum wage, based solely on an individual's age, is discriminatory.

Many organisations, including trade unions, understand the purpose of a training rate, but in this day and age it is not only young people who undertake training in their employment and there is no reason to use the need for training to justify a differential youth rate. The suggestion that age and training are linked is not necessarily true. An 18-year-old in a burger bar—we are back to McDonald's—is less likely to receive training than IT workers in their late 50s. The Government's skills task force found that employees in the hotel and catering industry were less likely to have training programmes, although that is the largest employer of younger people.

The youth rate has not worked as a development rate and the Low Pay Commission found that a quarter of 18 to 24-year-olds were in jobs without formal training. Its latest report states that there is

"little change so far in employers' training policies in response to the"

national minimum wage.

What do young people think about the differential rate? I held a youth forum in my constituency and invited young people from Basildon and East Thurrock and sought the views of young people throughout my constituency on this and other issues. I have also received views from the TUC's youth forum, the British Youth Council and the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union. It is clear that the view of younger adults, many if not most of whom are already receiving the higher rate adult minimum wage, is that everyone aged 18 and over should receive the same rate. Even those who are already receiving the higher rate believe that everyone should be covered by it. It is interesting that the new earnings survey states that the median earnings of those aged over 18 is above the adult rate of the national minimum wage.

One reason for having one rate instead of differential rates is the cost of living. Young people, whether in full-time education or on a low wage, must pay the full price for services. Transport costs in particular hit young people hard and there are no bus passes for younger people as there are, rightly, for pensioners. Young people who try to live independently often have the same housing, transport and food costs as older people, but for those on a low rate of pay, the transition to adulthood can be more difficult and delayed because they cannot take on the same responsibilities.

The lower rate also means that younger workers may have to work longer hours, damaging their chances of continuing education in out-of-work hours. The Government are committed to extending and encouraging lifelong learning, but it is more difficult for young people on the lower youth rate. At the age of 18—not 21—people are entitled to vote, marry without parental consent, serve in the armed forces and are deemed in law to have reached the age of complete responsibility. I believe strongly in linking rights with responsibilities and if young people have those responsibilities, they should also have the right to the basic rate of national minimum wage.

I believe that 16 and 17-year-olds should all be in full-time education or a combination of work and training that allows them to continue to gain skills and education. However, the reality is that many 16 and 17-year-olds have part-time and holiday jobs, as I did and as have many of my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) recognised that in his excellent Bill to introduce stricter regulations and tighter controls on the working conditions and hours of young workers. Some hon. Members believe that it is always wrong for 16 and 17-year-olds to work. However, that is not realistic because approximately two thirds of 16 and 17-year-olds work and 60 per cent. of them are in full-time education.

If we accept that younger people will work and that it is right to provide protection in terms of working hours and conditions, it is also right to offer some protection against exploitation in pay. Whereas employers in a high proportion of high street retail stores pay those over 16 adult minimum rates and more, rates of pay for 16 and 17-year-olds have been recorded of as low as £1 an hour. We must close a loophole that allows employers to take on younger workers at the expense of the over-18s, and we must not condone exploitation. We do not want to tempt 16 and 17-year-olds away from full-time education into full-time employment.

A sixth form in Suffolk that conducted a survey about the employment of sixth formers gave me some interesting information. The survey found that some employers sought to replace full-time adult staff with part-time teenage staff to reduce overheads. Many employees are under pressure from employers to work more hours during free study periods and after school, and they worry that if they refuse to do so they will lose their jobs. They feel pressured because of their low rates of pay. I recognise that the issue of 16 and 17-year-olds in work is complex, but I hope that consideration can be given to providing some wage protection to that age group.

It was a major step forward in April 1999 when we introduced the national minimum wage, giving protection to workers for the first time. On the night that the final Bill was passed in the House of Commons, some guests from America were having dinner with me. I was nipping back and forth to the Chamber, and they said, "What is the fuss about? Are you uprating the national minimum wage?" It was beyond their comprehension that, before the Labour Government came to power, we had no floor under wages. They could not understand that we had never introduced such legislation. Those days have gone, and everyone now accepts that it is right to have such a floor. The Government should be proud of their record. It is also a foundation on which to build.

I hope that I have outlined the reasons why I consider that the current exemptions and different rates are unfair and do not fulfil our commitment to balancing rights and responsibilities. Many 18-year-olds are already receiving a higher rate, so employers are moving in that direction. The higher rate will have little or no impact on jobs, and I ask the Government to consider moving that rate to offer all adults the same legal wage protection. I know that the Minister has an excellent record on such issues. I hope that he will be sympathetic, and I welcome his comments.

1.17 pm

The Minister for Competitiveness (Mr. Alan Johnson): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon (Angela Smith) for providing a further opportunity for us to debate the national minimum wage in this Chamber. As she said, it is one of the Government's most popular policies, and a manifesto commitment that has been carried out with—it is not an exaggeration to say—spectacular success. That success was by no means universally predicted. My hon. Friend was one of the shock troops, as was my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (Mr. Healey), when the Bill was considered in Committee. She explained eloquently the kind of opposition that the Government faced in introducing a minimum wage.

Although it is fair to say that I have an excellent track record on the issue—as my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon was kind enough to say—I am afraid to admit that I went to TUC congresses year after year in the 1970s and, with my colleagues, voted against a national minimum wage. The success of its introduction must be seen in that context. The last time that we were in power, it was not only employers that were opposed, but the trade union movement as well, with one or two honourable exceptions. We were worried about jobs and concerned to preserve our precious differentials. When we look back at those arguments now, a blush should come to our cheeks. Nevertheless, it is important to recognise the context in which we introduced a national minimum wage, as my hon. Friend says, for the first time in the United Kingdom, whereas other countries such as Japan, America and some in Europe have had one for many years.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon is also right to point out that the issue has become a positive U-turn zone for members of Opposition parties. It was not only Her Majesty's official Opposition who went through a policy process known as the Portillo process, in which, immediately before Treasury questions, the shadow Chancellor decides whether any policies should be changed, and immediately changes them. I have pointed out many times, including during the debate on the statutory instrument that increased the minimum wage last year, that the Opposition are not wedded to a national minimum wage with no regional variations. They have spoken on several occasions about small firms being exempted from the national minimum wage. My hon. Friend is right to say that the national minimum wage would not be completely safe in their hands.

Let us not forget that the Liberal Democrat party has made a spectacular U-turn on the issue. When the Bill was going through the House, the Liberal Democrats argued that there should be a regional minimum wage, not a national minimum wage. Such a concept was so bizarre that it would have led to so many problems throughout the country and place genuine burdens on business. It would have been extremely difficult and bureaucratic for a company to operate a different minimum wage from a company a few yards down the road. Indeed, the Liberal Democrats now agree with a national minimum wage.

The national minimum wage has been extremely successful, as has been the influence of the Low Pay Commission, which is monitoring the impact of the national minimum wage. Its job is to consider it not on

[Mr. Alan Johnson]

the basis of formulae or headline figures, but of movements in earnings, the impact on the economy and the effect on some low-pay sectors. The fact that it is a minimum wage, without sectoral and regional variations, makes the commission's job more important. It must carry out a careful analysis, as it has done in all the reports that it has submitted thus far. It announced in its press release of 31 January that it intends to produce its third report sooner than its terms of reference proposed, which is early March this year rather than July.

The Government have already announced that we will implement changes to the rate in October 2001, so that businesses have plenty of notice of a new rate. Businesses have argued consistently that they need the longest possible warning period. Having collected all the evidence that it requires to recommend a new main rate, which will be volume 1 of its report, the commission's recommendations should be made public at the earliest moment. We welcome that decision. We can expect the rest of the report, which is particularly relevant to the arguments advanced by my hon. Friend, by May. That second volume will deal with the youth rate and the effect of the minimum wage on young people generally.

I welcome the debate. It is not about whether we should have a national minimum wage. We have gone well beyond that. It is about the level at which it should be set, whether there should be a separate youth rate for 16 or 17-year-olds and some other elements that I shall try to cover today. It is customary to ask whether hon. Members want the good news or the bad news. Unfortunately for the balance of the argument, there is nothing but good news. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics confirm that between 1.2 million and 1.5 million low-paid workers and their families have benefited from the national minimum wage. It was introduced only in April 1999. Women have been particular beneficiaries of it. In its first year of operation, the gender gap closed by 1 per cent., and that cannot be put down to anything other than the national minimum wage. The gap is now narrower than ever before.

Part-time workers have seen an improvement in their position, with the national minimum wage having been at least partly responsible for stronger growth in average part-time weekly earnings. The regional pay gap is also closing, a point that is close to the hearts of my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth and myself. For example, earnings increased by 4 per cent. in Wales, by 4.7 per cent. in the north-east of England and by about 4.3 per cent. in Yorkshire and Humberside compared with the national average increase of 2.3 per cent. That is almost the first change in many years to what has been referred to sometimes as the north-south divide. We must ensure that people throughout Britain share in the country's economic prosperity. More than £3.2 million worth of underpayments have been secured for workers since April 1999 as a result of our enforcement orders.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon was right to say that we have had huge success in enforcing the national minimum wage. All that has been achieved without the slightest evidence of any damaging effects on the economy. It was said that the national minimum wage would lead to job losses. A million more people are in employment now, and we have a national minimum wage. It was said that the national minimum wage would increase inflation. Inflation is at its lowest level for 30 years. Long-term interest rates are at their lowest since England won the World cup. More importantly, it was argued that the minimum wage would feed through into price increases. Price rises are at their lowest since 1974. Wherever we look for the evidence, it suggests that the national minimum wage has had a positive impact on poverty pay without affecting the economy. Indeed, many arguments suggest that it has been extremely beneficial to the economy—not least the argument made by my hon. Friend. Companies are ringing our hotline number—0845 6000 678—to have the collars felt of some of their competitors who, they believe, are still paying less than the minimum wage and thus unfairly competing with them on poverty pay. That has certainly been an issue in the fish processing industry in my constituency.

It was evident both to us and to the Low Pay Commission from the start that setting minimum wage rates for young people was the aspect that presented the greatest risk of an adverse impact on employment. As the minimum wage had been introduced over many years in many other countries, we could analyse all the information about how it had worked. That demonstrated that the effect was most keenly felt for younger age groups and gave us reason enough to proceed with caution. We are also anxious that the minimum wage should support rather than hinder training and education.

My hon. Friend the Member for Basildon says that it was right to be cautious in introducing the measures. It is right to continue to be cautious, because we must continue to ensure that the minimum wage is not only established but grows roots, and that no political party, whether on the right or the left of the spectrum, will ever dare interfere with it again.

It is in that context that we asked the Low Pay Commission to reconsider the matter. Its first report pointed out the dangers of setting one rate for everyone over the age of 18 and of setting a rate for 16 and 17-year-olds. That was not merely a Government argument; it was the Low Pay Commission's argument, based on its analysis.

We increased the minimum rate for young people by 6.7 per cent. in June last year. We shall be cognisant of evidence and analysis from the Low Pay Commission, which consists of representatives of the Confederation of British Industry, the TUC and several academics led by Professor Bain, who has done a remarkably good job.

Although our actions are based on the Low Pay Commission's recommendations, we are not obliged to accept its suggestions. For example, the commission's advice was that 21-year-olds should receive the adult rate. At present they count as young people. There are good reasons for our decision, which was not motivated by any animosity towards 21-year-olds; we were all 21-year-olds once. However, we shall await the commission's next report to decide whether our position needs revising in the light of that report.

Our fear was that there was a spike, or peak, of youngsters coming through the system. Lots of evidence suggests that if young people lose a job at 22 or 23 years

of age and experience unemployment, that has a long-term effect on their future employment prospects. In taking a cautious approach to the matter, we wanted to see how that blip in the population developed through the system and to be absolutely sure that employment prospects would not be damaged. That is why we decided not to implement that part of the report.

All those issues are being re-examined. It is a specific part of the Low Pay Commission's job in its next report to consider young people, including 16 and 17-year-olds, who we believe should be in full-time education. We have a tremendous problem—which other countries do not have—of 16 and 17-year-olds leaving school to go to work. That is what the educational maintenance allowance is all about; that is the right priority, and there is definitive evidence to show that giving the minimum wage to 16 and 17-year-olds would militate against our priorities.

We will consider the matter again; we understand the arguments. The Low Pay Commission's report will inform our decisions, and I welcome the debate generated by my hon. Friend the Member for Basildon this afternoon.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): The Minister finished exactly on time. I congratulate him.

Bedford Hospital

1.30 pm

Sir Nicholas Lyell (North-East Bedfordshire): I am glad to have the opportunity to introduce this debate on Bedford hospital. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Bedfordshire (Mr. Sayeed) cannot be here, but he associates himself with what I have to say. I am also glad to see the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) in his place.

Bedford hospital hit the national press on Sunday 14 January, when a local newspaper, *Bedfordshire on Sunday*, published a sensational picture, widely syndicated in national newspapers, showing bodies on the floor of the chapel of rest at Bedford hospital. One of the bodies was partially uncovered to show the legs and part of the head of the deceased. There was, rightly, widespread concern at such an unacceptable situation.

On Tuesday 16 January, the Secretary of State came to the House to answer a private notice question tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox). The Secretary of State rightly described the situation as unacceptable, and informed the House that the initial findings of an investigation begun on the Sunday by the eastern region office of the NHS Executive had identified

"a failure of management within the trust."—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 201.]

and that the chief executive, Mr. Ken Williams, had "stepped down". He said that the final report would be published and placed in the Library. However, he went on to tell the House then and there that the situation had nothing to do with funding and everything to do with the failure of management. The clear implication to the world was that the failure was the responsibility of the chief executive, and he had rightly agreed to fall on his sword. That was it; it was a problem unique to Bedford and the fault of management; the report might be of marginal interest but, in effect, the matter was done and dusted.

As soon as I read the newspaper reports, I took the opportunity to speak to the chairman of the region, Mrs. Rosie Varley. There had plainly been strong pressure from the very top for immediate action. She told me that Mr. Williams had agreed to stand down. I confess that I was not happy, but the impression was given to me that somehow the practice had been allowed to become a regular occurrence; that no competent chief executive could have failed to have known what was going on, and that although everyone liked Ken Williams—there were considerable suspicions that the half-covered body had been something of a set-up—he was none the less right to have agreed to go.

When I questioned the Secretary of State on 16 January, I pointed out the excellent work that had taken place in Bedford hospital during the 10 years that Ken Williams had been chief executive, and his own hard work above and beyond ordinary working hours to help patients in difficulty. However, when I questioned the adequacy of the mortuary facilities, the Secretary of State indicated dissent. He insisted that the problem had nothing to do with cash—nothing to do with a shortage of resources—but everything to do with top management at the hospital.

[Sir Nicholas Lyell]

I must tell the Secretary of State that the belief in Bedfordshire is different. One thing is common ground: that what was shown in the photograph, and in particular the fact that one of the bodies was uncovered, was unacceptable. However, views are very different about the fundamental causes, exactly how the situation came about, where responsibility should lie and what is a fair and proportionate reaction.

The Secretary of State now knows that the chief executive has strong support at every level in the hospital. He has received a letter signed by no fewer than 70 members of the medical staff committee—I think that that represents the whole committee—asking that Ken Williams be reinstated, and I understand that a petition supporting Mr. Williams has received more than 800 signatures from people working at the hospital. Above all, a strong feeling exists that, when the story broke, there was an almost immediate demand for a head on a plate.

It was said that the result was unfair, and that the particular incident was a set-up in which the chief executive and senior management were deliberately kept in the dark while the press was informed. Problems of adequate mortuary facilities at times of pressure are widespread in the NHS and Bedford's antiquated mortuary has been known as a problem to management at regional level for not only years but decades. Problems of underfunding were specifically set out in the original reports of the inquiry by eastern region, but were deliberately removed from the report before it was published at the insistence of the Department. Indeed, the fact that the report has been altered was, in substance, admitted both in an answer to a parliamentary question that I put down, and by Mrs. Kate Phipps, who chaired the inquiry, during a recent interview on the "Today" programme.

The debate seeks answers to a series of questions that, unless properly addressed, will lead to an unfair result. The background to the matter is a growing fear in the NHS, which is becoming all too well founded, of a steady growth of a blame culture. I am not happy about it. If things go seriously wrong, those who are genuinely to blame must take responsibility, but if we are going to be tough we must also be fair. The questions that I raise must be answered if justice is to be done and seen to be done.

Bedford hospital made real improvements during the years when Ken Williams was its chief executive. Its buildings have been upgraded, notably its marvellous Cygnet maternity and paediatric unit, and its new accident and emergency unit, opened in 1997 by the then incoming Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Relations between medical staff and administrators have improved, and the strong feeling among other staff is shown by their petition.

On other objective fronts, the hospital has won a series of awards. Cleanliness was a matter of recent concern in the NHS; Bedford hospital is the eastern region beacon site for cleanliness. In December 2000, it won a charter mark for its hotel services. It is among the top 10 for the lowest hospital mortality in the region. Recently, it won the Bedfordshire borough council heartbeat award for food hygiene and healthy eating. It has supported Dr. Rob Thomas in his efforts to become hospital doctor of the year for his cancer services, which is of huge credit not only to him but to the hospital's support for him. It is a well-run hospital.

I come now to the mortuary facilities, of which the Secretary of State's statement to the House of 16 January fails to paint a fair picture. Like more than 100 other hospitals in the NHS, Bedford's mortuary facilities are antiquated. Under the present Government and the previous Government, of which I was a member, resources have been concentrated on front-line medical functions. Bedford has been significantly underfunded for decades, being either the worst or second worst funded trust in the whole of the eastern region, and consistently behindhand in the necessary catching up as money gradually came out of London to the provinces.

The health authority in the region was fully aware by the end of 1997 that non-clinical revenue costs were underfunded. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, when Secretary of State, was expressly told about that when he opened the new accident and emergency department. A letter from the Department, dated 22 June 1997, states:

"I recognise that a significant contribution to Bedfordshire's problems is the distance between current funding and the capitation target."

The author of that letter was none other than the present Secretary of State when Minister of State.

Many mortuaries throughout the NHS are out of date. I say that not to blame the Secretary of State, who inherited the position, but to emphasise that that needs to be taken into account in doing justice to those who manage the hospitals. According to the chair of Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd., which supervises mortuaries, more than one third of the 300 mortuary and post-mortem facilities that were visited had significant problems relating to their mortuary conditions,

"some of them comparable to those at Bedford hospital trust".

The statement continues:

"What Bedford needs is a new mortuary and so do many hospitals across the country."

The CPA chairman fairly described staff at Bedford hospital as

"doing their level best against a background of underinvestment and underfunding."

Those were important matters to take into account, yet they were simply not mentioned in the published public report—and neither were the circumstances in which the photographs were taken.

I do not blame the press, which exists in a free society as a watchdog for the public. However, if justice is to be done, the circumstances in which the press was tipped off must be carefully considered. Mr. Willy White, the regional representative of Unison, freely admits that he deliberately told the press rather than the management, let alone senior management. In doing so, he deliberately breached the hospital's whistle-blowing policy, which he had helped to write only six months previously. His excuses were that it was a long-standing problem and that he was aggrieved over unfair treatment of another member of staff, Monica Carmichael. She is entitled to fairness and her case has properly gone to appeal, but the present problem was not of long standing.

The temporary mortuary had been installed only at the end of December and for four days it had been out of action due to a build-up of a partial vacuum with which anyone with a fridge freezer is familiar. We all know that freezer doors cannot be opened if warm air has got in. That should have been put right more efficiently, but how can that be laid at the door of senior management unless they were told about it?

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): On the temporary mortuary unit hired and then purchased by the hospital, does the right hon. and learned Gentleman agree that, although it has the capacity for 24 bodies, it could be used for a maximum of only eight because of its siting and certain health and safety rules? Does that not suggest mismanagement of the use of that particular unit? If it had been used fully, we would not have seen the bodies on the floor of the chapel of rest in the mortuary. Does the right hon. and learned Gentleman accept that that problem should be acknowledged and addressed?

Sir Nicholas Lyell: The hon. Gentleman is right about the temporary mortuary units, which are not perfect. They have health and safety problems, but they were used in a dozen NHS hospitals with approval before Bedford bought this particular unit. It was a problem, but not a hanging offence, and it had not been drawn to the chief executive's attention.

Much was made by the Secretary of State of the new guidelines issued in May 2000 and of their breach by Bedford hospital. I assumed from listening to the Secretary of State that those guidelines had made it clear that in no circumstances should bodies be stored in places such as the chapel of rest. It is not a consecrated chapel, just a nice little room. However, the guidelines do not say that at all. These much vaunted guidelines say no more than:

"any NHS Trusts should ensure that mortuary capacity is adequate to meet peaks in winter deaths and take steps to provide additional facilities where this is likely to be required. Temporary mortuary facilities must meet minimum standards to respect patients' dignity; refrigerated vehicles and trailers must not be used."

There is not a word about chapels of rest.

Let me explain exactly where the chapel of rest is. It is in a secure area. It is a small room, not consecrated, but reasonably nicely furnished, immediately adjacent to the mortuary itself. There is no question of it being open to the public. The only specific point in the guidelines was the prohibition of the use of refrigerated lorries.

Finally, on the basis of the facts, there remains a strong suspicion at Bedford hospital that the uncovered body had been deliberately placed there by someone to sensationalise the photograph. I do not blame the press; they photographed what they were shown. However, it is strongly believed by most of the staff, and others, that the scene was set up by the Unison representative because, as he said, he felt vindictive about the handling of another union case involving a member of the Manufacturing, Science and Finance union.

There are further worries in relation to that case. The Secretary of State is a member of, and is sponsored by MSF. There are fears in Bedford that what was seen as his personal over-reaction may have resulted from lobbying on the subject by Mr. Roger Kline, who worked closely with him in the past and who, like Mr. Willie White in the first 48 hours after the story broke, was loudly demanding the dismissal of the chief executive.

I am asking the Secretary of State to have the matter looked at again by an impartial arbiter, perhaps a Queen's Counsel with experience in the national health service and employment law. There is a widespread feeling in Bedford hospital, at every level and regardless of party affiliation, that the full truth has not come out and that justice has not yet been done.

As I said at the outset, the practice of storing bodies in an unrefrigerated area, albeit a secure one next to the mortuary, is not appropriate to modern conditions. The fact remains that priorities for funding over the years—it is not only this Government's fault—have been elsewhere. There remain scores of hospitals where mortuary facilities are inadequate, as they are in Bedford. The suggestion of the Unison official in the press that the chief executive should simply have indented for a new mortuary was unrealistic. Indeed, such a request was made 10 years ago. He could not possibly have been expected to know what was deliberately not reported to him.

When such problems arise, it is essential that they should be corrected for the future, but it is also important that the response should be proportionate, or confidence will be destroyed and morale undermined. If a manager is to be scapegoated in these circumstances, it will permit injustice not only in this instance, but will fail the staff of the health service as a whole.

1.47 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Sir N. Lyell) on securing the debate on Bedford hospital. I also acknowledge the presence of my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall).

We need to look at the outcome of the investigation into the circumstances that led to the storage of bodies on the floor of the chapel of rest, although as the right hon. and learned Gentleman said, the chapel at Bedford hospital is not consecrated. This is a matter of great concern locally—indeed, it was of great national concern at the time the photographs were published. I can assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that the incident and the continuing debate are of great concern to me, and I welcome the opportunity to explain the facts surrounding those distressing photographs and to reassure him of our commitment to in-patients at Bedford or other hospitals to ensuring that they are treated with respect and dignity at all times. That must continue in the inevitable number of cases that arise when people die in hospital. It was in the interests of patients that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State asked for a full report into the circumstances surrounding the incident. Patients need to be confident that, in a patient-centred NHS, what happens behind closed doors is of the same standard as that which can be seen on the wards.

Most people found the published photographs shocking and it caused anguish to many, not least the constituents of the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Bedfordshire. It cannot be right for bodies

[Mr. John Denham]

to be left lying on floors over a period of days, in some cases, when people believed that their relatives were being looked after in a dignified way. The pictures showed that the patient's dignity was not respected in a way that we all have a right to expect in today's modern NHS.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was as horrified as everyone else when he saw the photographs and he promised the House that a full report of the investigation would be placed in the House of Commons Library. The eastern regional office of the NHS executive had begun to carry out an investigation within hours of the photographs being published, and its preliminary findings confirmed that a fuller investigation was needed. It is worth saying that the investigation team included a non-executive director from Bedfordshire health authority; it was not solely a team put together from within the regional office. The team interviewed more than 60 people, ranging from the porters and managers at the hospital to the coroner and representatives from the newspaper who took the pictures. The investigation confirmed that those recently bereaved had been caused additional distress at the thought that their relative might have appeared in the photograph. It also became clear that a serious breach of hospital security had been committed.

In addition, the investigation established that some of the bodies had been there for some days, that this was not the first time that bodies had been stored in this way, that rules of patient confidentiality were broken, as one of the deceased could be identified from the photograph, and that the handling of coroner's cases was potentially compromised. The porters, it was established, were not involved in the purchase of the additional body storage facility and that had contributed to the problems with that facility.

It is worth reminding the Chamber that, by the time of the incident, trusts had received two sets of guidance—health service circulars 1999/239 and 2000/016—which detailed action to be taken in respect of mortuary facilities. HSC 2000/016, issued in May 2000, set out the arrangements required by NHS trusts to ensure that mortuary capacity was adequate to meet peaks in the number of winter deaths and to take steps to provide additional facilities where those were likely to be required. It also stressed that where temporary mortuaries were required, they should meet minimum standards to respect patients' dignity.

However, that guidance was not brought to the attention of staff involved in the handling of bodies, despite its having been reinforced at a regional meeting of chief executives in November 2000 and during winter planning meetings between the regional office and local health care systems. As a result, there was no recognition of the urgent need to repair a fault on the door of the additional mortuary facility. The report states:

"From the evidence provided it is clear that the practice of placing bodies on the floor of the chapel of rest had been custom and practice for more than five years. Consequently, the Trust failed to treat the deceased with dignity and respect".

It has been suggested that the root cause of this whole issue is one of funding. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made clear in the House, that is not the case. Storage was available in the additional facility, which meant that the floor should never have had to be used. The floor was used because of a management failure to make it clear to all staff that the deceased should be treated with dignity. As the use of the floor had become custom and practice over a period of years, there was consequently no sense of urgency in getting a fairly minor problem with the doors resolved.

Things are changing in today's NHS and some of the practices common in the past are no longer acceptable. This is just such a case. Having pointed out that the alternative provision had been made, but there was a management failure to tackle the problems that arose in the additional facility, let me address the issue of funding.

Sir Nicholas Lyell: When one is considering fairness, would the Minister agree that the senior management can deal with a matter only if they are told about it? Is it not quite clear that they were not told?

Mr. Denham: Clear guidance set out in health service circulars was made available to chief executives right across the NHS. That guidance, in the eastern region, as elsewhere, was reinforced in the whole series of activities that now surround planning for the winter period. Everything was done to ensure that the chief executive of every trust understood the importance that was attached to the issue within the NHS, given the criticism that the NHS had received in previous years over the use of inappropriate temporary mortuary facilities. It is against that background that the events that I am describing should be seen. Indeed, it was when confronted by the findings of the preliminary investigation and public anger and concern that Mr. Williams felt it right to stand down from his post in the interests of the hospital.

On the funding issue, Bedfordshire has moved further from its weighted target allocation in recent years, but it is worth looking at what has been done with the resources. Bedfordshire will have received increased resources of £92 million, an increase of more than 30 per cent. since 1997, after taking account of the growth announced for 2001-02. Even after allowing for inflation, that has enabled more than £60 million to be invested in services. Bedfordshire has also benefited financially from the designation of Luton as a health action zone.

In recent years, the health authority has lived within its resources, and the trust has balanced its income and expenditure, so Bedfordshire has enjoyed a substantial real increase in NHS resources. Following a report in 1997 by the accrediting body, CPA, the trust upgraded its post mortem facilities. The report did not refer to the capacity of the mortuary, but since then, the trust has bid twice for pathology modernisation money without raising the expansion of the mortuary's capacity. The trust has never put forward a business case for a new mortuary; nor has the trust board raised the mortuary as a problem.

The investigation report acknowledged that the trust has less mortuary capacity than other, similar-sized hospitals and that it recently lost accreditation for its pathology services, including the mortuary, because of

core facilities. It is clearly in everyone's best interests that the problem is tackled as soon as possible. The regional office has been asked to work closely with the trust in developing plans for a modern and enlarged mortuary facility.

I return to the events that took place. The report states:

"On this occasion, additional mortuary capacity was available, but was not being used because of a door defect that was not rectified for four days. This was because of confusion about accountability at middle management level and poor communication between departments".

The failure of the door of the additional mortuary was never treated as an emergency, which is why it took four days to put right, and must be seen against a background in which it had been custom and practice to use the chapel of rest.

It has been suggested that the incident was the result of a conspiracy to discredit Ken Williams or to seek revenge against him. The investigation was not able to establish that that was the case, but irrespective of whether there had been action or activity of that sort, there was a management failure in respect of mortuary facilities and that would not be changed, whether or not people had acted with malicious intent or bad faith in the case.

The professional staff interviewed by the report team were unanimous in saying that there was an open policy in the trust and that they were confident that staff concerns would be listened to. That view was not shared by all the non-professional staff interviewed; some porters and union officials feared recriminations if they persisted in expressing their anxieties. It is clear that there have been difficulties in relationships following the dismissal of a member of staff last year and the trust will need to address that matter over time. No one was prepared to admit to the investigation team that he or she had allowed *Bedfordshire on Sunday* access to the mortuary and there was no opportunity to question people about their motive in taking the course of action rather than raising their concerns with trust managers. Neither the editor nor the photographer from *Bedfordshire on Sunday* would say how they gained access to the mortuary, although they agreed to state the days on which the photographs were taken. That enabled the bodies in the photograph to be identified, as required within the investigation team's terms of reference, but it failed to open any other avenue of investigation to the team.

There were suggestions that parts of the final report were left out of the version placed in the Library. The report laid in the Library was that written by officials in my Department and the investigation team stands by that report. Before it was completed, an early draft was shown to the trust to ensure that there were no factual inaccuracies and it was amended accordingly. The draft report was added to and edited as the investigation team worked on completing the final document. I have been assured by the chairman of the investigating team, Kate Phipps, that nothing of relevance was removed or left out of the final report and it is therefore a true reflection of the findings of the investigation.

The investigation of the incident does not end here; the body that was clearly identified in a photograph was a coroner's case, which was the responsibility of his office until released to the family. The coroner—

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 28 February 2001

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Sierra Leone

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mrs. McGuire.*]

9.30 am

Mr. Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Today, I shall speak about an important matter: the situation in Sierra Leone. Four weeks ago today, I was privileged to go to Sierra Leone with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence and the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis). I shall refer to various matters arising from our brief visit and draw attention to wider political, economic and military issues affecting the region.

My abiding memory—I am still coming to terms with it—is of a visit to the amputee camp in the middle of Freetown, where 226 people who have had arms or legs or both hacked off by Revolutionary United Front terrorists are living with their families in a self-help community of around 1,000 people. It is financed and assisted by international development agencies and supported by a number of other organisations and Governments, including ours. I was introduced to some of the people living there. A little girl called Marie Koroma was brought to see me. She is about two and a half years old; when she was 13 months old, her left arm was chopped off by an RUF terrorist. That is the reality in Sierra Leone that we must deal with. It is essential that our commitment and that of the international community and the United Nations are maintained for as long as necessary.

Sierra Leone has an interesting history—for many years, it was a positive history. The country was founded by freed slaves, and throughout our colonial administration its people held the British in high regard. They have now had almost 40 years of independence, but ordinary Sierra Leoneans ask what they have to celebrate; they say that those years have been wasted. The country was agriculturally self-sufficient and exported agricultural products. It has a difficult climate and fosters diseases such as malaria, but, like other countries in the region such as Gambia, it has potential for economic development based on tourism. However, that has suffered enormously in recent years.

I shall not go into the history of the conflict, preferring to concentrate on the future. However, it is worth recalling that in May 2000 my hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Mr. Worthington) introduced a debate in the Chamber during which he drew attention to the importance of explaining to people in this country our actions in Sierra Leone, the reasons for those actions and the fact that our commitment may not be short term. I was fortunate to speak in that debate, and I am pleased to be able to raise the issue again today after having had the opportunity, for the first time, to go to Sierra Leone and see what we and others are doing.

In 1999, the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs produced an important report which, although concerned mainly with other matters, referred to the situation in Sierra Leone. It provided an important historical introduction by setting out the context and explaining how the democratically elected Government of President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah came to power in 1996. Since then, there have been several coups and attempts by different groups to overthrow democracy.

As the report makes clear, and as everyone to whom I have spoken has confirmed, Sierra Leonean society consists of many different tribal groups and is 65 per cent. Muslim and 35 per cent. Christian. However, the people live harmoniously and the conflict has nothing to do with tribalism or religion. I asked a military commander in the Sierra Leone army—judging by his name, I suppose that he was a Muslim—about this issue. He laughed and said, "My wife is a Christian, my deputy is a Christian, and his wife is a Muslim."

Despite the nature of that society, there is conflict. It is based on one factor: greed for diamonds. The 1999 report from the Foreign Affairs Committee quotes one witness saying that

"some people would argue that diamonds have been the curse of Sierra Leone."

Diamonds have financed a conflict that has throughout centred on control of the diamond mining areas and the activities of a foreign Government—the regime of Charles Taylor in Liberia—who are using the RUF as proxies in Sierra Leone to control Sierra Leonean diamonds and profit from their export and sale.

None the less, having visited Freetown and some of the surrounding areas, my message is positive, not pessimistic. I saw children smiling and waving as they went to school dressed in their pristine school uniforms. I saw the little kiosks that are being set up on the beach to sell Coca-Cola and ice cream to tourists whom the people believe will one day visit Sierra Leone. I am told that where a few months ago there was nothing, there are now signs that the people are returning to normality.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): We are listening attentively to the hon. Gentleman's moving description of his visit to Sierra Leone, and I am pleased to hear that he gleaned some cause for optimism from it. Was there any evidence to suggest that British Government efforts to stem the flow of blood diamonds have been successful? I am sure that we all want progress to be made in that respect.

Mr. Gapes: I saw no such evidence. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to that question when he winds up.

We visited an area known as Wilberforce, which has a major, albeit rather basic, hospital that treats a variety of people; military personnel financed by the Department for International Development are playing a key role in its medical services. Among those in the hospital beds were members of a rebel faction—the West Side Boys—who had been injured in the conflict. To judge by the history of the conflict in Sierra Leone, people from the other side are not usually taken to hospital to be treated and allowed to recover, so their presence was an interesting sign of returning normality.

[Mr. Gapes]

Another interesting aspect was the way in which community activities such as schools were coming back together.

Important work is being carried out by our people in Sierra Leone. We are making a significant contribution, working in support of the United Nations, as well as playing our own distinctive role. We are making a small contribution to the United Nations force and as observers in the UN operation, and we are the lead country in the establishment of the international military advisory team. Our most significant role is in the short-term training programme to rebuild and establish democratic, competent, accountable and efficient armed forces for Sierra Leone. The problem in recent years was that the drug-crazed, diamond-fuelled factions were able to mobilise far more people and have a much greater impact on society than the badly trained and badly equipped official forces of the state. State power in the country almost disintegrated.

In May last year, when the Secretary of State for Defence made his statement in the House, the RUF was in the suburbs of Freetown and it controlled almost the entire country. We went in initially to evacuate our civilians and other European Union civilians; we then started the process of consolidation, held the airport until the UN forces came to take it over and began to work to establish and restore the state power of the democratically elected president and his Government—all vital work.

In less than a year, 6,500 people have been trained by our armed forces. We were fortunate to visit the area in which that training is carried out by Gurkha soldiers of the British Army. A young member, aged about 20, of the Sierra Leone army who was being trained by Gurkhas said to me, "These Gurkhas are very good men—very tough. Please keep them here. Please train all Sierra Leoneans with Gurkhas." I walked around the area with Major Ashok Kumar of the Gurkhas, a namesake of my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East (Dr. Kumar). Children and adults shouted out, "Hello, Ashok."

British people walking down the street got the same positive reaction. We are incredibly welcome and there is great support for our actions. As we passed along the streets, people would shout out, "Hello—thank you!" In all my visits to places around the world, I have never seen a reaction like that. In certain countries, at certain times, British citizens have not been quite so popular. I emphasise the popularity of what we are doing, which is vital to the future of Sierra Leone.

The British joint taskforce under Brigadier Jonathan Riley, those who are working with the Sierra Leone army and those who are carrying out the vital training mission have an important role to play. I was pleased by the recent announcement by the Secretary of State for Defence that the short-term training mission, which was due to end in the spring, is to be extended to September 2001. To take forward the programme in the long term, we intend to form with the Canadians an international mission, which we hope other countries will join.

What is the programme's future? When the Secretary of State for Defence spoke in the House on 23 May 2000, he said that we would be in Sierra Leone

"no longer than is necessary."—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2000; Vol. 350, c. 863.]

However, in the Select Committee on Defence on 7 February 2001, in reply to a question that I asked, he said:

"We will stay for as long as we are needed."

I welcome that change of tone and emphasis, because our impact on Sierra Leone is proportionately greater than our impact on any other country.

We have for many years had long-term commitments in Cyprus, we have a long-term commitment—albeit unintentional—in Bosnia, it appears that we are developing a long-term commitment in Kosovo, and British forces have other long-term commitments in other parts of the world. However, our commitment to Sierra Leone is more important than any of those in terms of its impact, its long-term potential and the gratitude of the people, which is something that we have not always received. That is not to decry the work we do elsewhere, but emphasises the vital difference that we are making in Sierra Leone.

I am proud that we are considering staying for as long as we are needed, but we need to tell the British people why that is necessary and to demonstrate the benefits of our involvement. I am concerned about several difficulties. Until I went to Sierra Leone—now I speak as the chairman of the all-party United Nations group—I had not fully appreciated why British forces in Sierra Leone were not flying the UN flag. Following my visit, I have a better understanding of the situation and believe that our relationship with the UN is correct. The development of the UN peacekeeping operation was not optimal—indeed, there was well-documented tension between the Nigerians and the Indians; the latter have now left Sierra Leone. There have also been problems, which I shall discuss later, with the deployment of the UN force and its future role.

I have received a letter from Oxfam that raises several other concerns. Despite the ceasefire agreement worked out in Abuja last November, it appears that UN forces are unwilling to move into areas previously or currently controlled by RUF rebels, even though the agreement states that they should. The Sierra Leone Government are keen for that to happen, but it is not happening and there are serious questions to be asked about when it will happen. Until it does happen, significant areas—perhaps one third of the country—will remain outside the ambit of the legally elected Government of the country, and it will be impossible to reintegrate the country as a whole.

In a similar vein, at what point will the Abuja process lead to the demobilisation and disarming of the rebels? To that difficulty, which is inevitable in all conflicts, two approaches can be taken: try to negotiate the solution, or try to win a victory. At this stage, the Sierra Leone forces are probably not strong enough on their own to be able to win or hold the territory, but the problem must be resolved at some point. We know from experience that the RUF did not abide by previous agreements. There is enormous resistance to loss of control of the basis on which such organisations are run and financed—diamonds.

The situation in the neighbouring countries is also a cause of concern. One of the consequences of the effectiveness of our operation and the deployment to

Sierra Leone of 10,000 UN troops, which number is supposed to increase, is that the RUF rebels have switched their focus. There is now a bitter conflict across the border in Guinea, and the Government of Guinea are fighting hard against the RUF. As a result, refugees who previously fled from Sierra Leone into Guinea are now trapped in a very small area between Guinean forces and RUF forces. It has been stated in the press that as many as 400,000 people are in danger of starvation because they are not receiving necessary food supplies. This week, some convoys reached part of the area with food for between 1,300 and 10,000 people, but it has been reported that hundreds of thousands of people are trapped between the conflicting forces. A corridor must be opened to allow those people to return to Sierra Leone, away from the conflict.

It is vital that more work is done for those people internally displaced in Sierra Leone, not refugees across the border. There are reports of large movements of people away from the areas in the north-west towards Freetown and Lungi, where there is an airport. That is inevitable because of the British presence and the deployment of UN forces in Freetown and beyond. Such areas and those within the ambit of the Sierra Leone Government offer security and the potential for a good life whereby people live without the threat of suffering. A great effort must now be made to help refugees in Guinea and internally displaced people in Sierra Leone. They must be fed, provided with transport and safe routes and moved into liberated areas. Such areas are growing all the time—indeed, we visited a place that had only just become open as a result of recent changes. However, such matters are taking time: as the liberated area spreads in one direction, conflict arises with the other side and the population is squeezed in between those areas.

It is essential that the international community, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, international aid agencies and non-governmental organisations can undertake their work securely and get through necessary resources to those who need them. Recently, some NGOs expressed anxiety about the security of their personnel in some areas. I would welcome a response on that matter, as it is clearly vital that they are able to do their job. We are making a great contribution to the security of Sierra Leone and NGO personnel do important work, often funded by the Department for International Development or other Governments in the European Union and elsewhere.

I should also like to mention public opinion in Sierra Leone. This week, I read a report of a seminar that was organised by representatives of what they call civil society in Sierra Leone. That report is strongly critical of the UN's role and calls urgently for more robust action to meet threats and deal with such problems. A cause of wider anxiety is the question of what effective action will be taken against the sponsor and host of the RUF, Charles Taylor's regime in Liberia. I understand that sanctions were supposed to be implemented against Liberia; the Governments of Guinea and of Sierra Leone strongly pressed for that, but not all other Governments in the region supported it. Can the Minister confirm the decision reported in the press this week to defer by two months the implementation of those sanctions? What is the current position and what is our Government's attitude? What steps are being taken to stop the blood diamond trade and introduce economic and other sanctions on Liberia, whose sponsorship, funding and organisation have lain behind the problems in Guinea and Sierra Leone in recent years.

I should like to ask about our future role and commitment to Sierra Leone. During our visit, I met President Kabbah. One of the interesting questions raised in our discussion was how we, as a functioning democratic society with civil control over the military, could contribute to the development of pluralistic multi-party democracy in Sierra Leone. In 1996, Sierra Leone had a democratic election in which lots of different parties stood. On the second ballot, the president was elected with nearly 60 per cent. of the vote, having received about 37 per cent. in the first ballot. However, Sierra Leone's political system is obviously undeveloped and political campaigning is impossible in large parts of the country.

The decision to postpone the next presidential elections was absolutely correct, as a free and fair election would be impossible in the current circumstances of conflict. That postponement gives us a great opportunity. I hope that our Government, through their support for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and other measures, will send resources, training missions and teams to help to build a pluralistic democratic political culture in Sierra Leone. Civil control of the military is a vital issue not only for Sierra Leone but for Africa generally. I remember the book by Ruth First, "The Barrel of a Gun", in which she explained the role of the military in African societies. We must develop a political culture in west Africa and elsewhere based on democratic control of the armed forces. The recent changes in Nigeria are welcome, but such changes can be transient or temporary. We must make sure that we achieve a functioning democratic civil society in Sierra Leone in the long term.

During my visit to Sierra Leone, I was incredibly impressed by the commitment of our people there. I witnessed our efforts to defend a democratic Government, establish security and provide the foundations of future prosperity and democratic society. A lot has been done, but there is still a lot to do that will require a long-term commitment on our part. We must remember that Sierra Leone is a Commonwealth country with which we have long been associated. It is good that Canada, another Commonwealth country, is making a contribution. but the commitment to help will also require support from our EU partners and others, including, of course, the UN.

In the UN forces there are Kenyan troops; there is a potential for a deployment of Pakistani forces; and Nepalese forces have recently carried out an inspection mission to decide whether to deploy troops, which would be welcome, as Gurkhas are already in the area with the British Army. In addition, many other countries, including Jordan and India, have made significant contributions in the past. We must not forget the major contribution made by Nigeria, whose forces have suffered huge casualties during the many years of the conflict in Sierra Leone. International commitment and effort is required, and I am proud that the United Kingdom is playing a vital role. I hope that that will continue for as long as we are needed.

10.2 am

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I congratulate the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on his initiative in applying for this debate, on his success in securing it and, above all, on the sincerity and comprehensiveness of his presentation. I also thank the Secretary of State for Defence, who kindly invited members of the Select Committee on Defence to accompany him on what was essentially his second trip to Sierra Leone since Britain became so heavily involved. Not only that, but when we were there, the Secretary of State took every opportunity to keep us fully involved in all that was happening in some of the more sensitive briefings, and, as the hon. Gentleman mentioned, gave us the opportunity to meet President Kabbah. We were both grateful for that.

President Kabbah made a good impression on us all. He struck us as a man of great calmness, thoughtfulness and, in so far as it is possible to make judgments on a short acquaintance, integrity. I could not help reflecting on the tragedy in which his country finds itself. It is one example—there are so many in international affairs—of the road to hell being paved with good intentions.

As the hon. Gentleman said, every time that we were seen in parts of Freetown, there would be shouts of welcome such as, "You are welcome here. Thank you for being here. Thank you for coming." It is strange that if there were to be a referendum in Sierra Leone today on whether the people would be better off as a colony under British rule, or in their present state of oppressed independence—

Mr. Gapes *indicated assent.*

Dr. Lewis: I see a wry look of agreement on the hon. Gentleman's face. There can be no doubt that they would wish that they were still a part of the supposedly exploitative British empire of the past. That empire would not have stood for the sort of terrorism and banditry that has had such terrible effects on the people of Sierra Leone in recent years.

When I visited the amputee camp with the hon. Member for Ilford, South, I was reminded of why the early evidence of Nazi atrocities in the second world war was not believed. The disbelief was a reaction against what was seen in retrospect to have been baseless atrocity propaganda from the first world war, which centred most memorably on the story of the Belgian babies' hands. When the Germans invaded Belgium in 1914 and violated Belgian neutrality, there was a story that they cut off the hands of Belgian babies so that they would not be able to hold weapons when they grew up. Subsequently, it was thought that no such injury would be survivable by such a young child. The Gentleman and I know that such injuries are survivable. As he pointed out, they are survivable even by a child as young as Marie Koroma, who was 13 months old when her left hand was chopped off in that bestial way.

We were told that the purpose of such atrocities was to terrorise the population—to show them that that was the sort of treatment that they could expect if they dared to support the legitimate Government of their country. It was intended to deny support to the Government force, and, undoubtedly, to encourage chaos and force people to flee from their homes. It is believed that about half of the 4.5 million inhabitants of Sierra Leone fled from their homes within the country, and that about half a million fled beyond the borders of the country.

The Gentleman stated clearly that the motivations are diamonds and exploitation. As far as can be seen, the activity is being fuelled by the interference of a country outside the diamond area—Liberia. Its leader, Charles Taylor, seems to be playing a strange game. Apparently he has a habit of ringing up President Kabbah every so often and making friendly inquiries about whether he can assist on minor matters. He professes to be in favour of steps towards a peaceful settlement and expresses concern about the degradation, terror and misfortune being inflicted on the Sierra Leonean people.

I would like to join the hon. Member for Ilford, South in pressing the Minister to spell out clearly, for the benefit of all hon. Members, the Government's assessment of the role and activities of President Taylor and Liberia in the troubles in Sierra Leone. If they believe that President Taylor and his agents are responsible for what is happening in Sierra Leone, what steps are they taking—and what steps do they propose to take—to put pressure on Liberia to cease its malign interference in Sierra Leone?

When we were in Sierra Leone, we were told that 600 British military personnel were taking part in the training mission. If it is possible for 600 British military personnel to achieve a genuine and—to use a vogue word—sustainable change in the circumstances of the people of that unfortunate country, that is a good investment of time, effort, money and British personnel. We have an historical connection with Sierra Leone; we arguably have a continuing moral responsibility for the country, even though with the ending of its colonial status we sadly—one might say—no longer have a legal responsibility. Many of my right hon. and hon. Friends worry about the overall effect of undertaking individual commitments that are in themselves worthy but which may cumulatively lead to an enfeebling of our capabilities to intervene militarily in other theatres, should other crises arise. Therefore, we must keep in mind the intended end game for this intervention.

What scenario does the Minister envisage for liquidating this commitment by the end of the autumn? If the Sierra Leone army is by then perfectly capable of re-establishing and maintaining control over the country, I shall be pleased to hear it. However, that is an optimistic prediction; there is a long way to go, although much progress has been made. The briefings that we received when we were in the country suggested that, as a result of the international presence in general and the British presence in particular in training the Sierra Leone army, between 40 and 50 per cent. of the land area had been brought back under Government control, pacified and stabilised. That would be a great achievement.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) asked the hon. Member for Ilford, South what progress had been made in cutting off the flow of blood diamonds—as she put it—from Sierra Leone. Given that the diamond areas are the ones most heavily infested with RUF forces and are relatively close to the border of Sierra Leone, the likelihood is small of impeding that flow for any considerable time. We are certainly unlikely physically to have stopped the flow.

Will the Minister tell us whether that can be achieved successfully? Is it being attempted through international arrangements controlling what happens to the diamonds after they leave the country?

The people behind the horror in Sierra Leone have a sense that the writing is on the wall. The reports that filter back into Freetown from the diamond mining areas inform us that the rate of diamond extraction is being accelerated dramatically. That suggests that the people involved are aware that their opportunities for exploiting the mines may not last indefinitely.

We need to be reassured that the Government, in undertaking a worthy mission, can be certain that a stable situation will be the result at the end of their intervention. Those who have disturbed the peace, terrorised the population and sought to exploit the country's potential wealth to their own sectional advantage must be sure that, not only have they failed in their endeavour, but that they will never be allowed to do something of that sort again. If it is the case that the RUF's campaign would have been unsustainable without the external support of Liberia and its president, the only hope of arriving at the situation that I have just described is to show the people who are fundamentally and ultimately responsible for what happens inside Sierra Leone that outside that country they cannot escape retribution for what they have done.

The Government favour the setting up of an international criminal court. I have always supported them in that endeavour. My final request to the Minister is therefore that when all this is over and an international criminal court is set up, those who did what they did to little girls like Marie Koroma—a myth in 1914, but reality in the 21st century—will be brought to justice before the bar of world public opinion.

10.16 am

Mr. Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate and to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) for initiating it. I apologise that I was not here to hear the start of his speech; I had a constituency meeting that had to take place this morning. However, as he and others will know, I have sought to maintain an interest in this subject during my time in the House, especially recently, and so wanted to add a word or two in support of his speech. Let me make it clear that mine is very much a Hughes Back-Bench speech and that it in no way trespasses on the greater authority that my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) will have if he catches your eye, Mr. Cook.

My links are in many ways far less credible than those of either of the hon. Gentlemen who have already spoken, for the simple reason that, despite my best efforts, I have not yet paid my first visit to Sierra Leone. Having hoped to go there in January, I now have a firm resolve to go in May—other things permitting—and very much look forward to that visit. Many Sierra Leonean nationals live in my constituency—the number has been hugely swelled by the civil war, during which people have felt obliged to leave for the United Kingdom. One reason that I feel that I understand something of what has occurred is that among those people are two party colleagues of mine who are councillors in Southwark: a Sierra Leonean national, Councillor Columba Blango, who with his family is obviously involved with the community; and Councillor Derek Partridge, who is the former high commissioner to Sierra Leone. With such expertise at one's fingertips, one will not go too far wrong. Many other active members of my community are in direct and regular contact with Sierra Leone.

Britain has the pivotal external role in Sierra Leone. I do not understate the huge contribution of Nigeria, of which it is rightly said that it gave voluntarily and to great sacrifice, but, as has been said, Britain is the country to which Sierra Leone looks for help in its hour of need. Sierra Leone is probably more loyal than almost any other Commonwealth country. I agree with the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis): were there to be a referendum on whether Sierra Leone should remain independent, its people would probably vote to become part of the United Kingdom again. That means that we must, as the Government have attempted to do, respond to the request for us to play a key role—not one that restrains the development of democracy and peacebuilding among the nationals and those who will stay in Sierra Leone, but as a means of securing and strengthening the democratic process. People must not feel that they will not have our support when they need us. The military peacekeeping process and the civilian peacebuilding process are equally important.

As the comments of the hon. Member for New Forest, East made clear, peace and reconstruction in Sierra Leone cannot happen if it is destabilised by pressures from outside its borders. Liberia acts as a hugely destabilising force. Secure frontiers are essential to prevent the growth of rebel forces and the exploitation of politics and economics. Without them, a rich, fertile and successful country will be pillaged and ravaged by others for their own interests. The Commonwealth and the United Nations should endeavour to achieve secure frontiers, so that other countries cannot exercise malign and oppressive influences.

Mrs. Gillan: Is the hon. Gentleman aware of reports that Burkina Faso has been involved? Can he shed any further light on that? Will he join me in asking the Minister to outline the destabilising factors that continue to exert influence within Sierra Leone?

Mr. Hughes: The hon. Lady is right. Several countries in west Africa have exerted influence. A key question—I would be grateful for an early ministerial response—is whether the Government are making clear to the new American Administration the importance of supporting and upholding democracy in Sierra Leone and of providing no permissive encouragement to other regimes to behave in ways seen in Guinea, Burkina Faso and Liberia.

My next point was central to the comments of the hon. Member for Ilford, South. Everyone accepts that the postponement of the presidential election that was due this year is understandable under the constitution of Sierra Leone. Another factor that unites Sierra Leone and the United Kingdom is that we both confront the prospect of elections in the near future, and both may be postponed for a while. As I understand the position in Sierra Leone, there is constitutional provision for a six-month postponement. There is no desire to evade

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democratic procedure, but there is an urgent need to ensure that free and fair elections are possible. They are not possible when so much territory is not safe for travel.

Many people—not only colleagues in Southwark, but charities such as Christian Aid—believe that it is essential to build up democratic processes and especially the next generation of leaders in Sierra Leone. Multi-party democracy is new, but unstable because of its newness: it must be given the chance to flourish. The people of Sierra Leone may need to renegotiate the constitution: theirs is not a constituency-based system, nor one in which the Executive is accountable to the legislature. Those are serious weaknesses. Building a multi-party democracy depends on the ability of people and structures to overcome those weaknesses. Bodies such as the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British Council—both of which are supported by the Government—the voluntary sector, charities and others have a key role to play. Hon. Members can contribute through the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and other agencies.

I have two questions for the Minister. First, is there, to echo the words used by the hon. Member for Ilford, South, a continuing commitment to the normalisation of affairs in Sierra Leone and to building peace, even though it may be a long and hard road? The commitment must be secure; if it is not, much good work will be undermined. Secondly, will the Government continue to search for more and better ways of supporting, both directly and indirectly, people who can build up the democratic process? There is a danger of a democratic deficit in the next generation of leaders. People need to be encouraged and enabled to be strong leaders in difficult territory. Sierra Leoneans in this country are grateful for the Government's interest. It must continue. Britain has the key role to play.

10.24 am

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): I start by joining other hon. Members in congratulating the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on raising an important subject this morning. His knowledge and his stories were moving. It was invaluable for all of us to hear him and the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) report back on what they saw during their visits. Liberal Democrats are strongly committed to supporting the Government initiatives in Sierra Leone, which have provided an example of our troops at their best and the role that we can play internationally. Many people are proud of that.

Sierra Leone represents a crucial test for our policy in this region of Africa. If we can get it right in Sierra Leone, lessons can be learned for other parts of Africa. It is therefore critical that we reinvigorate our efforts in west Africa in the next few months. The hon. Member for Ilford, South touched on the increasing problems in Guinea, which are a reason why today's debate is so important: there is a need to step up our activities in the area. In a complex situation, we have reached the difficult and critical point at which we must decide whether we are satisfied with our achievements, or whether we should step up our involvement to tackle some of the humanitarian issues to which I shall refer later.

Liberal Democrats support 100 per cent. the Foreign Secretary's statement that

"Britain will not abandon the people of Sierra Leone to the mercy of murderous thugs".

It is good that the Government made that clear so quickly. There are two clear objectives. The first is to sustain the legitimate Government of a Commonwealth country; hon. Members have mentioned our historic connections with the area. The second objective is to protect innocent civilians from the brutality of the rebels in the area, try to restore law and order and ensure that human rights are not violated. We strongly support that twin policy.

The Government were right to become involved in providing advice and training in the region, and we have heard how welcome that advice is. The 600 individuals who are out there training show that we punch above our weight, and their work has obviously had an enormous impact on Sierra Leone's army, which, it is reported, has become much more effective. I also welcome the Government's recent announcement that they are happy to make that commitment run through to September, by which time the international military advisory and training team, supported by the Canadians, will be able to carry on that effective work. None the less, I should like an assurance from the Minister that September is not a fixed date and that we will withdraw that support only when we are absolutely confident that the IMATT can perform to the same standard as our personnel. Frankly, I have my doubts about that. We have heard about the role of the Gurkhas, and I would be extremely anxious if the Department wanted to stick to the September deadline regardless of the circumstances.

Liberal Democrats differ from the Government on involvement on the ground: we should like British troops to be part of a United Nations force. I know that the Government have rejected that and I understand the concerns voiced by the hon. Member for Ilford, South, but we are worried about current UN capability in the area. About 2,000 troops left recently when the Indians and the Jordanians decided to withdraw. Those countries that remain part of the UN force do not have the skills and the abilities that we could bring to it. We have heard about our training role, and it seems a great pity that that skill is not to be transferred to the UN forces so that we could play a critical role on the ground, especially as failure could prolong the difficulties in the region. Although I entirely understand the Government's anxieties about our troops being involved in a prolonged campaign, matters might be brought to a head quicker if our troops were involved in the UN force rather than confined to their current limited, albeit welcome, role.

On the subject of back-up for the troops, the Minister will be aware that 112 military personnel serving in Sierra Leone are suffering from malaria and that 15 claims for compensation have been made. The Government have set up a tri-service board to investigate and report on the matter, but I ask the Minister to offer a few words of comfort and to give an absolute assurance that our troops will be protected from malaria, although I know that it is difficult because of the time scale involved and because troops are moved around. Furthermore, will the Minister publish the full text of the tri-service board's report? Press releases and

background papers have been issued, but we would have more confidence if the full text were made available to reassure us that everything possible was being done to protect troops from malaria.

Other hon. Members mentioned the difficult situation in Guinea. It is comforting that in the southern part of Sierra Leone, to which the hon. Member for New Forest, East referred, the Government seem to be in control; and we played our part in making that happen. However, as a consequence, trouble has moved northwards and into Guinea. *The Independent* this week carried alarming reports of the humanitarian difficulties affecting refugees who left Sierra Leone for Guinea. The United Nations has described that crisis as the largest in the world at present.

I am especially anxious about the region known as the "parrot's beak" and I would welcome the Minister's views. It is flanked by rebels on both sides and hemmed in by hostile Guineans to the north. There are several refugee camps in the region, each with a population of several thousand—the biggest, in Kolomba, has 30,000—all of whom are in extreme danger and face hunger because of lack of supplies. Fighting is intensifying as the rainy season approaches, and there is grave concern about what will happen when it kicks in. Food envoys to the camps have been attacked by rebels and one camp was without food supplies for four months. The refugees, who face attacks as rebels move into the area, are not welcomed by some in Guinea, who say that they are bringing the war from Sierra Leone. President Conte of Guinea has not used the most helpful phrases about those individuals, who are trapped between two forces.

What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues at the Department for International Development about humanitarian aid and the role of the United Nations in that difficult territory? United Nations staff have been kidnapped and killed in the region, which is highly volatile. Although much has been achieved in the south, and despite the humanitarian concerns, there is a reluctance to move into an area in which hostilities are occurring.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes) in urging that consideration be given to our long-term exit strategy. What is the Minister's view about Britain's involvement in setting up democratic structures? My hon. Friend made a helpful suggestion about the role of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and the British Council. Liberal Democrats support the Government's stance, but we are anxious that we have reached a critical point. Are we happy to let matters rest, or are we prepared to make a commitment to continue the training beyond September if we believe that others cannot train as well as we can?

We urge on the Government our belief that the situation will most effectively and speedily be resolved by UN troops playing a full role. That would send a strong message and put skills on the ground to deal with the problems in the region. Will the Minister also comment on what humanitarian aid we can give to help to address the difficulties emerging in Guinea?

10.35 am

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I echo the congratulations to the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) on securing the debate, which is long overdue. Sierra Leone seems to have slipped off the Government's agenda over recent months. I pay tribute to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis), who showed personal courage in visiting an area in which our troops are deployed, no doubt bringing them succour, and seeing the situation at first hand. Nothing—certainly not reliance on reports—replaces witnessing events on the ground. My first question to the Minister, whom I welcome to his new post, is what plans he has to follow in their footsteps by visiting Sierra Leone. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), who has continuously shown great interest in the matter. I endorse his remarks about the British Council and the Westminster Foundation for Democracy. I am worried about the fact that the British Council is being greatly run down in Africa; many of our posts there have closed because of the Government's changes.

We all share the desire for peace, security and the return of harmony to Sierra Leone—that is a given. We all endorse what the hon. Member for Ilford, South said about his visit to the amputee camp and Sierra Leone's potential. This weekend, I went to Zimbabwe and saw the situation there. I spent a similar amount of time in Zimbabwe as the hon. Gentleman spent in Sierra Leone, and witnessed the destruction of another African country with great potential. As in Sierra Leone, many of the problems of Zimbabwe reflect the desire for wealth and power, particularly through the diamond trade.

The Gurkhas, who have been tremendously praised in the debate, are a phenomenal division of our armed services. They have contributed greatly to our deployments throughout the world, not least in Kosovo where, during my previous visit, I saw them building shelters for our troops, who are doing a first-class job there. The Opposition give our troops who are deployed abroad every support and praise.

Sierra Leone is indeed a sad country. Until the 1990s it was reasonably stable, but then occurred the disastrous series of coups that led to the recent troubles. It is incredible that until the end of the 19th century the level of education in Sierra Leone was higher than it was in this country. Today, however, despite its phenomenal mineral wealth and the potential about which we have all heard, it is one of the poorest countries in the world with a derisory gross domestic product and a male life expectancy of merely 37 years.

I do not have much time to speak—I want to hear the Minister's response to the questions that other hon. Members have asked—but I wish to raise one issue that has not been mentioned: the progress of the Lomé peace agreement. I hope that the Minister will put some flesh on the bones of that agreement and tell us what progress is being made. Specifically, I should like to know what efforts have been made to transform the RUF into a political party, as was part of the agreement, and whether that transformation is happening. The disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants is a key part of reconstruction, so perhaps the Minister could let us know what progress is

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being made on that front. Furthermore, the release of prisoners of war was due to take place; has that happened? I hope that the Minister will also tell us about humanitarian assistance throughout Sierra Leone, which was another objective of the Lomé peace agreement.

We have not heard about the truth and reconciliation commission that was to be set up; perhaps the Minister can inform us of the latest position on that. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, East raised the prospect of bringing before an international criminal court the perpetrators of some of the horrendous crimes that have been committed. We would all support that aim, but part of the Lomé peace agreement was an amnesty for crimes committed before the agreement's signature. I should like to know about the progress of those amnesties, how many have been granted and to whom. Another part of the agreement related to the exploitation of natural resources in Sierra Leone. It would be helpful to have an update on what legitimate exploitation has taken place. We know of the doubts that still hang over the illegitimate use of diamonds and possible intervention and interference by neighbouring countries, but I hope that the Minister will tell us what has been happening legitimately on that front.

On the question of the military deployment, it has always appeared to Opposition Members that the Government have been making policy on the hoof on Sierra Leone. We have had constant reassurances that we would perform certain tasks and go no further, but a few months later those tasks seem to expand. Mission creep has taken a strong hold on the Government's policy in Sierra Leone. We have evidence of that in recent announcements. On 19 December last year, the Secretary of State for Defence said:

"We are making preparations for the short-term deployment of a surgical team to Sierra Leone to cover the possibility of a gap in medical cover"

because of the withdrawal of certain UN troops. He went on:

"The team will be withdrawn as soon as possible once alternative arrangements are available."—[*Official Report*, 19 December 2000; Vol. 360, c. 89W.]

Will the Minister update us on the team's status, what alternative arrangements have been made and the likelihood of its being withdrawn in the near future? In another written answer published Friday 26 January—not so long ago—the Secretary of State made yet another announcement that we were increasing our presence in Sierra Leone, saying:

"We plan to increase the IMATT's overall size from the 90 posts originally envisaged to 126."—[*Official Report*, 26 January 2001; Vol. 361, c. 725W.]

That seems to follow the established pattern of the continual upgrading and reassessment of the tasks that British forces are in Sierra Leone to complete. Will the Minister enlighten the Opposition as to who is making those assessments, why they appear to be so inaccurate and why the tasks and expenditure in that area continuously expand?

Mr. Oaten: Will the hon. Lady confirm whether she is for or against the increased activity?

Mrs. Gillan: I cannot answer that question at this stage, because of the scant information available to the Opposition. I am searching for further and better particulars because I think that it would be more helpful if, instead of adding like topsy to announcements on an ad hoc basis, a longer-term game plan were laid out for the information of both Members of Parliament and, more importantly, British armed services serving abroad. Will the Minister think longer term rather than shorter term, as seems to be the Government's major problem? I want to leave time for the Minister to respond, but I hope that he will undertake to write to Members who have contributed to this debate if he cannot respond to all the questions asked today. The reconstruction and peaceful reconciliation within Sierra Leone concerns all of us.

Finally, the memorandum of understanding signed with Sierra Leone provides for written notice of termination of three months if we are going to withdraw our troops. Will the Minister tell us whether that memorandum of understanding is still in place, or whether it has been added to or amended? We want to make sure that we contribute positively to the rebuilding of Sierra Leone, and that our service personnel are fully backed up by the House in carrying out their duties on behalf of this country. I hope that the Minister will provide the reassurances that we seek.

10.46 am

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr. Brian Wilson): First, I join other hon. Members in paying tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South (Mr. Gapes) for securing this debate, which has been extremely useful. It may surprise hon. Members to learn that one does not necessarily become an expert on everything just by becoming a Minister. Listening to today's debate has been an important part of my learning process about Sierra Leone. I single out my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) for their outstanding contributions, which reflect the fact that they have been to the country, experienced and seen it. There is no substitute for that and both hon. Gentlemen articulated their experiences effectively. The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) asked whether I intended to visit Sierra Leone. If I am privileged to be in office long enough, I shall visit the country. I am to visit west Africa next month, but the precise itinerary has yet to be determined. If I do not visit Sierra Leone on that trip, I expect to do so on a future one.

There is a fairly broad consensus, especially on the fundamental point that it is right that we are in Sierra Leone. It is a small country, it is poor and its people have suffered appalling brutality. However, it is a democracy, it has an abundance of natural resources and it has a vibrant and energetic people. Our purpose in Sierra Leone is to reassure those people that they have not been abandoned, and to help them to achieve the peace that they need to develop their country's potential.

It is incomprehensible and deeply depressing that a country so endowed with natural riches can be described as the poorest in the world, but the figures produced by the United Nations speak for themselves: in Sierra Leone, life expectancy is 37 years; of every 1,000 live births, 316 babies die and for every 100,00 live births, 1,800 mothers die. Those bald statistics are a sad reflection of a civil war that has lasted more than a

decade and anchored Sierra Leone to the bottom of the United Nations human development index. Poverty has bred poverty as the economy has collapsed, leaving a young and disaffected population clamouring for non-existent jobs. The terrible conflict has caused the needless deaths of thousands of innocent civilians and resulted in some of the most barbaric atrocities of modern times: thousands of innocent people, including babies, have had limbs hacked from their bodies, and more than half of Sierra Leone's population of 5 million has been displaced. It is difficult to imagine the suffering endured by the people of Sierra Leone.

Our presence is intended to send a powerful message to the Revolutionary United Front about our determination to bring the conflict to an end. How that happens is the choice of the combatants: the sooner they realise that they have no hope of forcing themselves on the people, the quicker we can undertake the huge task of lifting the country from its knees and restoring the people's capacity to build a better future for themselves. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State described our strategy for Sierra Leone in his statement on 6 June. That strategy has not changed: our priorities are to repel the rebels, restore the peace and rebuild the country.

Mrs. Gillan: Before he leaves the subject of the RUF, will the Minister tell us what progress has been made under the Lomé peace agreement and the transformation of the RUF into a political party?

Mr. Wilson: Under the terms of the July 1999 Lomé accord, the RUF is entitled to form a political party, but its leader, Foday Sankoh, broke that accord in May 2000 and we believe that he has lost the right to any further involvement as a political leader. The RUF must appoint a new leadership if it wants to participate in elections, when they are eventually held.

Our priorities remain to repel the rebels, restore the peace and rebuild Sierra Leone. They are the necessary elements for sustainable long-term development and represent the essence of our commitment to the people of Sierra Leone. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, South and others referred generously to our military assistance to Sierra Leone, which is fundamental to our goal of providing the Government of the country with the means to defend its people from brutal rebel attacks. Since June 2000, British forces have trained and equipped 6,500 soldiers. On 26 January, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced that the training will continue in its present form until September, by which time a total of 8,500 men will have undergone instruction. That programme has begun the development of an effective and accountable Sierra Leone army.

It would be remiss of me not to place on record, even at the cost of brevity, a tribute to the dedication of the men and women of the 2nd Royal Anglian, the 1st Royal Irish, the 1st Prince of Wales Own and the 2nd Royal Gurkha Rifles. I refer to all our forces involved in providing first-class training and support to the new Sierra Leone army. Incidentally, I shall write to hon. Members about all points to which I have not referred, including the point made by the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), who asked about malaria provision for our troops.

Mr. Oaten: Is September a cut-off deadline, or one that will be reviewed?

Mr. Wilson: I am coming to that. When the regiments have finished their work, an international military assistance and training team—IMATT—will take responsibility for longer-term training, but that does not signal the end of our involvement in the new army. Britain will continue to play a major role in IMATT. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured.

Britain will remain at the forefront in providing training and advice to the Government of Sierra Leone and in helping to build the structures necessary to ensure the democratic accountability of the new army. We shall continue to strengthen and redefine the role of Sierra Leone's Ministry of Defence, paying special attention to aspects of civilian control. Our assistance does not end there. We are also helping the United Nations mission in Sierra Leone. In addition to the 15 military observers, we have, at the request of the United Nations secretariat, provided a senior officer as chief of staff as well as another six officers to perform key tasks within the mission. In addition, our rapid reaction force is ready to come to the aid of UN peacekeeping operations anywhere in the world, including Sierra Leone.

We shall maintain an operational headquarters in Sierra Leone until the end of 2001. Through military exercises, we will continue to remind the rebels that our over-the-horizon rapid reaction forces are never far away. We hope that further bloodshed will not occur. A negotiated solution is not impossible. We welcome the Abuja ceasefire that was signed in November 2000 between the Government of Sierra Leone and the RUF, and we would all like to believe that the new agreement has reawakened the prospect of a negotiated settlement. I do not need to remind hon. Members that Sierra Leone has suffered many disappointments in the past five years. In 1996, the Abidjan accord collapsed, as did the Conarkry peace accord in 1997 and the Lomé peace accord in 2000. Although those agreements provided a realistic basis for peace, the persistent duplicity of the RUF undermined each of them. Although I am encouraged by the Abuja ceasefire, the history of false starts causes me to regard that new agreement cautiously.

A credible disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process is urgently required to encourage combatants to disarm. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has focused particular attention on that vital component of the peace process. The United Kingdom has developed model pilot projects that will provide visible evidence of the benefits in store for combatants when they have laid down their weapons and been demobilised. We shall continue to support the Sierra Leone Government, the World Bank and others in developing incentives designed to persuade combatants to give up the fight.

I am pleased to say that Britain played a leading role in the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1315, which paved the way for the establishment of the special court for Sierra Leone. It has been created to deal with

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those who bear the greatest responsibility for the heinous crimes under international and Sierra Leone law that have been committed in recent years. That court is being established at the request of the Sierra Leone Government, with the support of the international community through the United Nations. It will have a crucial role to play in demonstrating the determination of the international community to bring to justice all those who are responsible for such crimes. I hope that I have answered a point that has caused concern to hon. Members.

Mrs. Gillan: Will the Minister tell us how that court fits in with the amnesties for crimes committed prior to the Lomé agreement? What is the status of those amnesties?

Mr. Wilson: The special court will deal with only a limited number of the most serious offenders. In parallel, we are supporting the establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission, which will play an important role in establishing the facts of what has happened in Sierra Leone. It will provide a forum for those involved in the conflict on all sides to set out the truth. By definition, a special court would not deal with all matters and an amnesty is perhaps part of the overall mix.

Britain was also a key player in the adoption of UN Security Council resolution 1306, which imposed a ban on the import of all rough diamonds from Sierra Leone not controlled by its Government's certification scheme. That was a robust and imaginative response to Sierra Leone's tragedy, and sends out a powerful message about the need to end the trade in conflict diamonds. We shall continue to work to secure a worldwide certification scheme to halt the flow of illicit diamonds that fuels conflicts.

The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham asked what progress had been made in reducing that trade. I am pleased to report that the Sierra Leone Government recently reported to the United Nations sanctions committee that there has already been a small but significant increase in the number of diamonds passing through the Government's control. We shall build on that. More widely, the United Kingdom remains at the forefront of international and UN activity on the creation of an international certification regime, which will prevent conflict diamonds fuelling wars elsewhere, including in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. That was a matter in which my predecessor was particularly interested and I intend to carry on that interest.

Malign external influences not only make our work in Sierra Leone much harder, but threaten the stability of the wider region. UN Security Council resolution 1306 established an independent panel of experts to examine violations of the UN arms embargo and links between the trade in diamonds and arms in Sierra Leone. It clearly identifies President Taylor of Liberia as a prime supporter of the rebels, supplying arms and equipment in return for diamonds. We are determined to ensure that measures are adopted to put pressure on President Taylor to end his connections with the rebels. Liberia's support for the RUF has been largely responsible for the conflict in Sierra Leone spreading to Guinea. I will write individually to hon. Members who have spoken in the debate to explain our policy in Guinea. Although it is important to set out our record on that matter, time does not allow me to do so today. I hope that what I have said to hon. Members and what I will add in writing will satisfy them.

Shipbuilding (South Coast)

11 am

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): I am pleased to have an opportunity to lead this important debate on shipbuilding on the south coast. Hon. Members of all parties with constituencies in that area and further afield share my concern about the potential destruction of an industry that has been a major factor in our regional economy for many years. The hon. Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) has already sent his apologies for not being able to attend. I am sure that many of those present are hoping to contribute to the debate to reinforce our widespread concern, and I hope that they will not take offence should I refer to their constituencies in passing.

Shipbuilding on the south coast has a long and illustrious history. Not for nothing is Portsmouth known as the home of the Royal Navy. From the very beginning, the south coast of Hampshire has been a major centre for warship building. Centuries ago, the New Forest provided the hearts of oak for the old wooden hulls. Nelson's Victory and many other ships of the line were built in the shipyards along our coast. The tradition has lived on throughout the centuries with the naval port at Portsmouth and the commercial port of Southampton becoming the prime drivers of economic success in our region. A wealth of engineering and manufacturing industry has developed around those two great ports, ranging from building railway locomotives in my constituency of Eastleigh to manufacturing submarine and power cables in Southampton and Eastleigh and an advanced electronics industry.

As a student apprentice in the Portsmouth dockyard back in the 1960s, I was part of a work force of more than 22,000. The Vosper Thornycroft yards at Portchester and Woolston employed at least another 5,000 people. All those yards were, at that time, building ships for the Royal Navy. Together with the port of Southampton, the victualling yards, the armaments depots and the range of support services for the naval and merchant fleets, the industry in our region employed approximately 100,000 people. It is no wonder that Hampshire had, and still has, the most defence-dependent economy of any shire county.

Underpinning the shipbuilding industry was a large, well-trained and highly skilled work force. At any one time, some 1,000 apprentices were under articles in Portsmouth dockyard, and there were at least a further 300 at Vosper Thornycroft, providing a constant stream of new talent for the industry. It is a matter of record that shipbuilding in the United Kingdom has seen massive decline. Over the past 60 years, the tonnage of merchant ships being completed in British yards has fallen from more than a quarter of world tonnage to approximately 1 per cent. According to a paper produced by the Shipbuilding Forum, our merchant shipbuilding industry has been reduced to:

"A small industrial sector concentrating on niche markets for specialist high added value ships such as off-shore oil exploration vessels, local ferries, dredgers and tugs."

A once mighty industry has been reduced to making dredgers and tugs. An industry that employed many hundreds of thousands now employs fewer than 30,000 throughout the nation. The number employed at Portsmouth dockyard, now only a naval base, has reduced from 22,000 to approximately 2,000, and the number employed at Vosper Thornycroft has reduced from 5,000 to only 1,200, with half that number now threatened with redundancy.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government could have helped Vosper Thornycroft in Southampton by giving an assurance about the type 45 programme, which the company has desperately been seeking?

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman anticipates some remarks that I hope to make strongly and lucidly later. If he will bear with me, I am sure that he will support my comments.

An industry that once boasted dozens of firms building warships throughout the United Kingdom is now reduced to two prime contractors: BAE Systems in the north and Scotland and Vosper Thornycroft in the south.

I can well understand the concerns of hon. Members with constituencies in the north of England and Scotland, where shipyard jobs have become dependent on MOD orders, but I am equally concerned about the need to retain and strengthen competition in this specialist industry, to foster innovation and to ensure that the Government and the taxpayer get the best value for money. I am sure that hon. Members will realise that that concern is shared not just by employees and employers but by trade unions, who as a matter of policy agree that competition is best for our industry.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): My hon. Friend cites a number of shipyards, but I ask him to bear in mind Appledore shipyard, which is in my constituency. It is globally competitive and an excellent shipyard that provides excellent value for money at the smaller end of shipbuilding.

Mr. Chidgey: I well understand my hon. Friend's robust and reliable support for the excellent shipyard in his constituency. Appledore has a sound reputation throughout the world, but if he can recall, I spoke of prime contractors for shipbuilding, which is why I said that there are just two. Of course, much fine work is done at Appledore, which works closely with shipbuilders in my area, and long may it continue to do so. While I share the concerns of hon. Members whose constituencies are in the north of England and Scotland, my role today is unashamedly to put the case for shipbuilding in the south—the home of one of the two remaining warship prime contractors.

A recent book entitled "Warships for the World" states:

"Royal Naval vessels built on the South Coast made a major contribution to naval operations during the 1991 Gulf war."

Five locally built Hunt class mine counter-measure vessels

"played a vital role in clearing lanes through extensive minefields off the Kuwaiti coast, while HMS Gloucester"—

one of three type 42 destroyers built by Vosper Thornycroft—

[Mr. Chidgey]

"shot down the only Iraqi missile aimed against Allied naval vessels."

That is a matter of record, but what is perhaps more important is the export record achieved in our local yards in Woolston and Portchester by Vosper Thornycroft. It is a unique record in the British shipbuilding industry. Since the 1960s, Vosper Thornycroft has sought and won orders around the world. It has sold vessels to Malaysia, Kenya, Brunei, Singapore, Nigeria, Holland, Sweden, Panama, the Bahamas, Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago, Italy, Oman, Venezuela, Tunisia, Qatar, Egypt, Jordan and Brazil. That record is unsurpassed by any other shipbuilding firm in this country. The book continues:

"Shipbuilding on the South Coast has a long and highly successful record. In 1937 VT built as a private venture the very first motor torpedo boat—MTB 102—which served as a prototype for large numbers of vessels that served throughout the Second World War."

To bring us up to date, during the 1960s it developed the technology for the first glass-reinforced plastic royal naval warships. In the past few months, as the Minister will know, it has been contracted to design and construct the world's first trimaran warship demonstrator, the RV Triton. That is an unsurpassed record, not just according to the textbooks but in the perception of the South-East economic development agency.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the trimaran. Members of the public may not realise that one of the other participants involved in that programme is the United States, through the Darpa Organisation. Interestingly, the Americans placed the order for that advanced design and test vehicle in the shipyard to which he refers. That should not go unnoticed.

Mr. Chidgey: The hon. Gentleman must have visited the Woolston shipyard not so long ago to have such detailed information. He is absolutely right. The Americans are watching this exciting new development with great interest, and are, I understand, providing much of the instrumentation that will assess and evaluate the vessel's success.

As I have said, shipbuilding is important for our region. Our economic development agency says that defence and marine technology are major business sectors in the south-east, with high growth and high value potential. That is why SEEDA is working so hard with the industry and with key groups such as research institutions and training providers to develop a favourable economic and competitive environment, but it needs Government support to do that. In particular, competition needs to be encouraged and sustained in the defence market. That is crucial, because it keeps the pressure on improved productivity and cost control, which benefits not only taxpayers but the competitiveness of UK firms as a whole in an increasingly robust export market.

The benefits are clear. We have in Vospers the United Kingdom's leading warship exporter, with some 273 ships supplied to 34 countries in the past 30 years, and £1.5 billion worth of export orders won in the past 10 years. That statement may sound like it comes from a company brochure, but it comes from our economic development agency, which appreciates the value of the industry in the heart of our region.

Vospers is at the heart of a cluster of marine industries with world-class potential. The marine sector includes many small firms, which are often technology based with high growth potential. The presence of the company, with its direct link to the naval procurement programme, stimulates innovation among many suppliers. Severing that link would jeopardise the technological investment on which competitiveness increasingly depends. The impact will be felt not only in my constituency but among a vast catchment of firms that operate in the south coast maritime industry cluster. That is why SEEDA launched and supported the campaign for south coast shipbuilding. It brings together private companies, local authorities, Members of Parliament and members of trade unions in a partnership approach. It is an excellent example of how an economic development agency should work, and I applaud its efforts.

Vospers and the other marine engineering companies have a bright future in the south-east. They can maintain and create many business opportunities and jobs, given the right support. We want the Government to support that vision through fair competition, not preferential treatment. To use a hackneyed but vital phrase, we merely want a level playing field. We want to be able to compete equally with the others.

In the region, shipbuilding and repair involves eight companies that account for £225 million a year in turnover. Shipbuilding and repair secures £100 million a year in exports, and employs more than 3,000 people in the south-east. It is a growth industry worldwide. Some 2,400 new ships are built every year worldwide. I understand that the Department of Trade and Industry is keen to double shipbuilding and increase ship repair by as much as 30 per cent. in the United Kingdom. The south-east plays a major part in the sector.

Further shipbuilding losses will have a knock-on effect throughout the entire marine industry sector, including ports such as Southampton, where port-related activities contribute £1.3 billion a year to the local economy, and more than 10,000 direct and 6,000 indirect jobs would suffer severely.

The process of shipbuilding and repair and yacht building in the region has led to the development of several world-beating educational institutions. Southampton has its Oceanography institute and its university and other support organisations such as Marine Tech South, all of which have come from the support of the marine engineering industry cluster.

In spite of the decline in British shipbuilding, it is a growth industry worldwide, and our shipbuilders should be out there competing for a stake in a rough, tough marketplace. That is why the Government, the home market customer, should use their purchasing power to ensure that, through fair competition and the award of warship contracts, the industry develops, innovates and becomes more productive. That can be achieved only through competition.

I endorse the Government's claim that they intend to do precisely that—foster and enhance competition in the industry. They say frequently that they support competition generally and within the UK defence

market—specifically for the type 45 destroyer programme. In a Ministry of Defence memorandum dated 25 February 1998 to the Select Committees on Defence and on Trade and Industry, the Government stated:

"Competition remains fundamental to obtaining value for money... Where competition is not viable for prime contracts, competition at the sub-contract level is encouraged."

I see that I have caught the Minister's attention. On pages 38 and 39 of the joint report of the Defence and Trade and Industry Committees—HC675, Session 1997-98—it states that when considering such long-term implications of procurement decisions, the MOD includes factors such as

"the implications of the creation of a future monopoly".

The Government's introduction of smart procurement does nothing to change that, because it encourages the development of partnerships with industry. Ministers and officials therefore continue to emphasise the importance of competition. It is against that background that companies in the defence industry have to make major investment and employment decisions. The declared Government strategy for the type 45 destroyer programme is in line with their general policy.

It was with delight that we heard the announcement of the order on 11 July last year when the Secretary of State for Defence said:

"Our approach in this programme will ensure that experience in type 45 construction is spread between BAE Systems Marine and Vosper Thornycroft. That will assist future competition for follow-on ships... Provided that satisfactory arrangements can be agreed between the prime contractor and the two shipbuilders, we intend that the first and third ships will be assembled by BAE Systems Marine and the second ship by Vosper Thornycroft. Both companies will be able to compete independently for the assembly of batches of follow-on ships.—[*Official Report*, 11 July 2000; Vol. 353, c. 701-2.]

The big question, which I hope will feature in our debate, is what role the Government should and must play to ensure that that is achieved.

The Secretary of State and many of his colleagues have repeated those views. The Minister may recall that on 12 February 2001 he stated:

"There has been no change to date in our policy"—

so I wonder what happened on the 13th, 14th and subsequently—

"which is to conduct a procurement exercise involving both yards, under the direction of the prime contractor. That remains the policy."—[*Official Report*, 12 February 2001; Vol. 363, c. 17.]

However, a new factor calls into question the Government's commitment to competitive procurement of the type 45—the unsolicited bid submitted by BAE Marine to construct all 12 vessels. The Government maintain that their policy is unchanged, but at the same time they are considering a completely new strategy—giving BAE a monopoly in the design and construction of destroyers and frigates.

The Government previously expressed considerable support for competition in the type 45 procurement programme, but in another memorandum provided to the Defence Committee, the Ministry of Defence stated:

"Competing for follow-on ships in batches increases the pressure on tenderers to reduce prices. Savings of around 30 per cent. were achieved between the First of Class vessel of the Type 23 destroyer and the 14th hull of that class and we do not believe that these savings would have been as large without the pressure of competition. We anticipate achieving a similar level of savings in the Type 45 programme."

Again, I emphasise the reference to competition.

On page 56 of the Defence Committee's eighth report—Session 1998-99—the MOD went on:

"The potential savings which might be achieved if the entire class was ordered as a single batch can only be the subject of speculation, since this would be an unprecedented departure from current practice. Such an approach is unlikely to be adopted for a number of reasons. Firstly, warship design naturally evolves through the life of the particular class, for example, to take account of changing operational requirements. Formulating a contract with time, cost and performance parameters to anticipate design changes would be impracticable especially in terms of the commitment and risks involved in a programme of this complexity. Secondly, the industrial implications of such an approach could lead to a single supplier dominating warship procurement to the detriment of competition in the medium/long term."

If that is the Government's position, why are they taking such a long time to consider the unsolicited bid? Why did they not discard it at the outset as not in keeping with their policy?

In answer to a question that I tabled, the Minister will recall that he said:

"The BAE Systems Marine unsolicited proposal is still being assessed but if it is accepted, the DFM contract would need to be re-negotiated."—[*Official Report*, 30 January 2001; Vol. 362, c. 99W.]

That is shorthand for saying that the statement that Vosper Thornycroft would have a fair share of the work was to become meaningless and that Government policy for strengthening competition in the United Kingdom warship building industry was to be abandoned.

The fig leaf that the Government are using to hide their embarrassment seems to be the proviso that fair work share on the first of class for the type 45s depends on the prime contractor, BAE Systems and the two subcontractors reaching agreement. BAE Marine and Vosper Thornycroft must reach agreement on cost and risk sharing. However, by awarding the DFM contract to BAE Systems without first insisting on a back-to-back contract with BAE Marine and Vosper Thornycroft for the subcontract work, the MOD has put all the aces in the hands of BAE Systems. In that game of poker, all that BAE has to do is raise the stakes and sit tight. Vosper Thornycroft is running out of construction work and shedding 100 or so workers as every month goes by, so it is obvious that, in six months' time, it may no longer have the capacity to bid effectively for type 45 work.

Incidentally, one reason why Vosper Thornycroft is short of work is that it subcontracted the construction of two new multi-role survey warships for the Royal Navy, worth £130 million and sustaining 800 jobs for about three years, to the Appledore shipyard in the constituency of my good and hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett). Vosper Thornycroft did that because it expected to need the capacity in its yards for the promised work on the type 45 destroyers. To use a common phrase, that is being shafted—if I may use such an expression in this context.

Dr. Julian Lewis: Propeller shafted.

Mr. Chidgey: That might do. I will move swiftly on, Mr. Cook, rather than incur your disapprobation.

[Mr. Chidgey]

We often talk in this place about low politics, which seems to come with the territory, but there is also such a thing as low commerce. There is no doubt in my mind that BAE Marine submitted its unsolicited bid for the type 45 destroyer with the benefit of knowledge of Vosper Thornycroft's expertise and intellectual development. I have been in industry long enough to know how important those aspects are in retaining one's competitive edge and that we do not give away our skills, techniques and intellectual property lightly. Surely that knowledge was revealed only when the two companies were working together under the Government's instructions to collaborate for the first of class ships for the type 45 destroyer. It is naïve to believe that Vosper Thornycroft would have revealed its expertise in, for example, modular construction, without the assumed protection of the Government pledge that it was to be contracted to design and build the second type 45 destroyer and would be substantially involved in the first and third.

More times than I can remember, Ministers have replied to questions of a similar ilk by saying that that remains the Government's preferred strategy for fair work sharing on the type 45 or that it is their intention that Vosper Thornycroft should undertake a significant amount of the work. If the Government sit back and wait until September, when decisions must be taken on the construction programme for the type 45, the only game left in town will be to negotiate a contract directly with BAE Systems Marine. Shipbuilding in the south of England will have been destroyed and with it any effective competition for warship building in the United Kingdom.

I do not blame BAE, which is pursuing a sound commercial strategy in the interests of its workers and shareholders. The Government must take the blame for allowing the strategy to succeed against the interests of competition, the warship building industry and the taxpayer, who will foot the inflated final bill.

The Under-Secretary is a gentleman who shows great patience and carefully considers the questions put to him. Rather than giving us the usual Front Bench platitudes, I hope that he will give a firm commitment that the Government will discard forthwith the unsolicited bid for all 12 type 45s from BAE Systems Marine as anti-competitive, and instruct the chief executive of the Defence Procurement Agency to intervene on the DFM contract and insist that negotiations with Vosper, stalled by BAE, will restart immediately. I hope, too, that the Government will instruct the chief executive to redefine reasonable cost parameters for work-sharing strategies under the DFM contract in the light of his letter dated 31 January, which stated:

"Although it could be argued that there is some additional cost for the first three ships inherent in this strategy,"—

work sharing—

"we believe this to be easily outweighed by the benefits of subsequent competition for which it provides."—[*Official Report*, 31 January 2001; Vol. 362, c. 184W.]

It is time that the Government put their money where their mouth is. Ensuring a competitive strategy for the type 45 is an issue that affects the future of shipbuilding in the south of England and has serious implications for the whole of the United Kingdom shipbuilding industry.

In case hon. Members are in any doubt about BAE Systems' ambitions in this regard, I shall quote from the company's briefing setting out its warship building strategy. It states:

"For some time now we have been seeking to develop a long-term warship building strategy in partnership with the UK Government. A key element of the partnership concept would be the award, clearly subject to the value for money test, of all of the Type 45 platforms and a further batch of Astute submarines to our Marine business. Furthermore, we have recently submitted an unsolicited proposal to the UK MOD for the construction of two Auxiliary Oilers at Govan which could be financed either by the government or by ourselves."

A raft of proposals is set out for BAE Systems to become the sole provider for the Government in the warship building industry. Clearly, BAE makes a case that it believes to be sound for the company and for the Government, but it deliberately stifles effective competition for future generations of the warship building industry.

If Ministers continue to ignore our pleas and avoid the issue, they will be responsible for closing the most profitable and innovative shipyard in Britain. Safeguarding the future of shipbuilding on the south coast is vital; it will benefit the Royal Navy, the taxpayer and the entire British shipbuilding industry.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Frank Cook (in the Chair): Order. It has become common practice—indeed, almost an agreed protocol—in 90-minute debates that Front-Bench Members commence their winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the end of the debate. As so many hon. Members are rising, I appeal for brevity.

11.30 am

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I will not repeat the detailed comments of the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on the issues surrounding the debate. Instead, I wish to emphasise that shipbuilding on the south coast concerns not only Southampton or Portsmouth, but the whole economy of our part of the world. The issue should not be viewed as a contest between the south coast and the north of England because it concerns the future strategy on defence procurement and the building of warships in the United Kingdom. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh set out, that strategy is particularly well served by ensuring that the contract for type 45 destroyers is delivered on the basis of the existing strategy of smart procurement, which involves Vospers and BAE sharing the work.

Anyone attending a football match in Southampton—which is, these days, a particularly successful premiership club—is struck by the fact that Southampton fans usually sing songs directed not at the opposing football team but at Portsmouth football club, whichever side Southampton is playing. I am sure that the same happens at Portsmouth football club—albeit with smaller crowds. People outside the area might think that Southampton should fight for its shipyard and therefore oppose Portsmouth on that issue. However, Members representing Southampton and Portsmouth constituencies are united in their concern. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, North (Mr. Rapson) is unable to be present, but he has done an

enormous amount of work on the issue. A range of people of all parties in our part of the world is united in the wish to ensure a future for shipbuilding on the south coast, wherever it happens to takes place. I am sure that we all agree on that important point.

The hon. Member for Eastleigh set out a number of the substantial spin-offs that arise from shipbuilding on the south coast. It is important to the local and regional economy, jobs and skills. Many of the people who worked at Vospers and have obtained jobs elsewhere have enhanced the south coast's ability to build a first-class range of ships, not just Vospers warships. Shipbuilding is also important, as I said, to our national defence procurement strategy because we need to ensure that competition is maintained in the procurement of defence vessels. That creates a problem in regard to smart procurement, however, because only two contractors in the UK can effectively undertake the work for UK warships—assuming that one wishes to keep it in UK yards. The Ministry of Defence obviously feels that that is important and I thoroughly subscribe to that. It is difficult to conceive of perfect competition when only two yards or companies are competing, because they will know about each other's strategies and activities. Indeed, one may believe that those two yards should continue to provide competition, but the idea that one puts the other out of business, thereby extinguishing competition, undermines that principle. A smart procurement strategy therefore needs to be developed.

I found it particularly encouraging that the Government's strategy for the delivery of type 45 destroyers took the issue into account. They decided that the first three ships should be built jointly by the two yards so that the learning curve would be jointly steepened. Competition would then proceed from the end of the building of the third of class, and the overall objective of building the best ships at the lowest price over a period of time would be achieved. That sound and sensible strategy was set out to the Defence Committee last year. It was confirmed in an Adjournment debate before Christmas and was recently underlined to my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) and me when, together with a number of workers from Vospers shipyard, we spoke to a Defence Minister.

The strategy depends on the simple observation that there will be two yards for the entire period of the procurement of 12 vessels. If at any stage one yard ceases to exist, the whole strategy will be undermined. The appointment of a prime contractor is important to ensure that knowledge is shared at the end of the development of the third vessel and competition can proceed. If, as the hon. Member for Eastleigh emphasised, that prime contractor owns two of the yards that are competing for the contract, a problem arises. Obviously, Chinese walls are needed, but how strong and soundproof are they in practice? An unsolicited bid has been mentioned, which suggests that they are not that strong.

I have some sympathy with the Government over receiving that unsolicited bid. Of course they must entertain it. They cannot simply throw it out of the window, as they would be accused of not taking all factors into account in the competitive procurement process. Under the overall logic that has been set out, once that unsolicited bid has been entertained, it must be rejected because, by its success, it undermines the whole idea of competition in procurement in shipbuilding. It is important to ensure that the prime contractor does what was agreed and announced by the Government and that we have a genuine period of collaboration on those first three vessels, sharing out the work equally.

There is an important asymmetry in the process. Vospers wants the status quo to be preserved on competition and the procurement process. BAE consistently comes up with suggestions that may change that process. Indeed, *The Observer* of 25 February reports that BAE has yet again suggested that the Government should simply give it the contracts for two naval support ships. Vospers suggests that a competitive tendering process should be carried out and properly evaluated, with the contracts going to the successful tender.

A strategy that ensures that jobs and skills are retained on the south coast also secures the national interest. It ensures, too, that people do what they said that they would do. That is what we are asking for in this debate, and what Vospers is asking for. At the earliest stage possible, the security of that contract must be ensured so that the prime contractor does not wear down Vospers simply by procrastination. It is in the national interest that first-class ships, which Vospers—along with BAE—has a proud record of building, are secured for the British Navy. The Navy should have those vessels on the basis of a smart procurement contract, which ensures that first-class vessels are built at the lowest price achievable, with the rolling out of a contract over the full life of 12 vessels.

11.40 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I wish to express my solidarity with the points that have been made by the hon. Members for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) and for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead). My involvement with Vosper Thornycroft goes back some 18 years, during which time we have had a lot to celebrate: the success of the privatisation, the company's role as the lead yard for Hunt class mine sweepers, its continuing success in export markets and the diversification programme, which involved moving into aerospace. Vosper Thornycroft Aerospace is headquartered in Christchurch, in my constituency, so my interest in the firm continues, though in a different location.

Vosper Thornycroft is a strong and successful company. Throughout the years I have lobbied on behalf of the company and, as the Member for Southampton, Itchen, I worked hard at that. The yard was in those days just outside the Itchen constituency, situated in Eastleigh. However, the Government and their officials have tended to take the success of the company for granted and to allocate Ministry of Defence work to less successful and less competitive yards. We encountered that problem on the south coast under the Conservative Government, and I argued strongly with Ministers that we should have a level playing field. I told them that it was counter-productive to give work to less successful and less competitive yards, simply because they happen to be located in the north and in areas of higher unemployment.

[Mr. Christopher Chope]

The success of that policy, pursued vigorously by the Conservative Government, has been vindicated. One may consider what happened with the Hunt class programme. The company began by being the lead yard; it would have loved to have the contract for the whole programme, from start to finish, without any competition, but it had to compete each time against another yard. It was successful each time and each time quoted a price much lower than it had been on the previous procurement. The hon. Member for Eastleigh mentioned that over the period of the type 23 programme overall savings were made of about 30 per cent. My recollection is that during the Hunt class programme, it amounted to about 60 per cent. less for the last one produced than for the first one. That was a result of the continual competition throughout the procurement process. It is depressing to think that the Government are even toying with the idea of giving one contract for the entire programme to a monopoly supplier. I urge them to abandon the notion immediately and have faith in competition and south coast shipbuilding.

11.44 am

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on having the good fortune to win the ballot and secure this debate. We have already proved that it was needed; there is widespread cross-party support for the view that shipbuilding is essential to our area's history and future. We could become emotional when talking about the past, but for those in jobs there is no future in the past. They must have something to look forward to, and I hope that today's debate will secure that for them.

At present, there is confusion. BAE Systems wants a stranglehold on military shipbuilding in the United Kingdom. It is unhelpful when its company brief states:

"For some time now we have been seeking to develop a long-term warship building strategy in partnership with the UK Government. A key element of the partnership concept would be the award, clearly subject to the value for money test, of all of the Type 45 platforms and a further batch of Astute submarines to our Marine business. Furthermore, we have recently submitted an unsolicited proposal to the UK MOD for the construction of two Auxiliary Oilers (AO) at Govan which could be financed either by the government or by ourselves on the basis of a private finance initiative type arrangement."

The Government have said on several occasions in the past year that warship construction in the United Kingdom needs a fair and flat playing field on which all shipbuilders can participate. They have said that they want open competition and the ability to judge each bid on its merits. However, the company suggests that it is all but in bed with the Government and wants a completely closed shop in the construction of warships for the United Kingdom.

Those who have so far spoken in the debate were right to have retraced the history of Vosper Thornycroft and to congratulate the company on its achievements. Its record of success in selling ships overseas was built on the fact that it also constructed ships for the Royal Navy. If a company cannot sell to its own navy, why is it trying to sell overseas? If it is not competitive and good enough for the Royal Navy, what makes it believe that it is good enough to sell ships to another country's navy? It is difficult to convince overseas purchasers to buy ships in such cases. One cornerstone of Vosper Thornycroft's success is its ability to sell abroad, which is based on its successful record with the Royal Navy.

When I was a child growing up a stone's throw from the dockyard gates in Portsmouth, 48,000 civilians were employed in the dockyard. The industry was huge. That whole area of south Hampshire relied heavily on what happened in the dockyard. We are down now to fewer than 1,000 directly employed craftsmen in ship repair and maintenance on the naval base. Many of us in Portsmouth saw the relocation of Vospers operation from the Woolston yard in Southampton to the naval base in Portsmouth as a great opportunity—not only, as the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) said, for Portsmouth, but for the population of our part of south Hampshire, which stretches from the Sussex border to the edge of Southampton Water, along the New Forest coastline.

People will travel to work in such jobs. They do now, and they will in future. The yard's move to Portsmouth gave Vospers something that it did not have in Southampton: the ability to build bigger vessels. The type 45 is a great opportunity for the south coast to come alive again. We must think about the sort of ships that have been built in the dockyard, from the first dreadnoughts to Andromeda in the 1960s, the last ship built there. Vospers has a proud history of shipbuilding and the move was an opportunity to return to it.

I do not want the Minister who makes the decision about the type 45 and offshore patrol vessel contracts to take a Nelson-style approach, and put the telescope to the blind eye. He must not see only one option. Clearly, there are two options that could and should provide an opportunity for on-going competition. If the BAE Systems option is taken, Vosper and Appledore might not be around the next time that the Royal Navy is looking at shipbuilding. We need to grasp opportunities, not squander them. We have a great opportunity to fulfil the Government's ambition, and there are three good reasons why we should.

First, it is good for the UK and good for the Royal Navy for Vosper to be given an opportunity to do what the Secretary of State described on three occasions in the House and before his original statement in the middle of last year when he spoke to the Defence Committee. He gave a commitment that ships would be built in a partnership with more than one company. It is never good to put all the eggs in one basket. If competition is to mean anything, it should be fair and the rules should not be changed because someone decides to put in another bid after the competition was supposed to have closed. I cannot understand why the Government are even considering that option. Having 12 ships built by one company for one price, which would be fixed now, cannot be in the best national interest. It would cost the nation dearly over a 10-year period. There certainly would not be any savings.

Secondly, fulfilling the Government's ambition would be good for the cities of Portsmouth and Southampton and for all the businesses in and around the area that have flourished because of Vosper's success. Thirdly, it would be great for jobs—not only existing jobs but those that will be created if part of the

contract for type 45 and offshore patrol vessels is secured by Vosper. It would provide opportunities for youngsters who want to develop skills and interest in shipbuilding, which the area would otherwise lose.

This has been an important debate, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will answer some questions. What justification is there for placing orders with BAE Systems Marine without competition? Does he believe that all orders should be subject to proper strenuous competition, which is open to all? Is he aware of other unsolicited bids for shipbuilding construction, about which we have not yet been told? We have been told only about the type 45.

When does the Minister expect the decision to be made? That is the critical issue. We know that the Royal Navy desperately needs such vessels and that at least two companies are desperate for the work. I thought that the Government were desperate for a decision to be made. It is important that the Under-Secretary gives a clear indication that the decision will be made in the near future. Whatever evaluation is being made of the unsolicited bid, I hope that it can be put through the wringer quickly. I hope that jobs will not be lost. The longer the process goes on, the more people will see the opportunities for them to stay in work evaporating. Vosper must be conscious that some of its employees will start to drift away without the opportunity of continuous work. They might take up opportunities to work elsewhere. I hope that the Minister will restore confidence and show that the Ministry of Defence has not written off warship building on the south coast. The people of our area have had a commitment to this country for generations. They were there when the country needed them, and now the country must repay that loyalty. We have played our role in the defence of the realm and we now want to see the Government play fair by the people of Portsmouth and Southampton. The best way to do that is by making a quick decision that brings the second type 45 and at least a share of the offshore patrol vessel contract to Vosper Thornycroft, sooner rather than later.

11.55 am

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey). He made some powerful points in an excellent speech. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) and the hon. Members for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) and for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on their speeches.

Much of the discussion concerned competition and the fostering of competition. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh made a point that I, gently, correct. He mentioned that only two prime contractors remain for shipping contracts in the United Kingdom, but we at Appledore were prime contractors in 1995-96, when we constructed HMS Scott, the Arctic survey vessel. Had we been successful in our bid for the alternative landing ships logistics contracts—either for one or both—we would have been the prime contractor. We would have extended our covered yard by 50 yd, and we would then have been in a position to tender for larger classes of ships, which the Government knew. They would have then had exactly what they wanted—more yards in the United Kingdom to compete for work.

My hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh was right to say that we need fair competition—an ability to compete equally with other yards. After agreeing them, will the Government put the details of successful tenders in the public domain, so that competing shipyards can evaluate them to ensure that what happened was fair and that equity prevailed? The Minister will also be aware that the cost of tendering for vessels is huge. In order to encourage competition, will the Government consider underwriting part of the cost incurred by selected but unsuccessful tenderers?

Appledore has tendered for the contract to build three offshore protection vessels, which will be similar to the two that it has just completed for the Irish navy. I am told that the Irish are delighted with the vessels that we have constructed. Furthermore, I am told that Ministry of Defence officials have been on board at least one of the Irish offshore patrol vessels and were impressed by it. The officials have nothing but praise for the vessels that we have constructed.

Sadly, Appledore runs out of steel-cutting work in August this year, and lay-offs will begin. Appledore has had only one prime contract with the Ministry of Defence in the past 15 years, which was for HMS Scott. Recently, when I met the Secretary of State for Defence with Mr. Jim Wilson, the managing director of Appledore Shipyards, the Secretary of State referred to the HMS Scott contract. He said that Appledore had built a fine ship, on time to a fixed price. He said that he wished that he could say that about most other MOD contracts. All that I and the magnificent work force and management ask is for our tender to be considered on the basis of fair competition and value for money.

11.59 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): My colleagues, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey), have made an elegant and detailed defence of south coast shipyards, and I do not want to duplicate what has already been adequately covered. There are two issues with which the Minister must deal in the broader realm of policy. The first issue concerns competition policy. A dominant firm is dangerous in any industry. That applies as much to computer software as to naval vessels. Dominant firms are dangerous because, ultimately, the consumer suffers a detriment. In this case the consumer is the Royal Navy and, ultimately, the taxpayer. In this industry there is a diversity of suppliers and it has already been explained in some detail why that is an important way of protecting the industry and the consumer from abuse by a dominant company.

My hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) has just touched on the other important issue. There is a need for transparent, consistent, above-board processes of bidding and tendering. I was struck by a letter written by five of my colleagues to the Prime Minister a fortnight ago. My hon. Friends the hon. Members for Eastleigh, for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand), for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) wrote to him about the contract. One passage says:

"There are strong concerns that the bid has been made with the benefit of privileged knowledge shared by Vosper Thornycroft in their expectation of being design partners under the government's brief, rather than as competitors."

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

Any suggestion of that kind would immediately rule out an unsolicited bid as completely contrary to open competitive tendering processes.

The matter does not simply exist in isolation; I have encountered the problem recently on other naval contracts, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Torridge and West Devon. A few months ago a series of bids were made for the alternative landing ships logistics contracts. A company in my constituency, along with Appledore, put in a bid for the contract, having had been encouraged to do so by the Ministry of Defence. It went through a detailed and complex process and invested heavily in design and preparation work. The company was then told, at the very last moment, that the bids were not being taken further, for reasons that seemed to have nothing to do with cost or quality. That is why my hon. Friend was so right in insisting that tenders should be published. The participants in the bidding process should be able to see clearly what the criteria are.

Mr. Burnett: I do not know whether my hon. Friend saw the leader in the *Financial Times* on Monday 30 October 2000, entitled "Sentiment and shipbuilding". He may have noticed the point made at the start of the article to the effect that

"in spite of 'smart procurement' reforms, the old-fashioned political fix still takes precedence over value for money."

Dr. Cable: my hon. Friend has put the point more brutally, but I am sure, much more accurately than I did. We all want reassurance that the bidding procedures employed by the Ministry of Defence will be transparent so as to preserve the values of competitiveness crucial to the long-term viability of the industry. It is unfortunate that the shipbuilding industry has become so highly reliant on the Ministry of Defence. However, it is precisely for that reason that the Ministry must establish procedure that ensures competition and makes certain that any bidding procedures are transparent and commercial.

12.03 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Like other hon. Members, I do not want to take too much time as the Minister will want to have reasonable time to respond to the many detailed points that have been made.

I start by extending the usual courtesy and congratulating the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on securing the debate, although it should be held on the Floor of the House as this is an important matter. I congratulate, too, all those who spoke, many of whom referred to the proud history of shipbuilding on the south coast, although I do not want to talk much about that. In the past, in times of war and conflict, the United Kingdom has relied on vessels built in the shipyards on the south coast. We owe those yards a debt of gratitude, but gratitude is not enough. It is surely about what can be done and how good those who produce such equipment are in the usual competition process.

We are talking about a serious problem, which highlights the general debate about shipbuilding in the United Kingdom. To take up an earlier point, the debate is not about being against a particular yard in the United Kingdom. I have visited yards in Barrow-in-Furness. I have visited Cammell Laird in Liverpool and Vospers. At Appledore, I met a tremendously gung-ho, go-ahead team who really impressed me and made me believe that shipbuilding had a future in the United Kingdom. It is like that everywhere one goes. Those organisations understand the difficulties; they just want to ensure that there is fairness.

I want to tease out how the Government should approach such contracts. The type 45 contract was announced last July, when it was clear that it was going ahead. As the Minister knows, I welcomed that announcement at the time. I wish to put it on the record again that I welcome the decision and congratulate the Government's decision to end the Horizon programme. It was a difficult decision to make, but it was justified and reasonable. The issue is not one of party politics. To go it alone to produce what is necessary for the Royal Navy was the right decision.

I take issue, however, with a previous speaker who said that the matter is about competition, similar to that in the computer industry. There is a difference. The scale of the market is not the same. Also, the fact that, by and large, the Government are making the purchase, tends to skew the process. We must accept that this is not about the clear competition that one would expect on the high street, but about competition to keep procurement across a range of shipyards and to make sure that the prices are right.

I turn now to the problems faced by Vospers. After the contract was placed, there was a period of silence. In December, the Prime Minister said that the Ministry of Defence had received an unsolicited bid from BAE Systems. Martin Jay, who even now is not that far distanced from the debate, said:

"The next few months will tell us whether the government remains committed to competition in defence procurement, or would prefer to rely on a single relationship with BAE Systems".

There are two major problems. The decision will not be taken until at least September and construction may not start until 2003. As the hon. Member for Eastleigh said, the longer that drags on, the less likely it is that Vospers will be in a position to offer such competitive tendering and be able to provide the sort of ship that is required as part of that early batch of three. By the time a decision is reached, there may be only one way for the Government to go. Dragging heels over the matter will create a major problem.

I am also aware that Vospers has announced redundancies, which will involve up to 650 employees in the Woolston shipyard. That will have a huge knock-on effect. In the great scheme of things in the United Kingdom, the loss of 650 jobs will not cause a massive raising of eyebrows, but it will have a huge knock-on effect on the south coast in specialisations and skills and in being able to produce the quality of work of which Vospers is capable. It will also have an effect on Appledore, which wishes to continue in shipbuilding.

Securing a portion of the type 45 programme was an important feature for that shipyard and, more generally, for skills in the south coast region. I refer the

Government once again to their own comments on competition. I know that they have already been mentioned once or twice, but they bear repeating. The Ministry of Defence told the Select Committee:

"Competing for follow-on ships in batches increases the pressure on tenderers to reduce prices. Savings of around 30 per cent. were achieved between the First of Class vessel of the Type 23 destroyer and the 14th hull...We anticipate achieving a similar level of savings in the Type 45 programme."

The Ministry of Defence is now in the bizarre position of having announced an award, but having to contravene its own guidelines on competition and the placing of orders within the shipbuilding industry.

What is the real reason behind these developments? First, without any doubt, I see the hand of the Treasury at work. Part of the problem precedes the type 45 contract. The Minister will recall what happened to the contract for the roll on/roll off ferry. We warned that allowing four such ships to be constructed in shipyards outside the UK would have a serious knock-on effect on future orders. We can now see that happening.

Yards in Govan and Liverpool rightly believed that they were highly competitive and expected to achieve, within a UK bidding process, at least part of the award of those contracts for ship construction—but they did not. Having wrongly awarded the contracts overseas, the Government then scratched around to look for other vessels that could be constructed in those yards. That put pressure on the south coast: the business went to yards that might not, under usual circumstances, have been awarded the contracts. We now see the same process happening with the type 45. The pressure is on to provide work for yards in Scotland that could have been expected to have a clear programme of work—but did not. Short-term decisions taken a month ago clearly have a knock-on effect for later contracts and for skills on the south coast.

The most bizarre and worst of all reasons is the whiff of pork barrel politics surrounding the decision. Many Scottish Labour Members of Parliament are under pressure, particularly from the Scottish nationalists. They are, quite justifiably, complaining—and I supported them on the roll on/roll off ferry award—that work should have been allotted to those yards and that the effects would be devastating if it were not.

It is no coincidence that the Chancellor of the Exchequer, whose Department is responsible for demanding that the Ministry of Defence carefully examines the unsolicited bid, also happens to originate from the same area and is so close to those whose primary concern is about the next general election. We are all politicians in this Room and we all understand that. It is not as though it has not been done before. The worst aspect is that it was done on the back of bad decisions by the Treasury and has resulted in the impending and serious crisis for shipbuilding on the south coast.

Will the Under-Secretary explain why he refuses to take an early decision on the unsolicited bid? Why will he not return immediately to the Ministry's own guidelines on competition? If he does not, serious problems will arise. He cannot simply gamble that Vospers will be successful enough to survive and that the impact on the south coast will be less serious than the impact in Scotland. That would be a terrible decision, which most people would view as highly political and retrograde.

I hope that the Minister will rise to declare that he will no longer accept the unsolicited bid, that we should get on with the original order, that BAE should get on with its work with Vospers, that the type 45s will be brought into service as early as possible, and that highly important and competitive shipbuilding should continue on the south coast.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Until the contribution of the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), I disagreed with little that had been said. It is unfortunate that in a debate attempting to shed light on the subject, an Opposition spokesmen for a party that in government single-handedly virtually destroyed our armed forces over a period of 18 years starts whining, complaining, and crying crocodile tears on behalf of an industry for which it did little—certainly during the latter half of its term in office.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Eastleigh (Mr. Chidgey) on securing the debate. I particularly noted his remarks about the long history of shipbuilding on the south coast and its association with the Royal Navy. The shipbuilding industry near my constituency is in a similar position, so like him I am well aware of the long traditions involved. I welcome the opportunity to speak on a subject that is important to all involved in the shipbuilding industry. The hon. Gentleman and hon. Members of all parties have, rightly, articulated their constituents' concerns and, as I said, I disagreed with little. I will endeavour to answer as many of their questions as I can in the short time allowed, although I have to add the caveat that, because many of the matters that we are debating are at a delicate stage of evaluation, I will occasionally be limited in what I can say and so will not necessarily be able offer the complete assurances that they want.

Our commitment to the UK shipbuilding industry was clearly demonstrated in the strategic defence review. We have embarked on the largest warship building programme for decades. In the past nine months, the Government have placed orders for two survey vessels with Vospers, which the company subsequently decided to subcontract to Appledore; a prime contract for the design and build of the first three type 45 destroyers, with BAE Systems as prime contractor; and the design and build of two alternative landing ships logistics—ALSLs—with Swan Hunter (Tyneside). My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has also announced that, subject to the negotiation of satisfactory terms and conditions, the BAE Systems marine yard at Govan will receive an order for an additional two ALSLs. As is well known, we intend to contract with Andrew Weir Shipping Ltd., a British-based company, for the 25-year private finance initiative strategic sealift service.

Mr. Hancock: Will the Minister give way?

Dr. Moonie: If I take interventions, I will not get through the necessary points.

I think that all hon. Members would agree that, taken together, those orders and announcements represent good news for the Royal Navy and for our shipyards,

[Dr. Moonie]

creating or securing several thousand jobs in yards and ancillary industries. There is more to come: during the next few years, orders will be placed for the follow-on batches of Astute class submarines and type 45 destroyers, and for the detailed design and build of future aircraft carriers. Those will be the largest surface warship projects of recent years. The UK manufacturing industry has an excellent opportunity to participate in advanced technology programmes, which we hope to place for competition across the UK, north and south, reflecting the strengths of individual companies in shipbuilding and other areas.

Our plans also include a programme known as the future surface combatant to replace the current type 22 and type 23 frigates, submarines, and a variety of other vessels. They include the potential supply and support of offshore patrol vessels for the Royal Navy, using money-saving procurement methods. Proposals have been received, including some from Vospers. Those are currently under evaluation and, subject to a satisfactory outcome, we expect to place a contract shortly. The backdrop is therefore healthy—indeed, it is unprecedented in recent times.

Yards with the technical capacity to build naval ships are scattered widely throughout the country, including the south coast. Many of those yards would like to be considered for the simpler type of ship, but advanced warships such as submarines, destroyers and mine countermeasure ships are always likely to require specialist skills and facilities. In the north, for instance, our nuclear-powered submarines have for many years been exclusively constructed at Barrow-in-Furness, whereas in the south, Vosper Thornycroft has established a pre-eminent position in the construction of mine countermeasure ships.

I pay tribute to Appledore shipbuilders of north Devon. With a standing work force of only 540, Appledore has proved that it can make a substantial contribution to shipbuilding in this country. Under subcontract to Vospers, it is building our new survey vessels—highly capable new ships that, thanks to improved sea-keeping, will be able to carry out survey work in the rough waters of our western approaches for about 90 per cent of the year. That work is expected to sustain around 800 jobs with Appledore and its suppliers for the next three years. I encourage the company to maintain its efforts to participate in MOD work, while continuing to seek out commercial and naval work from other customers. That broader customer base should remain a key element of all our shipyards' strategies.

The honourable Member for Eastleigh commented extensively on Vosper Thornycroft, and I shall concentrate mainly on that company. I hope that my summary will allay some of his concerns and those of his constituents about the overall picture. Hon. Members may be aware that the Ministry of Defence recently signed a memorandum of understanding with Vosper Thornycroft to explore further the possibility of the company relocating its steel warship building business from its current location in Woolston, Southampton, to land leased at Portsmouth naval base. That proposal would allow Vosper Thornycroft to expand its facilities using surplus assets within the naval base, and increase the extent to which it can participate in the construction of larger warships.

If Vosper Thornycroft decides to proceed with the move, which remains a commercial decision for the company, it will make a major contribution to our drive to modernise and rationalise warship repair and maintenance throughout the United Kingdom. That will contribute substantial savings against the defence budget to fund the front-line improvements outlined in the strategic defence review through the warship support modernisation initiative. It should bring benefits at Portsmouth to the Ministry of Defence and to the company by reducing costs and improving efficiencies, while at the same time improving the support provided to the front line.

As hon. Members know, Vosper Thornycroft is involved in type 45 procurement because of its record as a designer and builder of innovative warships for the Royal Navy and various foreign navies. The company has been building ships at Southampton for more than 100 years, supplying 270 ships to 34 countries in the past 30 years. Its performance in exporting warships is particularly noteworthy: in the past 20 years, it has successfully built ships for the navies of Egypt, Kenya, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, to name but a few. Its building of the Hunt and Sandown classes of mine countermeasures ships in glass reinforced plastic for the Royal Navy has put it at the top of the world league for building these extremely sophisticated warships.

The Vosper Thornycroft group is a fine example of diversification, having used the experience it gained in shipbuilding to expand into new markets and reduce its dependence on warship contracts. That effort has been highly successful, with 67 per cent. of the group's turnover in the last financial year unrelated to new ship contracts. I am pleased that Vosper Thornycroft still wants to continue shipbuilding and its commitment so far to the design of the type 45 destroyer is evidence of that, as is its commitment to reforming its facilities to undertake the efficient building of those vessels.

We appreciate the shipbuilding community's anxieties about the lack of short-term work, despite the orders that have been placed by the Government. Bearing in mind the inevitable fluctuations in the ordering pattern for Royal Navy warships brought about by their long service life, we review the capacity of United Kingdom shipyards to undertake our forward programme, but it is not an exact science. The change to more modern methods of modular construction, the differing mixes of skills required for particular ship types and the way in which any particular shipbuilder will undertake the work make precise projections difficult. There is sufficient capacity in current UK shipyards to undertake our requirements, but that capacity cannot be sustained solely on the order book from Her Majesty's Government. That is why we give the strongest support to naval export orders.

We shall continue to seek to adopt commercial best practice whenever possible in design, manufacture, maintenance and marketing. We hope that that will allow predominantly warship yards to take on commercial work and vice versa, to assist in smoothing out peaks and troughs. I stress that adoption of commercial practices does not mean that we will relax

any element that would compromise our ships' ability to perform their operational role. Operational effectiveness remains paramount.

The Government have a clear interest in maintaining a competitive and efficient shipbuilding industry. However, the first concern of the Ministry of Defence must be to provide our armed forces with the best possible equipment at the best value for money for the taxpayer. It is up to the yards themselves to be as efficient and productive as possible to compete for Ministry of Defence contracts and for other orders. Our order book, even on the scale now in prospect, cannot sustain the UK shipbuilding industry on its own. Ministry of Defence work provides an opportunity; companies with shipbuilding interests must reach beyond that for commercial and export work, which will in turn feed back into greater efficiency in a virtuous circle. That is, and will be, the most effective mechanism to ensure job security.

The shipbuilding situation changes frequently for many reasons, including the pressures placed on yards in a highly competitive market. That is not new. The important thing is to win the orders. Vospers won the order for the survey vessels and decided to subcontract the construction of the vessels to Appledore. Changed circumstances, however, have left it with a shortfall of steel construction work in the short term. The Government can and will provide strong support to shipbuilders in their search for other customers, but we cannot compensate for a lack of success in securing orders from them.

I said that I would talk about the unsolicited bid that we received from BAE Marine Systems for an alternative procurement strategy on the type 45 programme. For some time, the Government's policy has been to maintain a competitive base for warship building within the United Kingdom. The uncertainty that that causes for jobs is well understood and it is clearly a worrying matter for the work force both at Vospers and on the Clyde. As with any proposal that may offer better value for money for the taxpayer, we are bound to consider it, so we are doing so carefully, looking at the full range of issues that such a proposal raises in consultation with other Government Departments. The prime contractor has now passed his assessment of the proposal to the MOD.

I should like to give a clear statement about the outcome of our assessment, as hon. Members have requested, but I cannot. The assessment and evaluation of the bid is continuing and no decision has been made. We will come to a decision on that difficult issue as soon as possible, and I assure hon. Members that they will be informed of the outcome at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Chidgey: I understand the Minister's problem, but can he tell us whether the Government are in discussion with BAE Systems on developing a long-term warship building strategy in partnership with the company? If so, is any other company being invited into those discussions?

Dr. Moonie: As far as I am aware, that is not part of the current discussions, which focus purely on the bid. Obviously, it is part of the company's long-term strategy and no one can blame BAE for trying. It is operating in the same commercial environment as everyone else.

Returning to the other points made by the hon. Member for Eastleigh and by my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), I can assure hon. Members that the prime contractor's work is closely overseen by the Defence Procurement Agency. In addition, Vospers has clear visibility of the developing design—indeed, it is leading the technical design team. That is working well. Work that Vospers is to undertake on first of class is clearly understood by the prime contractor, by Vospers and by Marine, and the contract pricing reflects that. That has not changed since it was articulated by the Chief of Defence Procurement on 21 December last year.

Vospers has agreed that it is difficult to contract while the design is immature. It has joined with the prime contractor and Marine to develop a detailed cost model for type 45 to allow a commitment to be made to it by September and enable its investment to go forward. That work is going well. It is to be reviewed in the next couple of weeks by the Defence Procurement Agency, by Vosper, Marine and the prime contractor. I can assure hon. Members that although the process might appear to have stalled, it is still progressing satisfactorily. That is of no great comfort to a yard that has a temporary shortfall of work, but there is nothing that we can do about that. The time scale for the steel construction was always fairly fixed. The hiatus is unfortunate but it is not the fault of the DPA, the Ministry of Defence, nor the company involved in the type 45 process. We are doing our best to move matters forward.

The prime contract for the first three ships was placed last December. It assumes a division of work between Vospers and BAE Systems Marine that will allow them both to gain experience and compete effectively for subsequent ships. That remains our intention. We are evaluating the bid from BAE Systems. In due course, when it has been fully evaluated, I will report on the results.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Time is up. Before I call the hon. Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon), I should like to say that although I do not know who the young lady was who handed a piece of paper to the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon, but as she was not a Member or a Doorkeeper, that was grossly out of order.

Social Services (Calderdale)

12.30 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I ask your permission, Mr. McWilliam, for my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Ms McCafferty) to speak after me. We share the local authority area of Calderdale and many of the cuts in social and other services proposed by the ruling Conservative group affect both our constituencies.

Since I asked for this debate some time ago, the Conservative group has backed down from making certain cuts and has decided to use some of the money from the housing transfer budget to save certain vital services. We must ask why the Conservatives have caused so much anxiety to many vulnerable people when, if we are to believe them, the money was there all the time.

The U-turn on the proposal to close the Scope outreach centre is very welcome, but I put on the record a warning that the Conservative council retreated from the cut only because of the wonderful campaign mounted by Janice Crabtree, the co-ordinator, her staff, the relatives and friends of the service users and, most importantly, the users—people such as Mr. Mark Pollard. He wrote to the *Evening Courier* in Halifax saying:

"I attend the service at the Bembridge Park Centre two days a week, on Mondays and Wednesdays. I learn about computers, literacy and numeracy, creative writing, cooking and drama.

This has allowed me to learn and develop things that I never dreamed of because I have cerebral palsy and visual impairment.

I have been able to publish poems, have a voice and opinion about things and to actually feel that I am a member of society.

If the service is closed what I have learned would be lost because I would not be able to get the same support that I get from this service as I know there are no services that can meet my needs to the same level."

That was a wonderful entreaty not to close the service. I am pleased for Mr. Pollard and the other users that there has been a retreat from the proposed cut. As hon. Members can see from that letter, the Scope outreach centre truly supports people with cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities so that they can achieve their individual potential. It is a centre of excellence and should never have been considered for closure in the first place. The Tories on Calderdale council had to listen and they have changed their mind.

Similarly, there was a proposal to close three adventure playgrounds that provide a good social service in areas in which there are many children and in deprived areas. A vigorous campaign was fought to save the playgrounds. Again, I pay tribute to the people such as Colin and Janice Jagger, who campaigned and fought so hard to save them. The Tory leader, Councillor John Ford, now says that they never intended to close that vital service for children, but I simply do not believe him. The massive campaign to save the playgrounds went on for two months, so why cause so much anxiety and fear among those communities for more than two months if they never intended to close them in the first place? The Tories could simply have said, "That is not true."

Welcome though the reprieve is for those services, many more face the axe. I am very concerned about the proposal to end free school milk. Since the Labour Government entered office, the eradication of child poverty has been a priority: 1 million children have been taken out of poverty and the Government plan to take another 2 million out of poverty in the next few years. School milk is an essential service for young children, particularly those with a low-income background. It provides vital nutrition, it is cheap and the take-up rate is almost 100 per cent. I call on councillors such as Mohamed Choudry and Shakir Saghir in St. Johns, Lorraine Stott in Mixendon and others to oppose this nasty little cut, which will save only £90,000. If they vote for the cut, they will harm children. The so-called independent councillor in Calderdale, Colin Stout, continually refers to his independence, so why is he taking the Tory whip on such a cut? It is disgraceful.

Another cut that looks small in monetary terms but would cause an enormous reduction in a vital service is the decision to axe £12,570 from the drugs and alcohol residential rehabilitation budget. That would be a disaster in the face of the increasing problem of drugs in Halifax and the Calder Valley. The mobile response team will be cut by £100,000, even though that service offers a lifeline to elderly people living in the community. My hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley will go into more detail, but we have both visited the scheme and know its worth.

Cuts to such vital services will threaten the excellent work of the health and social affairs committee set up by the former Labour council. The council is one of five that have achieved beacon status for joint working with the health services. That sort of initiative is rare and is included in the 10-year national health service plan. Labour-controlled Calderdale council introduced joint working in 1994 and it would be tragic if the committee's excellent work was threatened because of cuts in the grant to the voluntary sector, which I shall now address.

The proposed cut in the grant to advice centres has encouraged the citizens advice bureau to try to outbid two other voluntary organisations—Rhodes street advice centre and the DART advice centre for the disabled. Sadly, the CAB appears to have done a deal with the Tories, although I have warned it that if it sups with the devil, it will need a very long spoon. Calderdale DART is an advice centre for people with disabilities; it offers the excellent specialist service that is needed if, as we all want, disabled people are to remain in the community. One of its users wrote to the Halifax *Evening Courier* stating:

"I am particularly incensed to see that the local authority has encouraged voluntary organisations to try to outbid each other in the competition for funding....

As a client of Calderdale DART I have nothing but praise for the service it provides. Advice is accurate, clients are given polite, courteous treatment and more so. DART's motto seems to be that if it can't help it knows someone who can!

I have an assigned advice worker which prevents me having to explain my circumstances every time I contact DART. They will visit me in my own home, as my disability prevents me accessing office-based advice centres.

I have on several occasions also attempted to obtain advice from the CAB. The telephone help line is continually unavailable; apparently only 26 per cent. of its calls are answered."

That shows the pressure on the citizens advice bureau. I am not criticising it for that, but it is ludicrous to suggest that it could take over two specialist services.

The other advice centre that will close if the cut in the voluntary sector goes ahead and there is an amalgamation is the Rhodes street advice centre. It is an invaluable service in the middle of the Asian community and the co-ordinator, councillor Mohamed Najib, who ran the centre as a volunteer for years, and his staff of five offer advice on social services, housing, health, immigration and a host of other subjects. They deal with 14,000 queries a year and the suggestion that the CAB could replicate that service is nonsense. To go down that road is to play into the hands of right-wing extremists on Calderdale council.

Finally, I shall mention another service for retired people highlighted by the Liberal Democrat spokesman on Calderdale council. There is a possible cut in the budget for Matham Road bowling club and Ackroyd bowling green. Elderly people use those facilities and the council will save only £8,000. Meanwhile, it is spending £80,000 to ask the people of Calderdale for their ideas on best value—it is spending £80,000 on a public relations exercise while cutting two well-used and well-loved bowling greens.

The Tory budget contains many cuts that would harm young, disabled or elderly people. Tory councillors who fought last May's election on promises to improve services should examine their consciences. They ought to put the interests of the electorate who voted for them first by voting against this awful budget.

12.40 pm

Ms Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): We have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) that the Tories who run Calderdale council are guilty of incompetence and heartlessness in drawing up their budget proposals. I am of course delighted by the reprieve of services such as road safety education, recycling facilities, adventure playgrounds and especially the Scope outreach service, but, as my hon. Friend mentioned, credit for that is due to local people who have campaigned vigorously against the cuts. There is no credit due to the Tories for withdrawing proposals that should never have been made in the first place.

The original Conservative budget proposals caused massive dismay and concern throughout Calderdale. In particular, the proposed cuts to the Scope outreach centre and the mobile response unit caused anger, outrage and fear among people who depend on those vital services. Indeed, it appears that some of the cuts were not even required. It is hard to believe that the council's financial position could have changed so much in only three weeks. The satisfaction of seeing some of those services saved should not hide the long-term damage that will be inflicted by the Tory budget, because many damaging cuts remain.

The Tories still propose to decimate the mobile response service by cutting its budget by more than half. They have failed to indicate how the same level of service can be provided. Therefore, they are putting 2,500 vulnerable elderly people at risk by their actions. They are continuing to ignore the health of young children by scrapping free school milk, they are reducing the alcohol and drug rehabilitation budget and—this is an idea from the dark ages—they are closing 22 public toilets, which will make life difficult for the elderly, diabetics and anyone with poor bladder control.

There are also serious doubts about the long-term future of services. The Tories have given social services extra funding for one year, but that could mean cuts of up to £1 million next year. They have piled further pressure on social services by failing to give them adequate funding for contracts. Perhaps they know that they will lose control of Calderdale next year, so they are happy to pile up problems for the party that takes over from them. It is an uncaring and short-sighted budget from an uncaring and short-sighted party.

I should like to give an example of the damage that the Tories' heartless proposals would cause. The mobile response team is part of the community alarm service. A team of staff are on call 24 hours a day to go out immediately to people who press their alarm button because they need help. They may have fallen or need help getting back into a chair or bed. They may be unwell and need someone to check and reassure them. They may have had an accident or have some other care need, in which case the response team will visit, assess their problem and provide appropriate help. The team makes a real difference to the quality of life of older people. Without it, there would be no choice but to call an ambulance or other emergency service, which would mean that many of the older people would quickly end up in either hospital or long-term care.

The Conservatives still want to decimate the team by cutting more than half the budget. However, they have no idea how that might be achieved or what might replace the service, and they have had no discussions with the charity that provides the service. Last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax and I met the staff. Like many who work in social care, they are totally committed to the people whom they help. They are at a loss to understand how anyone can treat their work and the service that they provide with such contempt.

It is perhaps ironic that Calderdale was recently awarded beacon status for its joint work with health. Of course, that reflects policies and initiatives that were implemented by the previous Labour administration. However, the Tory budget proposals and the way in which they were prepared must cast doubt on how long Calderdale will retain beacon status. There has been no consultation with health and voluntary sector partners, some of whose grants are being cut. No thought has been given to the impact of such actions on the priorities and agendas that have been established. Calderdale authority is not generously, or even adequately, funded. Social care staff have said that they are deeply disillusioned with the way in which the authority treats the social services department. Their belief that they are treated as second-class citizens is reflected in the fact that the authority is finding it difficult to recruit staff.

We are awaiting publication of the social services inspection of services for older people, and it is perhaps unfortunate that the report will not be published until the budget process has been completed. It is widely believed that the report will criticise the department's performance in many areas. It is unlikely that it will make a case for cutting expenditure on vital services, but actions that officers might take to address any criticisms in the report will be undermined at the outset by Tory budget proposals that will further damage morale and funding.

[Ms Chris McCafferty]

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax and I have made it clear that we will support council representations to the Government for further assistance, but only if it is honest about the financial situation and its proposals' impact, and if it ceases to target its proposed cuts on the most vulnerable. To date, our offer has been ignored. It seems that Calderdale Tories are more interested in political gestures than working together to benefit vulnerable people.

I ask the Minister to consider the problems that Calderdale faces. This year, Calderdale enjoyed a very generous financial settlement—the second highest secured by a metropolitan borough. However, historically, Calderdale has been underfunded because of decisions taken in the 1980s on the structure of local government finance. I hope that that issue will be addressed in the future, but is targeted help available now? Could such help be accompanied by further vigilance in seeking to protect the vulnerable in Calderdale from the impact of the budget proposals? I urge the strongest possible action to ensure that Calderdale council meets its targets and achieves the standard of services that local people have a right to expect.

12.48 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) on securing this important opportunity to debate social services spending plans in Calderdale. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley (Ms McCafferty) on her important contribution.

Both my hon. Friends will agree that social services provide a hugely important range of services for some of the most vulnerable in our society, particularly children and the elderly. They can also help by dealing directly with the very real issues of social exclusion and deprivation that continue adversely to affect too many of our communities and fellow citizens. Those are very important responsibilities, and I believe that it is the Government's task to ensure that those crucial services are properly resourced and operate within a framework that promotes greater independence, opportunity and choice, and which raises the quality of front-line services. However, it is the job of local authorities such as Calderdale to provide and plan for the necessary front-line services to meet the needs of local communities, and to demonstrate clear improvements in both quality and accessibility. Those are the essential criteria against which any proposals for social services expenditure must be judged.

I turn first to the issue of resources. The Government have substantially increased the resources available to local councils to ensure that they are better able to discharge their duties. I should like to say more about those new resources, highlighting how Calderdale has benefited. Through the spending review announced early last year, over the next three years the Government are increasing by an average of 3.4 per cent. in real terms the resources that are available to councils with social services responsibilities. That increase compares with an average real-terms growth in social services resources of just 0.1 per cent. per annum during the previous Parliament.

The people of Calderdale will be among those who benefit from the substantial increases in resources provided for social services. This year, the funding made available through standard spending assessments is just over £32 million—5.1 per cent. more than in the previous year. We recently announced that those resources will increase again next year by a further 4.4 per cent.—substantially above the rate of inflation. In addition, the council will gain from the significant increases in new and on-going special grants that we are making available. In December, the Secretary of State for Health announced that a further £100 million, on top of the figures that I have quoted, would be made available for social services spending in 2001-02. Calderdale council will benefit by an extra £378,000 from those additional ring-fenced resources.

We have provided significant additional resources for children's services over the past few years. Last year, we introduced, for the first time, a grant to improve the range and quality of children's social services provided by local councils. In the first year of that grant, Calderdale received £260,000. It received a further £410,000 this year, and next year the grant will rise to £1.026 million. Other services have received additional resources. For example, Calderdale's carer's grant has more than trebled over the past three years. The grant totalled £75,000 in 1999 but will rise to £259,000 next year. Similarly, the council's mental health grant over the same three-year period will have risen from £331,000 in 1999 to £597,000 next year.

I hope that both my hon. Friends accept that the Government have provided significant new and additional resources to Calderdale council. In 2001-02, adding together what has been allocated through standard spending assessments and the new ring-fenced grants, the council has been provided with more than £36 million to spend on its social services. Exactly how those substantial sums are spent is for the council to decide. Local councillors must weigh up how much should be allocated to social care services, taking into account Government targets and what local users and carers want. It is the council's responsibility to manage those resources carefully and sensibly, so that maximum benefit accrues to people who require social services in Calderdale. That is the challenge facing all councils at this time of year as they set their budgets for 2001-02.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax rightly decided to raise her concerns at a time when it seemed that Conservative councillors in Calderdale intended to impose swingeing cuts on the social services budget, putting many vulnerable people at risk. Like my hon. Friend, I was worried when that prospect was brought to my attention. However, I understand that following recommendations made last night as a result of the concerns that she and others had raised about the proposals, councillors have revised their budget allocations and have stepped back from taking a number of decisions which would have caused considerable anxiety to local people. I know that she and my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley remain concerned about some of the decisions that Conservative councillors appear to be intent on pursuing, and I fully understand that. The yardstick against which those and any other decisions are to be judged will be the extent to which they enhance community well-being and help to meet the needs of

vulnerable people in Calderdale. It will be for local people to make any such judgment and to express it through the ballot box.

The Government will continue to look carefully and closely at the performance of social services in Calderdale to ensure that progress is made in meeting the national objectives that we have set. I assure both my hon. Friends that those objectives are not optional. They were set for the clear purpose of raising the standard of social services in every part of the country, and Calderdale is no exception. We expect every council to take the necessary steps to meet those standards, because that is the right way in which to end the lottery of care that has been apparent in social services for far too long.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax recognises that Calderdale can point to progress in improving its performance in a number of important areas. On children's services, for example, the council's performance in providing stability for looked-after children has improved significantly, but only one in three children leaving care did so with any educational qualifications. That is not good enough and we shall look for significant improvements in that important indicator.

In Calderdale, few people with learning disabilities are helped to live at home, although the number is gradually increasing. The same picture emerges for people with physical disabilities or mental health problems, and residential care services are acknowledged to be poor. Some inspections of residential homes for adults were not carried out within the statutory time scale, and the number of people entering residential care in Calderdale is much higher than the national average. That needs careful attention.

Everyone accepts that it is better for people to be helped to live in their own homes. Unfortunately, in Calderdale, the number of people receiving intensive care to allow them to live in their own homes fell last year against the national trend. That is a matter of concern and I shall look to the local authority to make greater efforts to bring its local performance into line with that in other parts of the country.

Calderdale is to be congratulated on achieving beacon status for partnership working in health. It will be necessary to ensure that high-quality services and strong partnership working are maintained when the reconfiguration of local health services has been completed.

In summary, Calderdale is at the start of a long journey in the development of good social care services. That will require a strategic, long-term vision of what needs to be done. That vision will have to be embraced by elected Members and the local community. It will take time, commitment and further investment, not less.

Mrs. Mahon: Will the Minister look particularly at the joint working between the local authority and Calderdale health care trust, because together they have done such good work? If the cuts jeopardise that, it would be sad for all those who have worked so hard.

Mr. Hutton: I agree strongly with my hon. Friend; I had intended briefly to mention intermediate care developments in Calderdale.

This is not the time to contemplate cutting funding for crucial, front-line social care services. Rather, it is time to review whether every pound is spent to maximum effect, whether better commissioning practices might release further savings, whether the balance between cost and quality is right, and whether current services are delivering the outcome sought by local people.

I referred earlier to the new policy framework within which we expect social services to operate. Central to that policy framework is the development of a new range of intermediate care services designed to prevent avoidable admissions to hospital, to enhance rehabilitation and faster recovery from illness, and to enable as many people as possible to live independently in their own homes. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax is anxious to see development of the new services in Calderdale and to ensure that the budget reductions proposed by the local Conservatives do not impede developments in that important area. I share her concern. We have made significant new resources available through the national health service plan, which are filtering through to services in Calderdale. For example, the Calderdale primary care group will benefit next year from a specific allocation for intermediate care of more than £150,000.

A substantial component of the £900 million announced in the NHS plan relates to resources provided to local government. In determining funding for social services to be made available through the standard spending assessment over the next three years, we took account specifically of additional council investment in services that promote independence, particularly for older people. The local government settlement makes provision for that over the next three years. The deployment of money provided through the standard spending assessment is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax acknowledged, a decision for councils in the light of local circumstances.

There has been significant development in intermediate care services in Calderdale and all the service providers who have been involved in that deserve congratulations. A range of new services is coming on line which will enhance the care and support available to older people. It would be tragic if any of that was put at risk because of short-sighted decisions that local Conservative councillors might be tempted to make.

My hon. Friend the Member for Halifax has done her constituents a substantial service, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley, in raising these matters this afternoon. We shall continue to take a close interest and watch over what is happening in Calderdale to ensure that the proper national objectives that we have set for social services over the next three years are delivered for the benefit of her constituents and of those of my hon. Friend the Member for Calder Valley.

Children's Health

1 pm

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): The Minister will know that I served as Chairman of the Select Committee on Health for five years and that, in 1996-97, that Committee undertook an inquiry into children's health. I have maintained my interest in the matter and I am delighted to have this opportunity to raise matters of concern with her.

First, I seek an assurance from the Minister on the needs of children explicitly described in the booklet, "Your Guide to the NHS", which bears little resemblance to the old patients charter. It emphasises patients' responsibilities to the NHS, as well as their rights. However, the guide makes no explicit reference to the health needs of children, unlike the "Charter for Children and Young People", which was issued in 1996 during the Select Committee's inquiry into services for children and young people. I should welcome the hon. Lady's comments on whether there has been an omission and whether the Government are prepared to rectify it.

Another matter that causes concern relates to children in adult wards and intensive care units. What assurance can the Government give that the needs of children who are ill and in hospital are not being ignored? Unfortunately, basic principles of care that have been acknowledged by all Governments since 1959 and highlighted by the Select Committee's inquiries into services for children and young people, such as children on adult wards, are still being ignored.

The Government have increased finance for paediatric intensive care, but children are still being routinely admitted to adult intensive care units following elective surgery, because some surgeons still ignore Department of Health guidance and undertake specialist surgery on children in hospitals without the appropriate facilities. Careful monitoring of paediatric intensive care, as promised in the Department of Health guidance in 1997, seems to have omissions because children who are admitted following elective surgery do not seem to be identified.

The Select Committee was shocked to discover that children's community services, which have been supported by every Government since the Platt report in 1959, are still not universally available, with about 40 per cent. of the United Kingdom being without a service. I welcome the Diana, Princess of Wales children's community teams for children with life-threatening or terminal conditions, but eight teams for England, although important, is a small contribution compared with what is needed. Many children with acute illness or following surgery remain in hospital because no children's community nursing service is available locally.

I shall quote from the Select Committee's third report, which states in paragraph 49:

"The overall intention must be to introduce as soon as possible a home nursing service provided by appropriately qualified staff and available to all children requiring nursing interventions and their families. For many years there has been such a nursing service for adults in their own homes. We consider that, as a matter of principle, sick children need and deserve no less."

I would welcome the Minister's response on that.

As for child and adolescent mental health, following the Select Committee's fourth report, the Government allocated money to that wholly inadequate service. However, the removal of child and adolescent mental health services from children's services, which has links with children's social services, education and children's health services, into newly-established mental health trusts, which are focused on the needs of adults and are unconnected with the range of agencies concerned with children, causes some concern. Unfortunately, the reality is that a stigma is still attached to mental health services, so some families may not wish to have the stigma of services from a mental health trust.

In addition, due to the paucity of services, children with mental health difficulties are admitted to acute paediatric wards, which are in a different trust. I ask the Minister, is this shift to services focused primarily on the needs of adults for the convenience of managerial organisation and professionals rather than the needs of children and their families?

There is a role for a children's commissioner—we now have a Children's Commissioner for Wales—although only one with a clearly defined role. The children's commissioner should be entitled to monitor the interests of children looked after by statutory services. He or she should also have a wider function in relation to the work that affects children that the Government carry out across all Departments.

Children—almost uniquely in society—are unable to participate in the democratic process. Adults make legislation and regulations that affect them, both directly in terms of provisions dealing with children and indirectly through the way in which we legislate to support the family. It is therefore right that an independent person should have the remit to examine legislative proposals across the range of Departments and to represent the interests of the children who will be affected by them. In that way, those interests will properly be taken into account in the workings of government and the legislative process.

I welcome the children's taskforce, but I have concerns about the needs of children who are sick within the NHS. The children's taskforce appears to focus on prevention and young people who cause specific difficulties, such as pregnant teenagers. Of course, I acknowledge the importance of prevention. Indeed, the Select Committee second report states:

"The rewards of good health care in childhood, especially health promotion and preventative interventions, are unique because the benefits may last a life time, and may be passed on to future generations."

There is, however, considerable concern that the needs of children who are ill are not being appropriately considered, but lumped together with adult services.

As a Member of Parliament who is interested in the issue, I must inform the Minister that I have been unable to obtain more than a photostat copy of the children's taskforce booklet and introduction. I should be grateful if I could have some copies of it in its true form, rather than having to rely upon that. I telephoned the lady whose name appears in the booklet to ask for copies, but unfortunately I received no reply. I should be most grateful if the Minister could help.

One aspect of quality health care that the Select Committee praised was integrated services for children without traditional barriers between hospital and

community services. They included acute services, such as neo-natal intensive care and hospital in-patient and out-patient care, and school nursing and community services, such as community children's nursing services and services for children with learning disabilities or mental health problems. As the staff involved include therapists, a child receiving, say, physiotherapy in the community for his cerebral palsy would, following surgery, receive treatment from the same physiotherapist while he was an in-patient in the acute hospital.

One of the themes identified was that services are too often organised for the convenience of staff and, sadly, such services are now being broken up to fit managerial convenience instead of children's needs. The emphasis on primary care trusts is resulting in community aspects of children's services going into the primary care trust, in mental health going into adult-focused adult mental health trusts, and in acute services going into adult-focused acute hospital trusts. Children therefore become a small part in adult-focused services, with staff that are educated and experienced in children's needs divided and increasingly isolated.

The Government recently announced their intention to set national standards for children's services, which is to be welcomed. I hope that early dates for the publication and implementation of those standards will be announced, as that would ensure that children's needs are not overlooked in services designed primarily for adults. A national service framework for all children would ensure that children's needs are not overlooked through services designed for adults, with children fitted in or, on a disease basis, tagged on to services that are geared primarily toward adults.

I am most grateful for the opportunity to place on record the anxieties that I and many others have about children's health. We look forward to the Minister's response and the addition of more information to that which we already have on the policies that the Department of Health, the hon. Lady and her colleagues will implement.

1.13 pm

The Minister for Public Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) on having secured the debate and choosing it to discuss an issue about which I feel especially strongly and which is extremely important for both the Government and the House. I pay tribute to the work that she has done with the Select Committee on Health and subsequently on children's health, an issue on which she has campaigned and worked for a long time.

The matter is extremely important to the Government, not simply from the point of view of children's health, but because children's health is so closely linked with other aspects of children's lives. Perhaps more tangibly than at any other stage in life, social, emotional and educational development are closely linked to health. That is especially true in the years when children are very young. Health in the early years can affect health throughout life, and health problems that develop in childhood can haunt people throughout their lives. The deep-rooted health inequalities in society often stem not simply from childhood but from pregnancy. The Government therefore regard children's health as a priority.

In responding to the points raised by the hon. Lady, I shall set out some of the progress that has been made and some of the measures that are already under way. I shall also outline some of the work that is being planned for the future in relation to the children's taskforce and the standards she mentioned towards the end of her speech.

A major programme of work is being planned to draw together many of the individual strands of children's health into a single national service framework for children. The national service frameworks have been developed as major programmes across the health service. NSFs are currently in place for mental health and coronary heart disease, and although the cancer plan had a slightly different genesis than NSFs, it sets out comprehensive standards of care and treatment in a similar fashion. The full range of care, from prevention to treatment to palliative care, is covered for conditions that are the big killers in society. We are keen to apply the same comprehensive approach to children's health. I strongly believe that the national service framework should not only be about children's heath services, but that it should include prevention and health promotion and cover many of the service issues raised by the hon. Lady.

We are still at an early stage in developing and determining the scope of the national service framework. A major consultation will be needed: parents, children and young people will be subject to extensive consultation as part of the process. The children's taskforce will play a major role in that work. We are currently at the stage of determining what issues should be included. I shall outline a few of the areas in which work is already under way, which will need to be fed into the national service framework, and cover some of the other areas that the national service framework will have to address in more detail.

We have taken considerable action on prevention, which, as the hon. Lady said, is extremely important. The rolling-out of the meningitis C vaccine programme is an example: we are the first country in the world to introduce a nationwide meningitis C programme. Managing to introduce it and offer the vaccine to everyone under the age of 18 in the space of 15 months is a huge tribute to the NHS, especially school nurses and those working in primary care who implemented the programme.

Work has also been done on promoting healthy living for children, especially in relation to access to fruit and vegetables and a healthy diet. Today, we roll out the next wave of the programme to provide free fruit in infants schools. Experts recommend five portions of fruit and vegetables a day to help to prevent cancer, heart disease and asthma in children. Research shows that, on average, children only have about two portions a day and children in low-income areas have considerably fewer. The provision of free fruit in infants schools across the country will make a major contribution to increased access to fruit and vegetables and a healthy diet, and to improving children's nutrition and long-term health.

Work has been done in relation to maternity services, and the sure start programme is tackling ill health and promoting health among families and children in the early years—for those under four—ensuring proper access to immunisation programmes and health care

[Yvette Cooper]

and, importantly, signposting to specialist services when health problems arise, ensuring diagnosis at the earliest possible moment, and proper support and provision of the expert services required in low-income areas.

The hon. Member for Broxbourne referred to acute care and community care. She is right to say that we introduced additional funding in 1997 to improve paediatric intensive care. To date, an additional £51 million has gone into building up the strengths of centres providing the highest level of care to the most critically ill children to ensure ready access, to develop specialist retrieval teams and to increase funding for specialist skills, especially nursing skills. We are now considering what further improvements we need to make to the level of local hospital support for that system to meet the needs of children who require high-dependency care. We must also consider neo-natal intensive care, in which expert work is under way that we can feed into the national service framework. We have made clear our intention to expand critical care—we have made major improvements during the past few years—but we need to be especially sensitive to the issues of neo-natal and paediatric intensive care.

The hon. Lady asked whether particular areas or consultants were following best practice. We know that that is in place in many areas—there are some excellent examples—but we also know that there is wide variation in the care provided, which is unacceptable. That is what drives the national service framework. In coronary heart disease, cancer and other areas, the national service framework has set national standards that every area must follow, which can be followed up through clinical governance and inspection mechanisms and the NHS performance management framework to ensure that they are properly implemented. The national service framework for children's services will provide us with the levers to ensure that every area is able to adapt and start to follow best practice, which we know is in place in some areas. That will take some time and we should be realistic: identifying best practice and developing the right standards will take time, but it will provide us with a powerful mechanism as the work takes place.

The hon. Lady also mentioned community care for children. That is especially important because, no matter how ill children become, most families want to care for them at home and most children will always be more comfortable at home. We should provide whatever services we can in the community. Through the national service framework, we shall need to consider the developing role of health visitors and school nurses, work on which has already begun as a result of the "Saving Lives" White Paper to improve the public and family health role of such services. Again, we need to consider what further work can be done and what further role such services can play as part of the national service framework.

We also need to consider support not just for prevention but for those children who become sick or have problems, whatever they may be. The hon. Lady referred to Diana nurses—we strongly support their work and are keen to learn lessons from it when providing care across the country. We are also keen to ensure proper palliative care support for children in the tragic circumstances in which it is needed. That is being considered as part of the current wave of consultation on the new opportunities fund to determine what additional care and support can be provided.

The hon. Lady referred to child and adolescent mental health services. A considerable amount of work has been done; national targets in health and social care for child and adolescent mental health services were introduced for the first time in 1999, under the national priorities guidance. In the past two years, we have invested £50 million of additional funds in the modernisation fund and the mental health grant to help to achieve those targets. For a long time, mental health was not regarded as a serious problem for children, because it was felt that they would simply grow out of it, which is not the case. More work must be done to extend the best practice in some areas to the whole country. Capacity, reform and the provision of services must be considered.

We are committed to the growth of NHS capacity across the board as part of the NHS plan, putting extra investment and extra staffing in place to deliver services, although we must be realistic about the time it will take to deliver necessary improvements. However, we need not simply to expand capacity, but to reform the way we do things by setting national standards and focusing on children's needs. We need to focus on prevention, not simply on treating the sick, and to work in partnership with schools, families and the community. Work with children cannot be done by the NHS alone.

A theme from the NHS plan that we must consider in the context of children's services and children's health is that current professional roles may have to change and professional barriers that have been in place for a long time may have to come down. Much work is being done in that sector at present, and we are keen to ensure that it links with other action across Government. The health service should not work in isolation; we must consider social services, the obvious area of support, but also education and support for those with learning difficulties.

We must acknowledge that inequality and poverty are the root causes of children's ill health. My view is that a commitment to abolish child poverty will have more impact on children's health than any other Government measure. We have already made progress in that respect by taking 1 million children out of poverty in the course of this Parliament, which is a huge step forward, but there is an awful lot left to do. Many children still need help and support, but in the long run, action on child poverty will improve children's health. Health inequalities are partly to do with the causes of ill health, but also relate to children's and health services. Services for children in low-income areas must be as good as the best in the country, which has, too often, not been the case.

A huge programme of work is under way on the lines suggested by the hon. Lady, and we have an amazing opportunity, through the national service framework, to take matters further in the next few years. We want to ensure that there is post-natal and maternity support, as well as support for children throughout their childhood. We have an ambitious programme, which will make for an interesting time in the next few years. I welcome the hon. Lady's contribution to the debate and thank her for raising these issues. I am sure that she will continue to do so as this work carries on over the next few years.

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne), may I compliment him on where he has chosen to sit? It was intended that Members should not split and sit according to their party. A debate across the Floor is much more helpful than trying to talk to the back of someone's head.

Basford Group Pension Scheme

1.30 pm

Mr. Desmond Browne (Kilmarnock and Loudoun): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for your kind words. I am grateful for the opportunity to raise in the House of Commons this very important issue for my constituents. For the last quarter of a century, manufacturing industry in my constituency has undergone the most radical change. Thousands of jobs have been lost in what were often considered to be lifetime occupations. No sector has suffered more than textiles, which dominated employment in the Irvine valley. Over the years, we have lost more than 400 jobs. The collapse of Basford Home Textiles, a part of the Basford Group, that went into receivership in June 1999, was a severe enough blow for the 38 workers who were made redundant, but they consoled themselves to some degree with the thought that at least their accrued pension rights in the group pension scheme would contribute to their standard of living at the time of retirement. The 99 employees retained by the successor employer also thought that their position was safe. Consequential to the receivership, the pension scheme had to be wound up. That process has revealed to the employees just how misplaced even that small amount of optimism was.

Mrs. Margaret Dawson, of Darvel, worked for many years in the industry both for Basford and their predecessors. She planned to retire at 60 and had a fair idea of what her pension would be. In 1995, the scheme was altered to equalise the normal retirement age for all members at 65. She knew and understood that the change forced on the scheme by the European Court case of Barber *v.* Guardian Royal Exchange would have a detrimental effect on her benefits. However, before she retired on 2 July 1999, the Basford Group went into receivership. The immediate effect of the commencement of the winding-up of the scheme on 26 May 1999 was that the new trustees, acting on the advice of the scheme actuary and pending clarification of the funding position, took a decision not to consider any early retirement requests.

Mrs. Dawson, who is a formidable woman, persisted with her request for early retirement and eventually, on 30 March 2000, the trustees agreed to pay her the guaranteed minimum pension. That figure is significantly less than the benefits she expected from the scheme, as set out in the figures she was given when she made her initial inquiries about early retirement. Now, almost two years after the date of her retirement and three years after her 60th birthday, she has no clear idea of what her final pension will be, and will not know that until the funding position of the scheme is finally known. She survives on the basic state pension, supplemented by the guaranteed minimum pension. She is confused, feels betrayed and rightly has a burning sense of injustice.

Bobby Armour of Kilmarnock also worked for Basford, but left before the receivership. He has a deferred pension in the scheme, and is still in employment but is nearing retirement age. He is also a victim of the uncertainty, as he cannot work out what his accrued benefits are worth. Furthermore, he cannot transfer his Basford pension to another scheme, as the value of the scheme has not yet been quantified, and a true transfer value cannot be assessed. He is in an almost identical position to David Ralston, another Darvel

[Mr. Desmond Browne]

resident who is still working in the industry—in the firm that took over from Basfords in Darvel. Like Mrs Dawson, Bobby Armour and David Ralston also feel betrayed and have a burning sense of injustice.

Those three cases are but examples of the circumstances of many of my constituents affected by the closure of the Basford plant. Over the past two years, there have been a series of comprehensive announcements from the independent trustee, Mitre Pensions Ltd., and the members' interests have been rigorously pursued by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, and in particular the regional organiser John Easdale and their shop stewards Eunice Callender, Paddy Quigley and Jim Raymond, who is now a local councillor.

Investigations by the independent trustee have uncovered a catalogue of actions in the last few months of the existence of the group that directly affected the pensions of all the employees, and which may leave some pensioners with as low as 48 per cent. of what they paid for. It appears that the trustees ignored advice from their actuary about the level of contributions necessary to maintain the funding requirement of the scheme and investment advice from their fund managers. Furthermore, the owner of Basford, Maurice Cresswell, who was also the chairman of the trustees of the pension fund, at a time when the only other trustees were directors of the company, persuaded the other trustees to buy two premises already owned by him, at a cost of some £560,000 to the fund—a figure that, not surprisingly, came in at about 5 per cent. of the fund's value.

Those actions, along with non-payment of employer contributions of at least £150,000 during 1998-99 and a delay in paying employee contributions during the same period, left the fund some 12.3 per cent. short of the value required to sustain the pensions of its members. Given that current pensioners are better protected than deferred pensioners on the winding-up, deferred pensioners will take a bigger loss, which is estimated at up to 28 per cent. by the new independent trustee, Mr. Iain Talman of Mitre.

Even those figures are still provisional, as the fund managers, Aon Consulting, have not yet been able to provide accurate figures on which to base decisions concerning the scheme. The winding-up of a pension scheme is not a simple process, but it is not helped by delays that are avoidable. The necessary actuarial valuation was promised within six months of the winding-up date. It took a full year, and even then it had to be redone. A second actuary was employed, but he resigned before he could report. A third actuary has been instructed, and his report is awaited, but the uncertainty for pensioners continues.

There has been an unexplained delay in claiming the outstanding employer contributions from the national insurance fund. Despite the fund managers having been aware of the valuation, and therefore the level of the missing funds, since last summer, it would seem that they only began the process of recovery before Christmas. That has further delayed the final valuation of the fund. Indeed, it has been difficult for anyone to find out anything from Aon Consulting. In his earlier announcements, the independent trustee encouraged members with questions about their specific entitlement to consult the fund managers as the first point of contact. I am repeatedly told that requests for information have been fruitless. I wrote to them on 20 December last year asking a number of questions relating to the scheme. On 7 February this year, I wrote again seeking a reply. I had not even had the courtesy of an acknowledgement. To be fair to them, that omission was corrected by a holding letter of 13 February, but I am still awaiting answers. If the Member of Parliament cannot get answers from people who manage the pension funds when there is a clear, direct, constituency interest, it does not augur well for ordinary members of the public.

The whole process has been one of delay after delay, and all this time more and more charges are being made on the scheme, lessening its value again and again. In his latest announcement, the independent trustee said that

"any member wishing to contact ... the independent trustee or the scheme administrator should feel free to do so on the understanding that both are professional organisations that receive remuneration from the scheme for their services."

The scheme will also have to bear the cost of additional investigations and expensive legal advice about whether there is a legal claim in respect of any or all of the actions that have caused the shortfall.

The buildings that were purchased from Cresswell were the subject of a series of transactions of labyrinthine complexity. There may also have been a deliberate attempt to make them not resaleable, because access to one of the buildings was retained by the owner, who is also the chairman of the trustees and the man who owned the company. To date, only one of the buildings has been sold. Until the second building is sold, no assessment can be made of the loss or, more unlikely, the gain to the scheme from the property transactions alone. At the same time, some assessment has to be made of the likely rental income that should have accrued to the scheme from the buildings. but which did not. For some inexplicable reason, the trustees allowed the company to get out of a notional leasing deal for one of the buildings, which was due to last for 10 years, without penalty after two years. Alternatively, an assessment should be made of whether other investment of the £560,000 purchase price would have been more beneficial to the scheme, and whether that is what the trustees should have done with the money in the first place.

Another cause of uncertainty is the fact that now, almost two years after the company went into receivership, no assessment is yet possible of whether legal action may help to recover part of the deficit. Mitre is properly taking legal advice on this matter, but in a letter to me of 9 February, it stated that

"this has proved to be more complex than was first anticipated. This has required substantial amounts of investigation and this continues to occur. There will be a further meeting with our solicitors shortly at which point a decision should be made as to whether any actions can be raised."

The members would rather have the certainty than the potential for litigation against someone who may turn out to be a man of straw.

None of the members of this scheme has benefited in any way from the changes implemented by the Pensions Act 1995, never mind the protections legislated for in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000.

Undoubtedly, had those members had the benefit of that legislation, the history of this scheme would have been different. However, that does not mean that there are not legitimate questions that the members are entitled to ask of the Government. There are lessons still to be learned from their appalling experiences.

Will my right hon. Friend consider setting up a pensions safety net fund, similar to the redundancy payments fund, to protect the investment of ordinary people whose pensions have been damaged through no fault of their own? This proposal has been put to me forcefully by the GMB, and on the face of it seems a much-needed reform. I am aware that the Government continually review the level of protection needed for vulnerable pension scheme members such as the Basford employees. I know that, as part of the consultation on security for occupational pensions, the Government are in dialogue with the industry, and that the Institute of Actuaries and the Faculty of Actuaries have proposed that solvency insurance could have a role to play in protecting members of underfunded schemes in the event of the insolvency of the sponsoring employer. Can my right hon. Friend say whether the Government intend to follow that recommendation? If they do, it may come too late for the Basford pensioners, but it would go a long way to giving some protection to others who may find themselves in a similar position in future.

The winding-up of this pension scheme has taken almost two years now, and the end of that process is not yet in sight. I am told by some of my colleagues that it is not unknown for the winding-up process to take significantly longer than that. One of my hon. Friends told me that, after seven years, a pension scheme in his constituency is no nearer being wound up. The process itself is a significant drain on the resources of the scheme. The powers given to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority to direct schemes on winding up may provide a less complicated and less expensive method of getting answers than the courts presently provide. When will those powers be brought into force, and what steps can the Government take to assess the performance of pension fund managers such as Aon, who hold themselves out as independent experts, both in their stewardship of the schemes, and in their performance when things goes wrong and delays are caused?

What is happening about the reform of the minimum funding requirement? If the minimum funding requirement ensured that there were sufficient assets to meet the liabilities of a fund, it would solve many of these problems. However, evidence suggests that it does not. Are the Government any nearer to determining their priority in relation to the minimum funding requirement? Is it to be greater security for the public's occupational pensions or greater investment freedom for schemes and investment fund managers in line with the Paul Myners review?

What proposals does my right hon. Friend have for improving the level of communication to scheme members when an occupational pension scheme winds up? The Department of Social Security undertook a research project into this issue prior to the implementation of the Pensions Act 1995. In the Basford case, the frequency and comprehensive nature of the announcements of the independent trustee is admirable, but his correspondence is still remarkably complex and difficult to understand. Yesterday, I had to read through the announcements two or three times before I could understand even the basics, and from my experience they are examples of good communication in such a situation.

Many other questions require to be asked in this particular case, but they can be posed only when the work of the administrator in winding up the scheme, and of the independent trustee in assessing culpability, is completed. In the meantime, any steps that the Government can take to ensure that other pension scheme members do not suffer the fate of my constituents, the Basford pensioners, will be warmly welcomed by them and by all other pension scheme members across the country.

1.44 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Social Security (Mr. Jeff Rooker): I agree with your initial comments, Mr. Deputy Speaker, about the seating position of my hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun (Mr. Browne). I did not like the former arrangement in this Room, and greatly prefer the present one.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on introducing his case. I am sorry to hear about what happened, and I recognise that scheme members must be beside themselves with worry. Many hundreds of people—pensioners, payers or deferred members—are involved.

It may not be parliamentary or ministerial to say so, but the case that my hon. Friend described stinks. I hope that my hon. Friend will appreciate that because many of the issues are on-going, what I am able to say is limited. I shall do my best to explain the system currently in place to protect pension schemes. Some aspects are under review and some changes have already been made. I also want to respond to as many specific points about the Basford case as I can.

The vast majority of UK pension schemes are set up under trust law. The basic duty to run a pension scheme lies with the trustees, not the company or the Government. The trustees must ensure that the rules of the scheme are followed and comply with the law.

The framework of trust law was reinforced by the Pensions Act 1995, which resulted from the Maxwell scandal. It introduced a series of measures to protect members of pension schemes, placed extra duties on trustees and set up the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority. We are actively monitoring and reviewing the Act's provisions in order to build on existing measures.

OPRA is the independent pensions regulator that investigates complaints when occupational pension schemes do not comply with the Pensions Act 1995. Anyone can report a pension scheme to OPRA if they believe that it is not being run properly. The scheme auditor and the actuary have a statutory duty to blow the whistle when they have reasonable cause to believe that the 1995 Act is not being complied with.

I have not checked the latest figure, but the last time I looked into it, there were about 120,000 pension schemes in this country. It is certainly a huge number. OPRA operates as a reactive regulator when people make complaints. We have examined and strengthened some of OPRA's operations through legislation that has not yet come fully into force.

[Mr. Jeff Rooker]

My hon. Friend raised concerns about the actions of the trustees and the actuaries involved in the Basford Group case. When Basford Textiles became insolvent, the insolvency practitioner appointed a statutory independent trustee. The previous trustee no longer acts as a trustee in relation to the scheme. The last actuarial valuation of the Batsford Group scheme was in 1996 and the next was due on 1 May 1999. The trustees sought 25 extra days as the wind-up of the scheme was due to commence on 26 May 1999. That valuation was completed on time by 26 May 2000.

When I started to get to grips with the minimum funding requirement, I mistook it as a solvency test. It may appear that way to a lay person, but there is no doubt that it is not. Pension schemes must be adequately funded to cover their liabilities. The 1995 Act introduced the MFR, which requires defined benefit schemes—schemes based on final salary—to hold a minimum level of assets to meet their liabilities.

We recognise that matters have changed since the minimum funding requirement was introduced. It came into force in 1997. As my hon. Friend acknowledged, many of the issues that affected his constituents are not covered by the 1995 Act, which had not come fully into force at that time. The Government consulted on the future of the minimum funding requirement and are currently studying the responses.

Coupled with that was the Myner review set up by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Given that he is about to make a major speech in the House in the not too distant future, he may or may not have something to say about that. The report has been received, and the consultation on the minimum funding regulation concluded at the end of January. We have been considering the responses to that consultation, because we must make an early statement about whether we will do nothing or do something, so that people know what is happening.

Pension contributions should be paid promptly and at the right level. In 1996, the actuary of the Basford Group scheme recommended a rise in employer contributions from 8.7 per cent. to 10.2 per cent., to take effect from April 1997. The trustees decided not to take the actuary's advice and did not increase the employer contributions. That may seem a small rise, but it represents a 20 per cent. increase. Under the minimum funding regulations, which have come in since the 1995 Act, a schedule of contributions must be set out clearly. That schedule must be certified by an actuary. If those regulations had been in force when the Basford trustees took the decision, it is unlikely that the actuary would have been able to certify that level of contributions. The actuary would have been obliged by law to report the situation to OPRA. A real problem has arisen, which predates the change in the law, by refusing to increase employer contributions by 20 per cent.

The trustees monitor the payment of contributions on the scheme's payments schedule and must tell OPRA and scheme members when contributions have been paid late or not paid at all. There is a firm rule about that. As my hon. Friend knows, there was a failure on the part of the employer to pay the contributions in the Basford case. I understand that a notice went out from the independent trustee to all members of the Basford Group scheme in July 2000 stating that all employee contributions had been recovered.

At present, there is no legal requirement for trustees to include members of pension schemes. Legislation went through the House last year, which will come into force later this year or early next year, whereby a minimum of a third of the trustees of a pension scheme must be members of the scheme. They may be pensioners, active members or deferred members, but they must be members of the scheme. In future, a group of trustees cannot be employer dominated.

The Pensions Act 1995 introduced restrictions on employer-related investments, such as shares in the company, land or property owned by the company. Clearly, that was the result of the Maxwell scandal. In May 1999, the independent trustee of the Basford scheme voiced doubts to OPRA about the appropriateness of several actions of the previous trustee in connection with the purchase and use of properties in 1996—a point that my hon. Friend raised in some detail. Those property dealings may have constituted a breach under the 1995 Act. Unfortunately for the scheme members, that Act did not come fully into force until 1997.

When things go wrong, it is only right that measures are in place to protect members of a scheme. I regret that many of the problems of the Basford scheme occurred before the 1995 Act came into effect. My hon. Friend realises that his constituents have a hell of a problem. Hopefully, it is being sorted out with the trustees. I note the delays that he listed, and I shall make it my business to ensure that I follow them up through OPRA and my officials. It is unacceptable if Members of Parliament do not receive replies. There is almost an implied threat that, if inquiries are made, the scheme will be charged. The only people making any money out of the situation are the professonals who are examining the problem, whereas the members of the scheme feel that their pensions are under threat, and they contributed to those pensions.

Measures are in place for redundancy payments schemes when a firm has become insolvent. If, on winding-up, the scheme is not fully funded under the minimum funding requirement, the amount outstanding becomes a debt on the employer, and the trustee must pursue that amount. Of course, the Pensions Compensation Board was also set up under the 1995 Act. It has not made many payments to date—I declare an interest, because one recent payment was in respect of a company in Birmingham that employed some of my constituents and those of my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Mr. Burden).

Members must be protected from fraud and dishonesty. Provisions for compensation were introduced in the 1995 Act. The Pensions Compensation Board pays compensation to an occupational pensions scheme if it suffers a reduction in its assets because of dishonesty when the sponsoring employer is insolvent. Improvements to the pensions compensation scheme were contained in the Welfare Reform and Pensions Act 1999, which is due to come into effect shortly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kilmarnock and Loudoun asked about consultation on the minimum funding requirement. As I said, we hope to make an

early announcement about suggestions that have been made for mutual insurance for the industry. There are pluses and minuses, but we are actively considering that option, because since the 1995 Act was passed, gaps have been clearly identified that we want to close. The time that has been taken to finalise the case is an issue, and I give my hon. Friend my personal assurance that I will follow that up myself. The Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000 introduced a package of measures for schemes in wind-up, which are intended to introduce more accountability into such schemes and to extend OPRA's powers in that regard. Again, the Act will come into force early next year—I know that these things are always later this year or early next year, but we are dealing with a huge industry. Millions of people are in pension schemes—there are about 120,000 pension schemes—so we must be careful about changes, and take time to consult even after the House has passed the main legislation.

Most pension schemes are extremely well run. The best run schemes from my experience are those in which members are involved as trustees and there is a free share of information, in which they watch with eagle eyes what happens to investments, especially if it appears that the company concerned is using some of the funds. We cannot legislate initially for every eventuality, so sometimes we legislate as we go along, filling the gaps, which is why we constantly review the framework.

I have great sympathy with the issue raised by my hon. Friend, and I am glad that he has given me the opportunity to put on the record some of the measures we have already taken and to signal future announcements. I understand that OPRA is at present satisfied that the independent trustee is doing everything in his power to rectify the situation by collecting as much money as possible for the scheme, which was clearly underfunded when it refused to increase employer contributions by the recommended 20 per cent. There is a major problem with underfunding, but OPRA will continue to monitor the scheme until it is fully wound up. I will ensure that if I can open a door or kick a door open, I will certainly do so in the interests of my hon. Friend's constituents.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 1 March 2001

[MR. MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

NHS Mental Health Services

[*Relevant documents: Fourth Report from the Health Committee, Session 1999-2000, HC 373, and the Government's response thereto, Cm 4888.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—[*Mr. Hutton.*]

2.30 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I appreciate the opportunity to discuss the report, which makes an important contribution to the mental health debate.

I thank the Committee for its hard work during the inquiry. I also thank the many witnesses who provided oral and written evidence. That was very helpful to the Committee's deliberations, as were the visits that it was allowed to pay to a broad range of establishments and agencies—I thank them too. Thanks are also due to the specialist advisers on the inquiry: Professors Bob Bluegrass, Tom Burns and Ray Rowden, Ms. Angela Greatley and Mr. Chris Vellenoweth.

It is not usual to express appreciation for the work of individual Committee staff, but I would like to thank Katherine Wright. Some of my colleagues will know her from her work in the House of Commons Library. She was seconded to the Committee for the period of the inquiry as a specialist assistant. I also thank all the Committee staff for their help.

I want to explain why the Committee undertook the inquiry. I was not the only member of the Committee who thought that mental health policy lacked co-ordination and that, occasionally, there were inappropriate placements. I had seen that in my constituency, which has two prisons, a regional secure unit and a psychiatric unit. I visit them frequently, and I have discovered that some people have been placed in the wrong institution. That is why I began to ponder how we might develop a better arrangement to ensure that such people were appropriately placed.

In an inquiry into the regulation of the private health sector, the Committee visited a private hospital in York. Everyone was struck by the preponderance of young black men in the hospital whose homes were 200 miles away in London. It seemed very wrong to us that they had been placed there, rather than nearer to their homes, and we felt that race and gender might be playing a part.

The Committee also felt that there were discrepancies in the ability of different areas to offer care in the community. For example, on a visit to north Birmingham, the Committee was impressed by the extent to which it was possible, through assertive outreach, to care coherently and constructively in the community for people with severe problems. However, other areas do not have enough in-patient beds. Sadly, my constituency is one such area: patients from Wakefield are placed in a private hospital in Cheshire because our in-patient facilities are under too much pressure as a result of a lack of appropriate alternative facilities in the community.

The Select Committee was concerned that some people high up in the Government have commented that the care in the community policy has failed, and that the pendulum has swung too far from hospital to community. We needed to examine the reality of that claim, so we undertook a wide-ranging inquiry that looked at the transition points in mental health services and the ability of the different sectors to cope with patients. Our terms of reference were deliberately very broad.

The inquiry examined the definition of mental disorder because the Select Committee thought that the criteria that people with mental disorders had to meet to access services could be the first hurdle to overcome before patients ended up in the right part of the system. We looked at how users of the system regard its services. We considered the effects of the new national service programme and the delivery of general mental health services, and that included an examination of the current proposals to overhaul the legal framework of mental health that would allow compulsory treatment to be given in the community as well as in hospital. We considered proposals to create a specific legal framework for people with severe personality disorder who are deemed to be dangerous. Finally, we examined how the transition is managed between general mental health services and more specialised services—for example, those for children and adolescents and secure mental health services.

I stress that I recognise that that is a contentious area. If we consider our history of treating successive generations of people with mental illness, we can see that attitudes and definitions have varied considerably. A few years ago, I visited a museum in my area that was organised by someone who had worked for the Stanley Royd psychiatric hospital for a long time and I found a book that defined the diagnoses of patients who had been admitted to a Poor Law lunatic asylum in the 19th century. I was interested to see that a large number of mental health cases consisted of people suffering from "political excitement"—it was one reason for detention in the asylum.

As some hon. Members know, I worked for the mental health services in professional social work for many years. I will always remember the move towards care in the community that began in the 1970s, and the practice of removing people from psychiatric hospitals—women in particular—who had been detained all their lives because they had been deemed "moral defectives", even though they were not mentally ill. I have met more moral defectives during 14 years in this place than during all my years in the mental health services. My point is that definitions are value-based.

The Select Committee was well aware of the values that influence how we define mental disorder: definitions are frequently gender-based and race-based. We made one specific recommendation about definitions. We felt that there was a need to improve services for people with dual diagnosis; they are people who might suffer from a mental disorder and substance abuse, or a mental disorder and learning disabilities. We felt that such people were poorly served by the present arrangements. I am pleased to report that the Government agreed that greater priority should be given to that.

[Mr. David Hinchliffe]

We felt that it was crucial to involve users and carers in all aspects of planning and delivering mental health services. We found an acceptance of the role of users and carers, which was a welcome shift in emphasis from the attitude of recent decades. However, we were warned that the reality of such a consultation is sometimes suspect. Karen Campbell of the Manic Depression Fellowship was scathing about the limited impact that user involvement often has. She said in evidence to us:

"I think we have reached a stage, as people who use mental health services, of thinking, you ask us to come to meetings and listen to what we say, but very, very rarely—I can count it on two fingers—does what we say make a difference."

We recommended that users should have much greater input in the training of mental health professionals. Again, I appreciate the fact that the Government have accepted the recommendation.

We were particularly concerned by the evidence that mental health services do not adequately meet the needs of ethnic minority patients. Some of my colleagues might speak in more detail about that. Our concern was not simply that black patients are more likely to be in the compulsory part of the mental health system, but that the services offered are often inappropriate or insensitive. Our recommendations included developing race awareness among NHS staff, designating NHS trust board members to take active responsibility for making services more culturally aware and expanding early intervention and interpreting services.

We looked at the effects of the national service framework and the delivery of general mental health services. The Committee was impressed by the impact of the framework, which was generally welcomed within the system as a positive development. However, we received evidence from a variety of witnesses about the low quality of much in-patient care. On some visits, we saw evidence that, materially, the system does not offer a great deal to patients in the wards, despite caring staff who were doing their best to function within the existing regimes. The system leaves much to be desired.

The Sainsbury Centre suggested to us that the pressures on acute beds were so great that the environment was untherapeutic, that services lacked clear goals and that links with community services were sometimes poor. We proposed that a capital modernisation fund aimed specifically at improving environmental standards on in-patient wards could make a significant difference to the quality of life for patients.

We spent considerable time looking at proposals to change the existing legal framework of mental health. We all accept that there is a need to modernise the law as it relates to the detention of patients within the mental health system. The current system is outdated. It is largely based on legislation passed in 1959—the Mental Health Act 1959—when the system was institution-based rather than community-based. We felt that any legislation replacing the Mental Health Act 1983 should have a broader remit than merely setting out when compulsion will be permitted; for example, through ensuring a right of access to a mental health assessment, an acceptance of the principle of reciprocity and a right of access to advocacy services. The Government are reviewing the latter point, and I hope that there will be positive proposals in due course.

We support the philosophy underlying the recommendations of the expert committee on the reform of the 1983 Act, in contrast to the proposals set out in the Government's Green Paper. We saw some distinctions between the expert committee's recommendations and the Green Paper. We recommended in particular the inclusion of the principles of non-discrimination and respect for autonomy in any new legislation. We felt that further work should be done to investigate the viability of a capacity test and that there should be provision for the use of crisis cards and advance directives to help individuals in crisis to signal their preferences regarding treatment, which they might not be able to do at the time that they need treatment.

We felt that there should be greater emphasis on the importance of the health benefit for the individual if compulsion is considered. The legislation must be operated in such a way that patients would receive a demonstrable health benefit. We also felt that compulsion should be used only as a last resort.

We discussed the contentious issue of community treatment orders. As a Committee, we accepted the arguments about the benefits of such orders, which would compel individuals to accept treatment even if they are not detained in a psychiatric hospital. However, we felt that that should be coupled with the safeguards that were set out in the expert committee's report.

I recognise the difficulties facing any Government when addressing policy for the difficult matter of dangerous people with severe personality disorder. It raises enormous problems and challenges. The evidence that the Committee received about the Government's proposals was remarkably uniform, and mental health professionals expressed considerable doubts about the proposals on several grounds: first, the civil liberties implications of detaining people who are deemed to be untreatable, yet who have not committed an offence; secondly, the resourcing and staffing implications of setting up a third system between the Prison Service and the health service; and, thirdly, the validity and reliability of the diagnosis of dangerous severe personality disorder.

The evidence that the Committee received from the Institute of Psychiatry was typical. It emphasised that severe personality disorder is not a clinical definition, and that the severity of a personality disorder bears no relation to how dangerous a person is. We welcome the recognition that the Home Office proposals on dangerous people with severe personality disorder are primarily a criminal justice matter, but we were concerned about the inappropriate use of a quasi-medical definition.

We were also concerned about apparent confusion over the term "untreatable". When I worked in mental health, I occasionally undertook compulsory admissions, and the issue of treatability has always been contentious. Two main conclusions were drawn from the evidence that we received: first, there is no professional consensus, either among psychiatrists or psychologists, on whether personality disorder is treatable; and secondly, the debate surrounding treatability is concerned with the lack of available resources.

We rejected both options in the Home Office proposals because they seemed to be illogical and unnecessary to achieving the service enhancement that we agreed was necessary. We recommended that research should be initiated on the treatment of antisocial personality disorder, and that adequate facilities should be made available within the national health service for people who suffer from a recognised disorder and who would benefit from treatment. We also recommended that further thought should be given to the proposal of reviewable sentences that would provide for those who are deemed to be a danger to the public but who are genuinely not amenable to treatment within the NHS. We further recommended that a definition similar to that used in Scotland—

"serious violent and/or sexual offenders who may present a continuing danger to the public"—

should be used in the English proposals to clarify that they are concerned with offending behaviour, rather than a mental disorder.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I am sorry to interrupt, but I wish to return to the issue of capacity.

Since the Committee's report, the Government have produced a White Paper. Will the hon. Gentleman tell us what he thinks about the safeguards that the Government have proposed for people who do not actively object to treatment, but who are deemed to lack the capacity to consent to it? That is the issue of the Bournewood judgment. Is he satisfied with the Government's proposals?

Mr. Hinchliffe: The report makes it clear that the Government have not gone as far as we proposed, although I understand that there has been movement since the original Green Paper.

We were very impressed by the witnesses from the expert committee, who spent considerable time developing their arguments on that matter. It is a hugely complex area, and I recognise the Government's difficulty in ensuring that there is a system that addresses the acute problems that patients occasionally have. We also need to anticipate psychiatric provision in 10 or 20 years' time. As I have pointed out, policy circumstances change in that we may move further towards community provision—I hope that we will—and any new mental health legislation must take such change into account. That is extremely difficult and this is a tough area with which the Government must deal, but the Committee felt that the expert committee had offered a way forward that had not been picked up in the Green Paper.

When looking at the challenge posed by the transition between elements of the service—especially between services for children and adolescents and adult mental health services—we found that clear systems linking them were the exception rather than the rule. I should have liked to have had more time for that part of the inquiry, because the problems that we saw showed that much work had to be done. We felt that the present system offered the worst of both worlds.

The evidence that we found suggested that the lack of a nationally agreed target age for transfer does not enhance local flexibility; it simply creates a patchwork of incompatible services. We recommended that the Department of Health should consult on a target age for transfer that would allow local flexibility where necessary, but would prevent the current extraordinary position in which 16 and 17-year-olds might be eligible for neither service.

The most radical solution to the problem of transition was the proposed creation of a youth service to look at provision for young people aged between, for example, 16 and 25. We felt that that proposal was attractive in many ways; it would avoid the need for transfer at a time when adolescents are especially vulnerable, and could encourage the development of specialist services identifying the onset of psychosis in late teens. We therefore recommended the commissioning of research on the viability of such a service and, in the meantime, the monitoring of the adequacy of current transfer arrangements.

Finally, we looked at transitions between secure and general mental health services. The Committee was concerned about the human rights implications of patients staying far longer than necessary in the higher levels of security, because of a lack of appropriate provision elsewhere. We received evidence from both Ashworth hospital and Broadmoor that patients were being detained in those high security special hospitals when they did not need to be there. They could have been helped in low-security, even community, placements quite safely and to greater benefit to themselves.

Those human rights implications were raised with us more than once by senior staff, who acknowledged that there had been inappropriate placements on a wide scale. We recommended that the action already being taken to assess the needs of individual patients should be completed as speedily as possible, and that, if short-term funding was necessary to provide appropriate placements, it should be made available. We were also concerned at the apparent lack of hard information on the numbers and types of alternative beds required to deal with patients of the kind that we met, particularly in the special hospitals. We recommended that the Department should publish firm figures on the number of secure beds that will be available, separately identifying short-term medium-secure, long-term medium-secure, short-term low-secure and long-term low-secure beds.

I welcome the fact that the Government have commissioned a review of medium-secure provision and forensic networks of care that will identify gaps in capacity. However, the Committee significantly differs from the Government—and I have raised this point in the Chamber with successive Secretaries of State—in that it feels that the Government should seriously consider the recommendation of the Fallon committee that the three special hospitals should be replaced by eight smaller regional units.

Having been in Parliament long enough to have heard this recommendation being made in response to problems that have occurred in the three special hospitals on other occasions, I strongly support the Committee's view that the Fallon committee was right. The Government should look again at the issues raised by that and other inquiries. We found a widespread view that the three special hospitals had been allowed to develop independently of the rest of the NHS, leading to

[Mr. Hinchliffe]

isolation and a culture that is sometimes more akin to that of a prison than a hospital, with the resultant recruitment difficulties.

Although our visits to Ashworth and Broadmoor made us sceptical about the so-called special expertise that is alleged as a benefit of the special hospitals, we felt that the arguments for a genuinely regional focus to secure care were overwhelming. We concluded that reform and improvement to the special hospitals is probably not workable. I welcome the steps taken by the Government to link the special hospitals more clearly to the regions in which they are based, but we want them to go further and make much more meaningful the ability of patients to move through the system, be that up, down or wherever is appropriate to their needs.

After hearing the evidence, the Committee strongly supported the principle of an entirely separate service for women. Some of it shocked us, and my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon), who visited Broadmoor with me, might speak about that in more detail as she spent more time with the women patients. We felt strongly that the Department should bring forward its women's strategy urgently. We know that it commissioned work, supported by an expert group chaired by Dame Rennie Fritchie, to examine issues surrounding women in high-security hospitals. It is a pressing issue, which I urge the Minister to examine as soon as possible.

We had serious concerns about standards in prison health care centres and supported the proposal of the chief inspector of prisons that any prisoner who needs specialist mental health services should be transferred to the national health service, if necessary under temporary licence.

I apologise for speaking at some length on what was a comprehensive inquiry, which found many positives. I picked up on some of the negatives because Select Committee inquiries work by drawing attention to negatives and pressing the Government to address them. I welcome the fact that the Government are already examining some of our points.

I commend particularly the staff that we met in a range of agencies and hospitals. They were doing an extremely good job in difficult circumstances with some very disturbed people. Having worked in the system, I have some insight into the problems that those people face. The House owes a great deal to those dedicated people, and we should recognise that far more than we do.

We should also strongly commend the user groups, which have developed relatively recently and have given a long-overdue voice to those who were frequently ignored. A number of patient groups gave evidence, and it was among the most moving and important that we heard in the inquiry. I welcome the steps taken by successive Governments in the direction of more civilised treatment of the mentally ill but much more still needs to be done. The Health Committee recognises that and I think that the Government do too.

I would like to express a personal view, having worked in the mental health system. Vast numbers of people who would previously have been institutionalised can now lead more normal, positive and meaningful lives through the efforts of successive Governments to create a more humane policy. Our present situation is summed up for me by the most memorable quotation that we heard during the inquiry. It came from David Joannides of the Association of Directors of Social Services. He said:

"Community care has not failed, it has failed some people."

It is important that we continue in the direction of enhancing and strengthening community care, addressing the failures and protecting patients and the public. Hopefully, we will move towards a more civilised system than we have had in the past, even in my lifetime.

2.58 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I am pleased that the Health Committee devoted one of its major reports of the past Session to mental health. All too often in the past, although to be fair not under the present Government or in the last few years of the previous Government, mental health was the Cinderella service of the NHS. It tended to get brushed under the carpet with regard to funding priorities and public and ministerial attention, because it is an unknown quantity and because of the stigma attached to it.

I hope that I will be forgiven for speaking on a narrow issue: paragraphs 63 to 66 of the Health Committee report, which concern stigma, and the Government's response. Other hon. Members will want to discuss other important issues and I do not want to duplicate their remarks.

I have been concerned for a long time about the raw prejudice and stigma attached to people suffering from mental illness. Most of us, as individuals, are genuinely caring. If we hear that a member of our family or a friend is suffering from cancer or has flu, we are naturally responsive. We want to find out how that person is and offer our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Many people, however, do not understand mental illness. That fact, together with the way in which mental illness is categorised in society, makes people frightened of suffering from it—although 20 per cent. of the population will suffer from a form of mental illness at some point in their lives. Fear and ignorance mean that many families do not want others to know if a family member is suffering from mental illness. They fear the reaction that it will evoke. Many sufferers of mental illness want to hide it from their friends, perhaps from their family, and certainly from their employers, for fear of what may happen to them. It is unforgivable for a civilised society at the beginning of the 21st century to have such a prejudice, misunderstanding and fear. I welcome any move to open up the subject of mental health and break down those barriers.

Our report made a number of recommendations in that area. They include the crucial role to be played by education. If young people can be persuaded during their formative years to accept the problems of mental illness as they accept those of other illnesses, it will be a great step forward. The Government's response mentioned the initiatives being taken, through the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Health, to start that process, which began last autumn. I welcome that positive step forward.

The matter cannot be resolved simply through education. Paragraph 63 of the report contains a quotation from Dr. Mike Shooter of the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which reads:

"The members of the users and carers group in the college, for example, have said to me when they have listened to the philosophy of a campaign like that,"—

a campaign for greater education—

"that it is very laudable but in the end it will not help unless they"—

the sufferers of mental illness—

"can get insurance, unless they can get a job, unless they can get a mortgage without running up against the sort of institutionalised stigma we were talking about before."

That statement is important because it opens up the reality of stigma, which is not just fear, prejudice and ignorance displayed through individuals' comments. That quote pinpoints the real-life, daily problems that people face and that can crucially affect the improvement of their quality of life and their chances of having a fresh start in society. Education is important, but we must do more to help people with insurance, employment prospects and day-to-day living needs. We cannot simply say, "Do more in education and the problem will be resolved", because it will not be.

Another problem will be understood by any Members of Parliament who have faced it in their constituencies. When a health authority's proposals to establish a hostel in a residential area are known, prejudice—completely ill-informed more often than not—immediately erupts in that area. It is time for all Members of the House and other elected figures at local and national level to stand up and be counted. It is easy to jump on to the political bandwagon of saying no to a hostel in a residential area, but in my experience, nothing more is heard about hostels after they have been established and proper supervision, with back-up services, help and support for their residents, is in place.

The horror stories put about before hostels are established to try to prevent their opening never materialise as fact, and never would. The prejudices of individuals who want to prevent hostels from being opened create a climate of fear that bears no resemblance to reality. It is time for politicians at all levels to have the guts and courage not to say no as an automatic, knee-jerk reaction to hostels. Integration into the rest of the community is important. I still passionately believe that care in the community is the correct policy. It is a civilised policy that has moved with the times. Long-term hospitals that tried to hide the problems of mental illness by locking people up and giving them an unacceptable quality of life were an affront to civilisation.

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman is making a passionate and strong contribution. The Committee has argued about the Fallon inquiry recommendations on moving more towards regional provision. In all seriousness, how do we tackle the difficulties that any Government would face in doing so? My area has a regional secure unit. I am on board with everything in the hon. Gentleman's philosophy, but how would he feel if one of the Committee's recommendations were a proposal to create a regional secure unit in Chelmsford? Politicians have to face such challenges.

Mr. Burns: The straightforward answer to my Chairman's narrow question is that my view would depend on where in my constituency the recommendation for the medium-secure unit was. I would have no problem with a hostel in a residential area—I accept that hostels are not medium-secure units—as it would basically be a house like any other house with multiple occupancy. A medium-secure unit would have to be put in the right place, as would a prison. One does not put them in the middle of residential areas. One can put such units in areas all around the country, with proper security and protection so that local communities can live side by side with them, just as they can with prisons. There is a prison in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and I have one in the centre of Chelmsford. It causes my constituents no problems, because it is secure.

I still believe strongly in the philosophy of care in the community. It is an affront to lock up the people that we are discussing. The Minister could confirm the irony that, under the old policy of simply locking people up, throwing away the key and hoping that no one saw the problem, there were more deaths and personal injuries among patients than there are now with them in the community.

I do not intend to make a party political point. What I am talking about happened under the Government in which I served, as it has under the present Government. The trouble with care in the community is that while fewer violent incidents are happening, the fact that they happen out in society and that public inquiries are held afterwards, means that there is greater publicity and public awareness. Sadly, such horrific incidents have happened—often as the result of blunders—that it is feared that such things happen all the time. Also, to return to the problem of stigma, members of the public are sometimes fearful of totally harmless persons who live in society while suffering from a degree of mental illness, because it is relatively new to encounter such people. In the past they would have been locked up, out of sight and out of mind.

As to the horrific incidents that have occurred, of which there have been too many, the policy of care in the community has to an extent gone out of synch. There has not been enough protection of the public in some limited instances. That fact has engendered a complete lack of public confidence and brought the policy into disrepute. We need now to build up public confidence in a principle that is right. I agree with the Government—and I would dearly have loved the previous Government to have taken the same line, had the parliamentary arithmetic and the time available allowed it—that matters need to be tightened up with respect to people suffering from mental illness who are allowed to remain free in the community. We got things wrong and the present Government have done so too; but, to be fair, it could be argued that the existing legislative regime has placed the Government in their present position.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) referred to the issue of untreatable patients, and I want to take a slightly different angle on it. The state should have more powers to protect the public from people who are untreatable. I remember vividly from my time at the Department of Health two instances when it was contacted about two individuals aged over 18—which

[Mr. Burns]

was of course a fundamental issue—who were coming out of secure units. Because they had not committed a crime or caused any problems, there was nothing that the state could do to keep them in a secure environment to protect them or, even more importantly, the public.

In one case in particular, social services from the relevant local authority, the police, the consultants dealing with the individual and, for some odd reason, the Prison Service begged us to find a way to keep the young lady in a secure environment. It was only a question of time, in their professional judgment, before she would harm someone because of her illness, which was untreatable. It was deeply frustrating that there was nothing that the Department of Health could do. The law was the law, and because she had not offended, she was to leave the secure unit and return to the community. Ironically, in that case, the Home Office, to put it crudely, got everyone off the hook and managed to find some way within the law by which the lady could move from the medium secure unit to Rampton.

I accept that human rights and individual civil liberties are relevant and I should be the last person to say that we should brush aside an individual's civil liberties to satisfy the tabloid press or public opinion. However, we must never lose sight either of the civil liberties of the public or their right to be protected from people who are untreatable and particularly dangerous.

Mr Hammond: My hon. Friend used the term "untreatable" several times. Considering the Select Committee's recommendation that further research be done into the treatability or otherwise of personality disorder, and on examining the White Paper, that seems to be a key area that needs further exploration. Is my hon. Friend using the term "untreatable" after careful consideration? Has he reached the conclusion that people with this condition are untreatable, or does he have an open mind on that?

Mr. Burns: Rightly or wrongly, I use the term. As my hon. Friend knows, I am not medically qualified to answer his question. However, as someone who has had limited experience of dealing with these individuals, I have come to the conclusion that whatever research one conducts, there is a category of people in the country who are totally untreatable. Unless dramatic breakthroughs in medical science occur, there is no chance—in the short term—of finding treatment for such people. It is an unfortunate quirk of fate or of circumstance.

In conclusion, we must all—Ministers and Members of Parliament—work together to break down the stigma associated with mental health problems and ensure that raw prejudice, which in many cases is rather unpleasant, is tackled. That must be done, but not simply through education. The Government have a role, not in a nanny state way, but through trying to solve problems of employment, housing, insurance and so on. The state also has a role in dealing with community feeling, ensuring that fears are broken down and that people are better protected from those individuals who have done so much to undermine the basically correct policy of care in the community.

3.16 pm

Mr. John Gunnell (Morley and Rothwell): I rise to speak on the use of electro-convulsive therapy in the national health service, about which I have been concerned for a long time and which comes within the framework of the Select Committee's activities. In view of my impending retirement, this is probably my last opportunity to make this particular point, which is another reason for my wishing to speak.

The Minister will be aware that I made proposals for changes in the rules on ECT in a ten-minute Bill entitled the Electro-convulsive Therapy (Restrictions on Use) Bill, which I presented in December 1997. I subsequently withdrew the Bill, following discussions with the then Minister with responsibility for mental health, my right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng). He felt that it would not be appropriate to tinker with the Mental Health Act 1983, and that my concerns would be better raised when consideration was given to reforming the 1983 Act as a whole. We have now reached that stage, and I am well aware that Ministers have given consideration to the position of ECT in the range of treatments available or required for patients under the Act.

During Health Committee hearings and visits, ECT was not often raised as an issue. However, I recall one meeting with patients at a south London hospital in which an 18-year old woman spoke of the devastating effect of compulsory ECT treatment on her mental health. The use of ECT has now declined, but I am uncertain whether there are still patients who receive ECT without their consent and without another doctor being asked for a second opinion. That doctor should, of course, be independent of the doctor who requested the treatment. I believe that another professional opinion is required before treatment.

I am unaware whether exact records are now kept of all those who receive ECT, including whether they consented to such treatment and the outcome of the treatment in the short and long term—or at least in the medium term. It is important to have exact information on the effects of ECT to justify its continuing use. I am not alone in having such worries. A number of hon. Members, whose constituents had received ECT and who subsequently raised the matter with their MP, have talked to me about their concerns, most notably my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley).

I want to raise a completely separate issue that arose after the Health Committee visit to Broadmoor. The Committee was impressed with the positive approach of the chief executive and of many of the staff whom we met. I was, therefore, concerned to receive a letter dated 31 January 2001 from Len Dunn, the honorary secretary of the Broadmoor hospital staff recreation club. He wrote about the threatened closure of the club. The letter has not been widely circulated, which is why I bring it to the attention of the House today. Mr. Dunn wrote:

"I should like to draw your attention to the planned closure by the Broadmoor Hospital Authority of our Staff Recreation Club which has been in existence for nearly 140 years and is currently enjoyed by some 1,400 employees and their families.

Broadmoor Hospital Authority wants to demolish the club to make way for the relocation of its Training and Education Centre as part of its Hospitals' Estate's Disposal Strategy and has now issued proceedings against the Club. We are urging the Authority to reconsider its options.

We believe that the closure will be highly detrimental to the recruitment and retention of staff, exacerbating an already severe shortage. It is a popular facility where hospital staff can unwind after the stress of a highly challenging job. It appears to 'fly in the face' of current government initiatives which advocate 'supportive family-friendly' practices. Furthermore it will be a considerable loss to the community as the club regularly hosts local charitable events.

We maintain that there is ample room within the Broadmoor Hospital Authority to house both the Training and Education Centre and the Club. We are prepared to look at ways of contributing financially to assist with an alternative plan, and would welcome consultation and the opportunity to participate in meaningful negotiation."

That letter spells out the concerns of staff working at Broadmoor—concerns that I share. The staff are important and have a highly challenging job; not many of us would want to do it. I imagine that the Minister has a copy of the letter, but if not, I can let him have one. What is his response to the letter? I am sure that the Minister appreciates the staff as much as we do and that he is as concerned about their well-being as we are. I hope that he will respond to the request for consultation.

3.24 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I congratulate the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), on his speech. He spoke for us all about the unanimous report and covered all the issues, but that will not stop me from making my own points.

I was moved by the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) about stigma and I entirely agree with what he said. I also agree with the remarks of the hon. Member for Leeds, West and Morley (Mr Gunnell) about electro-convulsive therapy. I have one such case at the moment: someone, not in my constituency, was given the treatment and asked to sign for it when he or she were not in the right frame of mind to know precisely what he or she were doing. Eighteen doses of the treatment were given, and a relative of the patient involved is extremely upset about it.

The hon. Member for Wakefield and I share an interest in mental health because of our constituency experiences. Members of Parliament know that often the inspiration behind the many groups that are formed is someone with a loved one affected by an illness or trying to cope with a problem. Mental health groups are no different.

There are not huge numbers of votes for parliamentarians in discussing the state of our prisons, but we should discuss such a matter, even if it is not of great interest to our constituents. Mental health is like that, too: people do not want to get too involved in the issues. As a newly elected Member of Parliament I vividly recall visiting South Ockendon hospital, where I saw sights for which I was unprepared. I had gone along to a hospital event, where I bought bird baths, nesting boxes and so on, which all looked lovely, and then I saw how some of the people were cared for, which was pretty grim. I had not realised that people really were put in straitjackets and restrained.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford that in some cases it is difficult to know what is best for people, but restraining them in the way that used to be done at South Ockendon hospital is not acceptable. We must not forget that these patients are human beings, too.

We have all met people with mental health problems. Tragically, four weeks ago a friend of mine, a deputy head who was highly intelligent, committed suicide during school hours. I had no idea of his state of health. His wife told me that on the day he committed suicide he had received a letter telling him that he had been awarded the MBE. For whatever reason, he had a tremendous feeling of inadequacy. The 2,000 mourners at his funeral said it all: he was a fantastic chap.

At our constituency surgeries, hon. Members meet many people—I choose my words carefully—who seem a little unusual in the way that they present their case. One of our colleagues was nearly killed as a result of what happened at a constituency surgery.

Members of Parliament get depressed. I occasionally get depressed when I look at Labour Members, and when I look at the opinion polls, I feel even worse, but I am an optimist. I salute all the Committee Members for their efforts in producing the report. I agreed to be a member of a Select Committee because I felt that our debates on the Floor of the House had become a bit of a blunt instrument, and Select Committees were a sharper way of dealing with matters.

There is no point in our spending three hours in Westminster Hall debating these matters, and the Select Committee interviewing wonderful experts and having the help of the support staff—I went all round the country looking at all the different facilities—if a few weeks after our report is issued, the Government send us a nice reply and the whole thing is forgotten. That has always gone on, so I am not making a point about this Government. The Health Committee has dealt with these matters calmly and its recommendations are excellent, but I suppose that I would say that.

I should just like to highlight five of the recommendations in the summary. Point (f) states:

"There have been undeniable failures in service since the policy of care in the community was first launched. But we feel that it is both misleading and unhelpful to state that the policy of care in the community has failed"—

this is a unanimous report agreed by all members of the Committee—

"as the Government has done on a number of occasions. We urge the Government to make clear in the language it uses ... that care in the community is a positive policy and one which it supports."

When the Conservative Government delivered care in the community, I thought that it would cost a huge amount of money and I wondered whether we had thought it through. It has indeed cost a huge amount of money but the Health Committee certainly supports the policy.

Paragraph (h) refers to joined-up government. I hate that expression. It means everyone working together. Sadly, not everyone in the mental health services in south-east Essex is working together. I sought the opinion of a number of individuals in the area. A consultant psychiatrist said:

"reducing suicide rates is a very important issue. Southend...needs...semi-informal services...which can really rise to the challenges of the mental health problem in the community."

[Mr. David Amess]

A patient who harms himself says:

"The day I left hospital I felt really alone. I couldn't phone the ward for support and felt alone. Instead I had to phone the Samaritans who told me to take up knitting."

The Samaritans do a splendid job, and it is unfortunate if someone said that. I received a letter from a constituent who said:

"I have no idea where my husband could go for help now, as every door seems to be closing in his face and his mental state is becoming more fragile as a consequence".

A general practitioner said:

"David, there is a lack of consultants and conditions in the wards at Rochford are pathetic and I strongly feel that it needs urgent attention."

There are gaps in the services in south-east Essex and the various agencies clearly have a problem talking to each other. I do not have a magic wand but if the Minister and his officials care to look at our recommendations and can deliver some of them, it would make a huge difference.

I recently received a letter from a constituent who said:

"In 1999 I had problems and because I could not talk about them I was taken to Runwell hospital".

I know that at least three hon. Members know that hospital. It is an old asylum that has been threatened with closure for 10 years. Nothing happens. Most of the buildings are a disgrace to the modern national health service. I do not suggest that there are huge pots of money, but someone needs to come up with a solution to the problems at Runwell. My constituent continues:

"I hated it in there. In December 1999 I was allowed to return home on the condition I accepted help from a Mental Health Team Co-Ordinator and, that I had a CPN give me an injection monthly. I didn't want someone from Mental Health to visit."

My constituent now learns that she is no longer to receive help from her splendid support team.

Opposition Members talk endlessly about point (p), which deals with staff shortages. All hon. Members have received a briefing note from the Royal College of Psychiatrists, which underpins that recommendation. The Royal College said:

"The proposals, if implemented fully, would have significant implications in terms of personnel and training. In the light of the 14 per cent. vacancy rate for consultant psychiatrists there is much work to do in attracting people to the mental health professions:

The proposals would also be extremely costly financially—we are concerned that care and treatment will be based not on the needs of patients but on what can be 'afforded'."

Point (s) of our recommendations states:

"We are aware that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence... is currently considering guidelines on the management of schizophrenia".

Hon. Members have also received the briefing note from the Zito Trust, which tells us that NICE has recently announced the details of its inquiries into the treatment of schizophrenia. The Zito Trust believes that it is an opportune moment for that debate—perhaps the Minister will confirm whether that is right. The Zito Trust states:

"NICE will be appraising atypical anti-psychotics. Atypical drugs for the treatment of schizophrenia dramatically improve patient outcomes, have fewer debilitating side effects and result in better compliance for patients. In nearly two thirds of patients, older typical medicines are associated with some terrible side-effects (including muscle tremors, rigidity, uncontrollable movements and restlessness which in many cases continue even after the treatment has ended). These side effects are one of several causative factors leading to patient non-compliance that can have serious consequences for both patients and the general public."

The trust is concerned that

"pending NICE's guidance being launched many patients will be denied the effective, newer treatment they deserve. It is our view that this will put at risk patients who will have a lower quality of life because of inappropriate treatment and it is our deep concern that they may fail to take their medication as a result."

The final point is point (t), in which the Committee talks about a range of suitable accommodation—an issue that my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford touched on. The Health Committee report is very worth while, but if it ends up covered with dust and with no one taking a blind bit of notice of it, we will have wasted our time.

Dealing with people with mental health problems is a huge challenge. All the time one meets people who are in a deep depression; their carers are in despair that they cannot get the right help. Such help and support may not exist. I am sure that the Minister and his team will meet positively the challenges raised and the solutions recommended by the Health Committee's report.

3.39 pm

Mrs. Eileen Gordon (Romford): I echo my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) in thanking all the witnesses who took the time to give us evidence and the special advisers and Clerks who worked with us on the report. They did a great job.

I was proud to be a member of the inquiry. Hon. Members will probably share my heartening experience that whenever the issues are discussed, I find that people welcome the report as an advance in the dialogue on mental health issues. That has been recognised by the Government, health professionals and, perhaps most importantly, by user groups, which very much welcome the report's recommendations. I suppose that every member of the Committee who took part in that long inquiry had different impressions of, or headlines for, the things that they saw and the people to whom they spoke. I shall highlight some of the impressions that were left with me.

Many changes are taking place in the national health service, both in the structure of mental health facilities and in provision. With my hon. Friends the Members for Hornchurch (Mr. Cryer) and for Upminster (Mr. Darvill), I met representatives of the North East London Mental Health trust on Tuesday. After April, it will be responsible for providing mental health care for more than 1 million people. I was impressed by the trust's values and by what it intends to do, which echoes the work that we did and the Government's response.

Perhaps I can digress for a moment to pay tribute to Sandra Knowles, the chief executive of the Barking, Havering and Brentwood Community Health Care NHS trust. Despite the fact that she is doing away with her job by handing it over to the North East London Mental Health trust, she has worked tirelessly to ensure a seamless transition for staff and service users. Her team has worked incredibly hard and I hope that, on 1 April, the users of the services will not notice a difference.

I reiterate what the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said—for too long, mental health services have been a Cinderella service. It is a case of "out of sight, out of mind." We had a huge institution in Brentwood to serve the local constituencies—Warley hospital. Thankfully, it is on its last legs and new provision is being made. It was the most awful place and had an impact on the whole community. Even as children, we were warned about Warley hospital. If we went to Brentwood, we would run past it. As the hon. Gentleman said, a stigma has been attached to mental health and is still prevalent.

Much has happened since the start of our inquiry. I very much welcome the national service framework that has been established by the Government, because we are all trying to move towards a holistic approach to people who need mental health care. That can only be good for them and the rest of society. A major issue to emerge from the report was the way in which we involve the users of the services. For too long, professionals have been telling people what is good for them. Increasingly, however, users have a strong voice and make their views known. They are being heard, and I hope that they will be listened to and have an input into policy.

I was shocked that the holistic approach had not been used up to now, which is shown by employment and housing issues. People with a mental illness may have episodes of illness. They may be well and, with a little help, find a job. They may be in work, paying rent and making their way in life, but then have an episode of illness, which means that they have to stop working. That has an impact on housing and disability benefits, for example, and they have to go through a cycle of reapplying for benefit each time. It should be recognised that these people have been there before, that it will be a pattern, that they will not work permanently, and that circumstances are difficult for them. People who are ill and have to go through this process are at their most vulnerable and are often unable to cope.

I hope that the advocacy service will take off, so that people will have someone to help guide them through the process. Through the Government's initiatives on one-stop shops, people can have their benefits sorted out in one place rather than having to trudge from one office to another, each time having to explain what is wrong with them over and over again, which is obviously distressing.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Lady has spoken about people who are able to go back to work but subsequently have another period of mental illness. It also works on the other side of the equation. One of my constituents is a severe schizophrenic and a double amputee as a result of an accident that occurred while she was in the care of the mental health trust. She is an in-patient sometimes, but lives in the community at other times. Every time she comes out of hospital, she has to go through the whole bureaucratic process again, filling in enormously long forms. The system does not seem to recognise that such people are unable, by definition, to cope with that problem every time they return to the community.

Mrs. Gordon: As I said, it is a real problem that has not yet been solved. It seems common sense to get to know and understand each individual as a person. It is sensible to have someone at the one-stop shop who recognises a person and knows what help might be required. It should not be necessary to go through the process over and over again. Carers also have to go through the process with the people they care for and it is extremely distressing.

The role of primary care in mental health issues is important. We know about special hospitals and prisons, and the statistics are interesting. One in four GP consultations has a mental health element and 90 per cent. of mental health problems are cared for in the primary care sector. We must therefore ensure that GPs and any specialists who work with them are aware of the issues. We do not want people told to go away and take up knitting, as the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) mentioned. Some GPs truly understand the issues and can deal with mental health within their surgeries, but many others do not.

With the formation of primary care groups and primary care trusts, GPs are able to work together and share information on best practice. The new mental health trust in our area will mean that mental health issues and care will move up the agenda. If one in four people has mental health aspects to their problem—stress, for example—it should be picked up at the primary care stage. We all know that the earlier a problem is diagnosed, the easier it is to deal with.

The hon. Member for Chelmsford, West has already dealt well with stigma, but I want to discuss one example. Someone told me at a local MIND meeting that, while waiting at a bus stop, she got chatting to the person next to her. After they had exchanged views about weather or the lateness of the bus, she mentioned that she had not been well, and when asked what the problem had been said, "I have been in Warley hospital," which as I have explained is a local mental health facility. The other woman immediately turned her back and moved away. Such unfounded fear of mental illness still exists. It was unnecessary and cruel for the woman I met to have had to suffer that. We must do more to educate the public about mental health problems. In my locality, MIND does an excellent job of informing people of the facts about mental health.

Mr. Hammond: Does the hon. Lady agree that we need to get the public to distinguish between the great majority of people who suffer from mental illness and the tiny minority of them who are potentially dangerous? Does she think that the Government's proposal to create a new definition of mental disorder that embraces not only people with mental illness but people with a learning disability will be helpful in reducing the stigmatisation of the whole group?

Mrs. Gordon: I hope that any measures that the Government take will focus on reducing stigma and educating people. That is so important. As the hon. Member for West Chelmsford said, we must start early in schools to provide information. People suffer from stress; we have enough stress in this job and it is the same for many people in other jobs.

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I did not intend to interrupt my hon. Friend's remarks but it is important to put the record straight. I hope that she is aware that the definition of

[Mr. John Hutton]

people who are to be treated compulsorily that we propose in the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" will not include people simply because they are learning disabled. The idea that it will is completely wrong.

Mrs. Gordon: I thank my hon. Friend for clarifying that point.

The voluntary sector has already been discussed, but I want to mention its important work. It emerged in the evidence that the Select Committee heard that voluntary bodies are always walking a funding tightrope. They may have annual funding and every year—or, for a three-year project, every three years—they must undergo the same process, wondering whether they will be given the money. Local groups live on a knife edge most of the time, worrying about the following year's grant and what services they will be able to provide. I hope that the Government will examine that issue and give voluntary groups some security with respect to the future. They make an invaluable contribution to patients' care.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield mentioned the women's services. I visited the services at Broadmoor and Ashworth. The staff there were doing their best and working hard. Much good work was being done, but it was repeatedly highlighted that most of the women patients should not have been there—it was inappropriate for them. It is so sad that people should be in Broadmoor—however caring the staff are—when they do not need to be. Indeed, some women are moved to medium-secure units but because those facilities are also inappropriate they eventually end up back at Broadmoor. There is nowhere else to go.

Many of the women in special hospitals have been abused sexually or physically for most of their lives. However, women form only a small part of the population in medium secure units, so when they are moved there, they tend to be put in mixed units or even on the same wards as men. They find that threatening. The units are debating whether to have women-only accommodation or a mixed structure with separate facilities for women, so that they can retreat into a comfortable and safe environment. That needs to be sorted out, because the director of women's services at Broadmoor told us that 60 per cent. of the women in her care could be looked after in the community or on assertive outreach. It is shocking that those women can be locked away when they could be in medium or low-security facilities.

As there are so few women in that sector, they are put in special hospitals and, as we know from the three cases that were mentioned, they can end up far from their communities and sometimes from their children. When we were at Broadmoor, we heard that, after the Fallon report, heavy restrictions were placed on the men because of the various incidents that had occurred there, with visiting children being abused. Obviously, the staff had to tighten things up and put in more security. However, the women in the women's unit suffered the same security despite there being no evidence that they would have harmed the children. Indeed, it would have helped their rehabilitation and their prognosis for better health if their children and friends with children could have visited. Those restrictions were inappropriate. A separate strategy is needed for women in special prisons and secure units. Women's groups have the necessary knowledge to help decide the best way forward.

I wish that we had had time to cover other areas. It is an intense report and we covered much ground. We dealt with the problems of the transfer from child services to adult services, caused by the fact that adolescents are kept in fairly small units but when they suddenly reach the cut-off date they are sent to somewhere harsh like Broadmoor. I hope that we can revisit that aspect, because we need to take a more intensive look at it. Nevertheless, I am pleased with the report and the Government's response and I am glad to have been a part of it.

3.58 pm

Mr. John Austin (Erith and Thamesmead): I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) has had to leave us, because he said that today's speech may be his last contribution in the House. I hope that it is not. I knew the hon. Gentleman before I became a Member. We all recognise the enormous contribution that he has made not only in the House but for the benefit of the people of west Yorkshire, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) knows.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for referring to our hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell). His contribution to the Committee's work was remarkable. He has had a great deal of experience in health and social services matters. He chaired a social services committee and served on the Health Committee, and his contribution was positive in every inquiry.

Mr. Austin: I welcome the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield introduced the debate. I also thank the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) for his balanced and rounded speech, and for his concentration on the border issues of mental ill health, especially stigma. Public safety issues are important, and no one wants to underestimate the tragedy of homicides and suicides, but all members of the Committee share concern at the fact that media focus on such events prevents a rational discussion of issues such as the location of hostels for people who present no real risk to anyone in the community. Those people are probably vulnerable individuals themselves. That focus also makes it more difficult to tackle the stigma problem.

The Committee is concluding its major inquiry on public health issues. The most important determinants of health are economic, social and environmental. Access to employment, training, housing, security and social interaction are key elements for the promotion of good health. Those who lack them are more likely to suffer physical and mental ill health. However, those who suffer mental ill health have more difficulty in accessing them. As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and our report said, such people face difficulties in re-accessing the benefit system.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield referred to unequal or inappropriate treatment on grounds of race and ethnicity, and my hon. Friend the Member for

Romford (Mrs. Gordon) referred to the same problem in terms of gender. Witness after witness gave evidence of the fact that health services, especially mental health services, suffer from institutional racism. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield pointed out, patients from ethnic minorities tend to access services later than their white counterparts although they may be more severely ill. They are more likely to be detained than treated as informal patients, are over-represented in the secure system and are often provided with inappropriate or insensitive services. They are more likely to receive physical treatments, and less likely to be offered counselling and other non-physical treatments.

That is not news. Our inquiry has not suddenly uncovered that information, as it was well documented 10 or 15 years ago by people such as Roland Littlewood, Maurice Lipsedge and Aggrey Burke. We met Roland Littlewood during the course of our inquiry when we visited NAFSIYAT. Little seems to have changed for the better in terms of discrimination and institutional racism. I am glad that the Government have begun to consider the matter, especially in the wake of the Macpherson inquiry.

Our inquiry found that many of the most appropriate services for ethnic minority communities seemed to be provided by voluntary and community-based organisations. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford pointed out the severe difficulty in continuity of funding. We made a firm recommendation on that, and I am pleased that the Government have taken it on board in their response. I agree with her on gender issues, and ask why there are so many women in special hospitals whom even my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health admits should not be there. That is also recognised in the White Paper, which is pleasing. We have heard that the director of women's services at Broadmoor believes that 60 per cent. of the women in her care could be looked after in a less secure environment.

As my hon. Friend pointed out so vividly, women who are difficult to manage but are not dangerous are spiralled up the system because of a lack of segregated facilities in medium secure units. The choice appears to be between a mixed ward with male sexual abusers in medium-secure units, or transfer to a special maximum-security hospital. That cannot be appropriate or right. My hon. Friend also referred to the gender-blind approach of the security directions on child visiting, following the Fallon inquiry into Ashworth. It was clearly aimed at men, yet women at Rampton and Broadmoor are now restricted in seeing their own children, without any consideration being given to the therapeutic implications. That cannot be right, and I hope that it is being dealt with.

The Committee also considered issues relating to caring for people in the community. There have been some reports, including a study at York university, on the success of assertive community treatment. They show that that form of treatment maintains contact with more patients, cuts hospital admissions, and reduces time spent in hospital with no evidence of clinical harm.

The Committee was impressed when it visited both north Birmingham and St. George's hospital in south-west London, where assertive outreach programmes are combined with the use of the newer atypical anti-psychotic drugs, which were referred to earlier, as well as psycho-social interventions and home treatment. That combination is achieving real results. I welcome the commitment in the Government's recent White Paper to an additional 170 assertive outreach teams with 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week access to services. I recognise that performance varies across the country, and that more research must be carried out into which forms of assertive outreach work.

Questions have also been raised as to whether community care has failed, or whether it has gone too far. It was said earlier that, although care in the community has not failed, the absence of such care has often failed vulnerable people. The late development of the appropriate care in the community packages has led, unfortunately, to the question being raised as to whether the shift from hospital-based care to community-based care has gone too far, or whether tragic incidents such as the murder of Jonathan Zito in 1993 were the result of the closure of in-patient units before the development of adequate community provision.

Those widespread concerns in the 1990s contributed to the passing of the Mental Health (Patients in the Community) Act 1995. That Act contained an element of compulsion since it created a new power of after-care and supervision. However, it stopped short of requiring patients to accept treatment. In practice, the power of conditional discharge has not been widely used, perhaps because of the absence of community support facilities rather than because of the absence of a power of compulsory treatment.

The passing of the recent human rights legislation will be an interesting challenge for the mental health services. Last summer, before the implementation of the human rights legislation, the Court of Appeal ruled that local councils should pay for after-care services for some categories of long-term psychiatric patients. The human rights legislation could, in certain circumstances, require local councils and health authorities to meet the conditions of mental health tribunal discharge orders.

Last year, a case was brought against a health authority by a woman who had been held in detention in hospital for more than a year after a mental health tribunal had directed her release because the health authority had failed to find a forensic psychiatrist to supervise her after care. In a similar case in 1997, a patient with schizophrenia took the United Kingdom to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. He had been detained for several years after the release date ordered by the tribunal because the local authority could not find a suitable supervised hostel. The council was found to be in breach of the European convention on human rights for its failure to fulfil the tribunal's conditions within a reasonable period.

Until recently, the only real remedy available to people was the long and arduous process of taking the United Kingdom to court in Strasbourg. Their only other form of redress was by way of judicial review, but ultimately, in judicial review, the court could decide only whether the authority had acted reasonably and had little power other than that of being able to encourage the authorities to explore alternative solutions. Mental health tribunals do not have the power to compel authorities to comply with the conditions of discharge.

[Mr. Austin]

Now that the human rights legislation has been incorporated into British law, any individual can apply to the British courts. That will have an impact on mental health services and their delivery and will, in some cases, ensure that services are available to meet discharge criteria and free up much needed in-patient beds. However, I fear that without additional resources, those authorities may end up having to rob Peter to pay Paul. The Government must therefore be aware of the resource implications of providing an adequate care in the community system.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), the former Secretary of State, said in 1997 that community care had failed, his choice of words was not helpful. However, he was not asking for a return to the old system, with the reintroduction of the water-tower asylums—or the bins, as they are more appropriately known in the trade. He set up the independent reference group's review of community services and recognised, as do the Government, that locking up patients in long-stay institutions is often harsh and harmful. He said that he was looking for a third way. That was perhaps the only time that the right hon. Member for St. Pancras and I looked for a third way; a way that comprised the provision of acute beds, more secure facilities, more 24-hour crisis teams, hostels—as the hon. Member for West Chelmsford said—supported accommodation, home treatment teams and assertive outreach.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield referred to the evidence that we received on people with dual diagnosis. That is of real concern to the Committee and I hope to all hon. Members present. My hon. Friend referred to people with a dual diagnosis of mental disorder and substance misuse or mental disorder and learning disability. Despite their different circumstances, both groups face the common problem of what is known as "pass the parcel"—it is someone else's problem. Young Minds told the inquiry that

"the division between drug and alcohol services and mental health services creates widespread problems throughout the mental health system".

As the National Schizophrenia Fellowship put it:

"they are deemed too 'mad' to go into an alcohol or drugs unit or too 'high' to go into a mental health service".

Turning Point gave us evidence that people with alcohol or drug and mental health problems also find it difficult to access primary care services so that their physical health needs are not addressed.

It is not an easy issue with simple solutions. One NHS trust put it bluntly when, referring to the problem of patients with dual diagnosis on a general ward, it said:

"you have people with other conditions who do not want young men out of their heads on wards."

Those who misuse drugs or alcohol also have a right to treatment. Since some may be the people for whom compulsory treatment is considered, a human rights issue arises if they were previously denied access to appropriate services. Substance misuse is often implicated in acts of violence, both homicide and suicide.

4.13 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.28 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Austin: I was referring to the problems faced by people with a dual diagnosis. The Health Committee received two studies, one from Maudsley, the other from Lewisham. The first showed that 40 per cent. of alcohol-dependent patients had some form of mental illness, and the second that 58 per cent. of people accessing mental health services had a dual diagnosis of substance misuse. Although the national service framework acknowledges problems of co-morbidity, it provides little guidance, which led the Committee to recommend that the Department of Health should require joint working and co-ordination between mental health and substance misuse agencies. It also recommended that working with people with a dual diagnosis should be made a requirement within the remit of assertive outreach services and that the duty of partnership imposed on the NHS and local authorities under section 27 of the Health Act 1999 should include substance misuse and housing services.

I want to say more about drug treatment. In delivering a unanimous, cross-party report, the Committee called upon the National Institute for Clinical Excellence seriously to consider the outcome of treatment from a user's perspective, including the benefits of making compliance with drug treatment less onerous. Our report was published at the same time as the publication of a survey by the Zito Trust, showing severe gaps and weaknesses in the provision of services, with patients being denied access to the most effective treatment—21 per cent. of United Kingdom health authorities restricted the use of atypical anti-psychotic drugs that are known to have fewer side effects and result in better compliance.

Notwithstanding the outcome of the NICE investigation, I share Jayne Zito's concern that patients who are non-compliant, often because of the horrendous side effects of typical medicines, are denied access to atypical medicines, which, as Jayne Zito said, improve compliance, lead to reintegration into society and can result in significant savings.

The Government believe that independent advocacy services are important—it is a subject dear to the heart of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield—as shown in the White Paper, which was published before the passing of the Health and Social Care Bill. The White Paper refers to the patient advisory liaison service as the gateway to specialist advocacy services.

The Minister knows the importance that hon. Members attach to the assurance that the advocacy services should be independent, and be seen to be so. In view of the amendment to the Health and Social Care Bill on the location and provision of advocacy services, which the Government accepted, the matter will have to be addressed before we consider a mental health Bill.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman is talking about the Health and Social Care Bill as if it were a fait accompli. The Bill is still under consideration in the other place and, depending on the timing of the dissolution of Parliament, may not make it to the statute book.

Mr. Austin: Whether or not the Bill reaches the statute book in this or a future Parliament, I hope that the

Minister will acknowledge the commitment to the important principles of independent and available advocacy services in the Health and Social Care Bill.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) drew an analogy between the Prison Service and mental health services in terms of community interest. That may be valid, but there is a clear distinction: most of us know something about prisons, but few hon. Members have a loved one, a friend or a relative, who has been in the nick. However, I suspect that every one of us has someone close to them with personal experience of the mental health services. It is not only our constituents who have such experience.

I have two prisons in one in my constituency, and there are prisons in the constituencies of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr Brand). Many people are in Belmarsh prison in my constituency because of the failure and inadequacy of the mental health services to address their needs.

I have been a critic for many years of the inadequacy of the psychiatric and forensic services in prisons, but the new regime at Belmarsh prison, which I visit, is a beacon of light in the development of services, and the Committee was very positive about it.

The media have concentrated on the small number of difficult-to-manage patients but that should not divert us from the need to raise the standards of mental health services generally. The Government's NHS frameworks may need even more resources than they have already generously made available, but if they are implemented, we may at last see the tag "Cinderella service" removed from mental health.

4.34 pm

Dr. Peter Brand (Isle of Wight): It is always a great privilege to speak on behalf of the Liberal Democrats on Health Committee reports. It is rare that I do not fully endorse a report, but then I have also had the privilege to serve as a Committee member. I must congratulate the members, staff and advisers on the excellent way in which the Committee works. Our chairman, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), keeps us in order and gives his own opinion, but at the end of the day allows consensus to emerge, which is right. Our recommendations are based on evidence. That is why it is important that we look at the areas in which the evidence clearly points to a recommendation that is not always picked up by the Government in the way that we would like.

The timing of the report is excellent. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and others have talked about the continuing stigmatisation of people with mental health problems. I suppose that it is a step forward from being totally excluded and marginalised, but it is still awful that we cannot accept that mental illness is not the fault of the person who has it—we should not have a blame culture—nor is it an infectious illness. It is a condition brought on either acutely, like any other acute illness, or chronically, due to the pressures created by society and social conditions.

Also, it is timely to talk about mental health because we can do so much more to support people and prevent illness, as well as to treat them. I strongly endorse the report's recommendation that our service to people with mental illness, and those recovering from or at risk from it, should be better integrated. I am slightly concerned that we should not move too much into a medical model for doing that important work. Of course, treatment often involves pharmaceuticals, but they should be an adjunct to everything else that we do.

Sometimes the war against mental illness seems to be seen as a form of chemical warfare—it seems that, provided that one drugs people into quietude and submission, there are no problems. A number of hon. Members have talked about the use of up-to-date drugs. It is wrong to describe the new anti-schizophrenic drugs as atypical drugs. They should be described as modern drugs that allow people to function as well as be in control. The points made by the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell) on electro-convulsive therapy were extremely valuable in that context. ECT can be extremely helpful in certain limited conditions. It can be life saving; it can also be a means of blasting out people's anxieties and memories and making them extremely quiet, so that they are no longer a nuisance.

There must be a way to ensure that people have a say in their proposed treatment—not only in the context of compulsory treatment orders, but perhaps more importantly, in the context of having uncertain competence about giving permission. It is too easy for clinicians to persuade people who are not admitted under a section that a certain form of treatment is best for them without giving them an option to consider alternatives. The issue of competence is extremely important in that context. I am glad that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) picked up the point when the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell was talking about ECT because it applies just as much to drug treatment.

Just as drug treatment can be appropriate, it is also important that other quality-of-life issues are properly addressed. I am pleased that at least four of this afternoon's contributors made strong reference to the need to consider social support. There is a need for cross-government thinking on how the benefits system delivers its services. At my surgery on Friday, I saw someone who must go to a tribunal because his benefit is being cut from 60 per cent. to 40 per cent. or something similar. That man is agoraphobic. He worked himself up for a month to go to the mainland for a medical examination by the benefits system. When he arrived, he was told, "Well, we're overbooked this afternoon. Here's some money for your ferry fare. Come back in two weeks' time." That service is being run on behalf of the service provider, not the people who need it.

I hear far too often that the medical branch of the Benefits Agency is totally insensitive to the people whom it serves. As individuals, the people in that agency may be perfectly nice, but the systems that they employ are like the ones that we had in general practice 30 years ago, which are rightly not acceptable now. If the Government employ an agency, they should consider the way in which it delivers services.

It is important that rules and regulations are not too restrictive. For example, before housing benefit is paid, it must be verified by a housing officer. If someone in the community struggles hard to be able to meet anyone but has developed a degree of trust with his community psychiatric nurse and psychiatric social worker, either of

[Dr. Peter Brand]

them, who often make the placement in the first place, could do the verification job well. It is now done by yet another body. There is no doubt that red tape and a jobsworth attitude are sometimes involved. I cannot blame the people concerned, because they work to a strict set of rules, but that reduces the amount of social and supportive housing that is available.

Two weeks ago, I received a letter from Dr. Ram Seth, who is a wonderful psychiatrist on the island. He is despairing at the situation of two of his patients. They are in-patients, but should no longer be in hospital and he cannot find anywhere for them to go or anyone who will have them. I regularly meet social landlord providers who say that they would like to continue doing that business but they need a little more support. Somehow, the joined-up thinking by Government has not been worked out properly.

While I am talking about joined-up government, I also make a plea for the Minister to talk to his colleagues with responsibility for employment, especially the therapeutic earnings arrangements and the current limit. The hon. Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) mentioned the difficulties of moving in and out of employment. It is not in anyone's interest for someone to take a job unless he knows that he can continue to do it for a time. If a psychiatric patient or recovering patient is very vulnerable, the last thing that we want is an on-going set of disasters. Someone may try hard and take on a job. After two or three weeks, however, he may find that the judgment was not right and he should not have tried it. It is not merely a question of his going back to the day centre and getting his support. The person is also without funds until that is sorted out. It may be six weeks before he has anything to live on, which is an enormous disincentive for people to go forward.

I am also concerned that we do not see day centres entirely as places for the acute or severely chronically ill. I must declare an interest. My older brother runs a day centre. It is successful and it allows people to keep in touch with a supportive facility even when they have gone back to work. With our new arrangements, which try to target help towards those who are more severely ill, his case load is being studied to see who can be thrown out. Where do vulnerable people go when they are thrown out? I have a problem with this. The medical model for allocating resources does not cut across the social support, which is not always as easy to define as some of the medical support. The medical profession does not have a good record on defining things. Psychiatry is full of diagnoses and opinions about the meaning of diagnoses. I will touch on that issue with reference to personality disorders and treatability.

On co-conditions, the hon. Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) described drug dependency and alcoholism well. An enormous opportunity is missed within the Prison Service to tackle people with those problems. Community psychiatric nurses travel all day to find out whether they can provide help to a person through assertive outreach, yet at the same time, people with just such needs rot in our prisons without the support that they should have. Enlightened—and some extremely good—prison regimes exist. There are good prisons on the island. However, it is not reasonable to expect the job in question—running therapy groups for people with drug or alcohol problems, or with sexual deviations—to be taken on largely by prison officers in addition to their custodial and occupational therapy work. That approach cannot be sustained.

I now find that prison officers are breaking down because they cannot cope with the strain. They provide a service that should be resourced through the national health service—and properly. I am glad that the report mentions the present arrangement, which is difficult for health authorities in areas where there is a substantial prison population. It is impossible to contribute the resources that are needed. Even for something relatively simple and accessible, such as counselling services for which people are available in the job market, the money simply is not there. I hope that the Minister will suggest what progress the review on the funding of prison medical services has made. That matter is of great concern, not only on the Isle of Wight but generally in areas with substantial prison contacts.

In prisons, there are many mentally ill people who are not treated. Prisons are also the waiting list for secure hospitals. The bizarre situation is that people who, if treated, could return to the community are in prison with people who should be not there but in secure units and who make the lives of other prisoners and prison officers extremely difficult. On our special hospital visits we saw that there is a waiting list to discharge people and a waiting list to admit people—although the waiting list to admit is not created until there is a vacancy.

Mr. Austin: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one of the problems that he has identified has been tackled at Belmarsh to a large extent by forensic psychiatric services being provided for the prison on a commission basis by the local medium-secure unit?

Dr. Brand: That is an extremely valuable point. It is one of the models that we have to work through. It is vital that the prison medical services, the special units and the secure hospitals all work to the same regime and that they have clear financial accountability for the jobs that they take on. I am afraid that rigidly separated budgets will result in a lot of defensive fencing before decisions are made.

What progress is being made on the extra beds in secure units that the Minister spoke about in Committee—and, indeed, on specialist units for women? The points made by the hon. Member for Romford were so telling. We are putting women in an impossible situation by allowing Broadmoor to become a haven or asylum. I am not against asylums—in the true sense of the word as places of safety—but they need not be places in a secure hospital.

Two difficult human rights issues are tackled in the Health and Social Care Bill. One is the compulsory treatment order in the community, which is an extension of the present powers. At the moment, people can be compulsorily detained but not necessarily treated; they can refuse treatment until a tribunal has heard the case. At the moment, that does not extend to the community. Those who are in the community can be taken into hospital, but treatment cannot be forced upon them.

If treatment is to be forced on people in the community, it is important that the patients, if competent, should have a choice of what that treatment

should be. They should have the opportunity, before an episode of illness, of saying what that treatment might be. Patients' carers should have an input, as should those support organisations to which patients belong. That is why the advocacy service is important. In this instance, I would not like the advocacy service simply to deal with complaints. It should help people expertly to make choices that they may find difficult to understand. If we are to deny people the liberty to say no, it is important that proper checks and balances are put in place. That is even more important if we are talking about denying people their freedom.

I am uneasy about locking people up because of their personality. As has been said, a severe personality disorder does not necessarily relate to the dangerousness that a person presents to society. I am glad to say that a body of medical opinion believes that treatments can help people come to terms with their personality disorders and allow them to interact better with society. More work needs to be done with what are normally described as talking therapies—I believe that they should be called listening therapies—including the psychotherapeutic approach that allows people's behaviour to be moulded over a long period of time to reduce risk. In that sense, using hospital psychiatric facilities is appropriate, but I would be unhappy if people were put in prison, or a quasi-facility—as if it were an oubliette—because we do not like their opinions or thinking patterns. That is dangerous.

I fully support the Fallon concept of reviewable sentences. It would be interesting to hear whether the Minister has talked to his Home Office colleagues and whether he can think of an individual who has not committed some offence, no matter how minor, and presents a major risk in line with the descriptions of people with dangerous personality disorders. Such individuals must be extremely rare. They may have committed offences as juveniles. Something will have happened to have brought them to the attention of the authorities.

Some people may be so unfortunate that they cannot cope and need to be imprisoned or put somewhere secure. From that location, they can be reviewed, and they should have the right to go back to court to say that they do not represent the risk that they used to and want to be let out. Reviewable sentences are a much better way forward than putting someone in jail.

Mr. Hammond: I am slightly confused, but perhaps I have the wrong end of the stick. I thought that reviewable sentences related to offenders who might subsequently have their incarceration period extended because of the threat that they presented. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting a form of reviewable sentence for someone who has not committed an offence, or have I misunderstood him?

Dr. Brand: I am sorry if I did not make myself clear. I am saying that some people commit offences that may be relatively minor, but those people may present a clear threat and so would be given indeterminate sentences. An arson attack that does not do enormous damage, for instance, might suggest a disturbed personality. In such circumstances, a reviewable sentence may be appropriate if the cases are not deemed a priori for the mental health services. I hope that there are not many such cases. The Government estimate a figure of, I think, 2,300, and it might be interesting to know how many of those people have some court record.

I must pay tribute to successive Governments for making enormous progress on the way in which mental health is regarded. It is important that we do not simply say that mental health has to come into the mainstream, as we must also resource it. Much is now being done to work more closely with patients. I single out my friend Roger Fordham, who runs a patients' group on the Isle of Wight. He is a terrific worker for his patients and colleagues in the day centre. Such people are an enormous resource, but we should not over-use them. It is important that we do not narrow our horizons too much to one willing individual. We must ensure that we use everyone who has a contribution to make.

I have also been impressed with the work of the Zito Trust. The report comments on the mandatory homicide inquiries and their effect, and makes the sound recommendation that they be sent to a specialist branch of the Commission for Health Improvement. I cannot think of any lasting positive outcome of such an inquiry other than the Zito Trust—it is an unofficial body, but it has done excel'ent work. It is a forward-looking organisation that is not centred only on victims, as it considers the needs of the people who committed the dreadful offences and other people in the same category.

No such improvements can be achieved without adequate resources. As has been said, we are short not only of psychiatrists but of psychologists and psychiatric nurses. The idea that general practitioners could be trained to be more skilful and do more mental health work is no solution as GPs are already over-burdened with work.

More time is necessary to bring more people on, but I hope that in the interim, the Minister will recognise the enormous contribution that can be made by lay counsellors, social workers, carers and other people in supporting roles. It is wrong that units are still being shut down or restricted because we cannot afford the people to run them. Those are the units that support people and keep them out of hospital and out of our prisons.

5 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): As perhaps the only Member speaking today, apart from the Minister, who was not a member of the Committee, I should like to congratulate it on tackling a difficult and complex subject and producing a report that, as I am sure its readers will agree, is an extremely useful reference document covering a wide area. I am also grateful for the tone adopted by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). All hon. Members have adopted a constructive tone, acknowledging that it is a matter of building on the efforts of successive Governments and that society has come a long way during the past 30 or 40 years in terms of how we deal with people who suffer from mental illness. We still have a long way to go, but we have come a long way, and the issue is not primarily party political.

Since the publication of the Committee report, a lot of water has passed under the bridge in terms of Government documents. The NHS plan came out

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shortly after the report, and the Government's response to the report, the Health and Social Care Bill and the consultation responses to the Green Paper "Reform of the Mental Health Act 1983" have all been published, as was the White Paper, in December. We must consider the Committee's recommendations in the light of what has taken place since the publication of its report.

We have, as yet, seen no sign of legislation. The Government have stated on many occasions and reiterated in all the documents that I have listed, that mental health is a high priority for them. Since there is potentially still a year of this Parliament left to run, I hope that that high level of commitment and the importance that the Government attach to mental health will be expressed in the form of a Bill. There is broad consensus that new legislation is needed. There is also a fairly broad consensus that such legislation is more important than some of the other legislation that has filled the legislative programme. I hope that the Minister will have something reassuring to say about that.

The title of the report is "Provision of NHS Mental Health Services", and although I do not want to be picky, it is probably appropriate to mention at the outset the independent sector. The Government have stated that they wish to work more closely with the sector in future to ensure effective provision of NHS services to NHS patients. The independent sector plays a significant role in the delivery of mental health services, particularly medium-secure services. In London, I understand that one independent organisation provides more NHS in-patient psychiatry than any NHS trust in the London region.

Without wishing to be churlish, I detected in recommendation (uu) of the report a tinge of hostility to the involvement of the private sector and what seemed like an aspiration to reduce private sector involvement. Will the Minister say something about the future of private and independent sector providers of mental health services? Do they have a future in mental health provision in the NHS? If they were to receive a negative signal, it could have unfortunate consequences, so I hope that the Minister can say something reassuring about that. What proportion of the additional beds and facilities that the Government have announced are expected to be provided directly by the NHS and what proportion will be NHS-funded facilities provided by the private sector?

Mr. Hinchliffe: The hon. Gentleman knows my general views on the private sector, which I shall therefore not need to discuss. When we produced the report, the Committee was concerned that some of the private establishments that we examined were offering a service, but their existence obstructed the development of a better service in the NHS. Earlier, I referred to a private hospital in York that offered secure facilities that were full of young black men from London. My personal view, which was shared by the cross-party Committee, is that we must place those men in appropriate facilities in their communities, which is a point made in the report.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I know his views on the private sector generally, so I understand why he does not feel the need to discuss them today because you, Mr O'Hara, would certainly rule the language out of order. I have heard what he had to say and I look forward to the Minister's comments.

There is a capacity issue. We have all seen what is happening in the care homes sector, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would not want anything similar to happen in the medium secure mental health sector by virtue of careless talk. I hope that the Minister will want to reassure quality providers that there will be a role for them because I would not want to spoil the tone of consensus on the issues that we have discussed today.

When my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) responded to the presentation of the White Paper by the Secretary of State in the House, he welcomed the general thrust of Government policy. More care delivered in more appropriate settings must equal better outcomes. We also welcome the Government's determination to address the question of stigma, about which my hon. Friend the Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and the hon. Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) have spoken eloquently today.

The Committee noted that the focus of attention on high-risk patients—the bulk of the White Paper deals with such patients, which inevitably focuses press attention—conveys a highly misleading impression of mental health services. Earlier, I intervened on the hon. Lady to ask about the Government's proposed new definition of mental disorder that covers any disability or disorder of mind or brain, whether permanent or temporary, which results in an impairment or disturbance of mental functioning. Perhaps the Minister will want to clarify the position because I took his earlier comments to mean that that definition would not include people with a learning disability. However, my understanding is that it will include people with a learning disability, although that alone will not make them vulnerable to compulsion.

The point that I raised with the hon. Lady related to stigma. I have raised the issue before, but I perceive that many people in the community do not distinguish between either learning disability and mental illness or the vast majority of mental illnesses and the tiny number of patients who may be a threat to themselves or to others. I raised this question with the hon. Lady, and I shall address it again to the Minister: does broadening the definition of mental disorders help to de-stigmatise this area? How can it be managed to ensure that the effect will be positive in terms of reducing stigma?

My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring welcomed the proposed reform and simplification of sectioning procedures, although he raised some practical concerns. If and when we see a Bill, we shall examine carefully how the Government intend to overcome them. We also welcome the proposal for community treatment orders, subject, as always, to the establishment of the appropriate safeguards. Doubtless there will be much devil in the detail that will need scrutiny. It is clear that community treatment orders are building on the success of care in the community and must constitute the way forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and the Select Committee itself concluded that it would be unhelpful for the Government to give the impression that care in the community has been a failure. I should point out that the Minister has gone out of his way to emphasise

that he does not consider care in the community a failure, but in a press release dated 29 July 1998 the current Secretary of State's predecessor said:

"Care in the community has failed."

One cannot express oneself much clearer than that, and the Government and the mental health community might have to work hard for some time to repair the damage done by that brief statement.

We support much of the thrust of the Government's White Paper and their response to the Select Committee report, but in due course I shall raise some specific issues about which we are not quite so happy. Like hon. Members in this Chamber, who are all experts on this subject, I hope that others will keep in mind the proper balance between general mental health services and issues relating to high-risk patients. The hon. Member for Romford said that approximately one in four GP consultations involve a mental health element. Ninety per cent. of patients with mental health problems are cared for entirely within the primary care system, which points strongly to the need to focus resources on early intervention and identification of problems.

We also know that four in every 1,000 people have a severe mental health condition, such as schizophrenia, and some 11,500 people are detained in hospitals and homes under the Mental Health Act 1983. In the light of those figures, if the proposals in the White Paper are implemented and legislation is enacted, how many people are expected to be treated under compulsion in the new regime that the Minister envisages? Concern has been expressed that numbers might increase significantly. On the question of moving people to units with lower security levels where possible and in the light of recommendation (xx) and the Government's response to it, what reduction in the population of high-security mental health units does the Minister expect? In the Government's response to recommendation (r), reference is made to 1,000 new "workers" in mental health at primary care level. What does that mean? What type of people and level of qualification are we talking about?

The Select Committee has rightly recognised that funding and resourcing is a principal area of concern. Although it welcomed the ring-fenced funds that have been drawn from the modernisation fund, it recognised that the overall level of funding is of the greatest importance. It also noted variations in the percentages of health authority allocations that are spent on mental health, and herein lies one of the problems. The Government say loud and clear that they regard mental health as a top priority, but they have set targets for health authorities and NHS trusts that have a somewhat headline-grabbing potential. The inevitable result is that health authorities are tempted to divert their resources towards meeting those targets that, in their view, the Government believe should be addressed first. The worry is that mental health will remain the Cinderella service while it must compete with other, high priority, high-profile, life and death, blue-light issues that the Government, rightly, have raised. The Government say that mental health is a priority, but most of the electorate, if asked what are the principal objectives in the health service, would probably say cancer and coronary heart disease if they have been listening to the Government. I should be surprised if many of them would say mental health.

I want to refer to one or two specific matters and then to speak briefly about dangerous severe personality disorder. We all recognise that staffing is the main constraint in implementing the Government's mental health plans and the NHS national plan. The Committee identified precisely the concerns in relation to psychologists and occupational therapists. The Government's response to the Committee's recommendations (p) and (r) was inadequate and I am surprised that the hon. Member for Wakefield did not mention that. It referred to the total number of nurses and other health professionals whom the Government hope to have in place by 2004 under the NHS plan. It did not refer to the specific requirements for staffing our mental health services.

I have some questions for the Minister. First, can those NHS plans be met? We have seen the reports of the Audit Commission and National Audit Office, which refer to the difficulty of meeting those plans with the current high drop-out level among trainee nurses. Secondly, what proportion of those people will be directed towards mental health services? If the NHS plan is not achieved on staffing, what reassurance can the Minister give that mental health services will not suffer the brunt of under-availability of qualified staff? Pay is often said to be the main grouse that causes problems with recruitment, particularly to mental health services, but job satisfaction, morale, conditions and, above all, being allowed to get on with the job are also important.

I want to leave the Minister plenty of time to reply, so I shall omit several important matters and say a few words about the Government's proposals on compulsion. I referred to the Bournewood judgment during an intervention and I should be grateful if the Minister would elaborate on how the new regime will deal with patients who have not objected to treatment but who are deemed not to have the mental capacity to consent to treatment. The Select Committee suggested that it might be a good idea if we had a better definition of capacity. I am slightly concerned that in practical terms those people are treated compulsorily. If they are correctly assessed not to have the ability to consent, the regime that will control them when they are inside the system should be more akin to the regime of a voluntary patient than to that of a compulsory patient. The Minister knows that I have a particular interest in that matter because the Bournewood mental health trust is in my constituency.

Turning to patients with dangerous severe personality disorder, I must say at the outset that the Opposition recognise that it is a very difficult problem and that part of the challenge, if we are to de-stigmatise mental illness, is to identify those who are a danger to the public and to assure the public that they are being appropriately dealt with. We can then re-educate the public about the way in which they think about the 99.9 per cent. of mentally ill people who are not a danger to anyone, except perhaps themselves occasionally.

After much consideration and a lot of soul-searching, the Opposition have concluded that we simply cannot support a regime that locks people up, not for the purpose of treating them in a therapeutic environment, but as a form of preventive detention. There is presently inadequate evidence to suggest that the predictive power of diagnosis is sound enough to contemplate the

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enormity of incarcerating someone without treatment and without any realistic possibility of being released back into the community. The Opposition are extremely wary of the Government's proposals for dealing with dangerous severe personality disorder patients.

To conclude, I emphasise that what unites us is much greater than what divides us. There is a considerable sphere of consensus. I have explained some of our concerns. If a Bill is introduced before the end of the Parliament, we look forward to engaging constructively with the Government on the practical issues that it will raise. I hope that we can proceed as we have hitherto—in a consensual way to ensure that the progress made over the past 30 or 40 years continues in future.

5.21 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): First, may I say that I am glad that a doctor is in the House this afternoon? I may need to ask the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Dr. Brand) to help me with the problems affecting my voice.

I hope to respond fully to all the issues that hon. Members have raised. We have had an excellent debate about the future of mental health services and I agree with virtually everything that has been said. Anyone listening to today's proceedings would conclude that a substantial consensus exists about what needs to be done to ensure that all our constituents have access to the first-class mental health services that we would want for ourselves if we ever suffered from a mental health problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who has a close interest in these matters, made an excellent speech. He and I agree on many aspects of the problem, particularly on the need to improve community mental health services. We have made that a priority for investment, reform and modernisation during the past three years and I can certainly give my hon. Friend the assurance that that will continue.

I also welcome the speech of the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns), who did my job in the previous Conservative Government. I agree with him about the need to tackle discrimination, stigma and ill-informed prejudice. I pay tribute to him for the stance that he has adopted on this issue, which is not always easy. The hon. Gentleman was on more dangerous ground in respect of jumping on political bandwagons, but I respect his courage in raising that matter as well.

I greatly enjoyed the brief contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Gunnell). This may be the last opportunity to hear my hon. Friend speak in the House. I hope not, because he is an outstanding Member of Parliament and a distinguished member of the Health Committee who brings personal integrity and compassion to these subjects. I pay an enormous tribute to him as an individual. I hope that I will have the chance to hear more from him in the future.

I can assure the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) that we intend to improve mental health services. We responded positively to the Health Committee's report, which is a mark of our continuing contribution to this issue. We have no intention of producing a response to the report and then forgetting about mental health services. The hon. Gentleman asked a specific question about the National Institute of Clinical Excellence and the use of atypical anti-psychotics, if he will forgive me for using that expression. NICE is reviewing the whole treatment of schizophrenia and has not yet produced its final appraisal. The Government will examine it carefully when it is produced, which I hope will be as soon as possible.

My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mrs. Gordon) is actively involved in mental health issues in her constituency and has a special concern to ensure that patients and users are effectively involved in planning their care and treatment. We share that commitment. It is strongly and fully reflected throughout the national service framework, which has been well received not just in the NHS but outside with user and patient groups and in local authorities. She was right to stress, as did the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), the need to improve our investment in care. Anyone who has read the NHS plan and looked at what Ministers have been saying will know of our strong commitment to improve front-line primary care services. As has been widely remarked, that is where the majority of patients can be safely and appropriately treated. It is where they want to be treated. It is the responsibility of us in the NHS and our partners in local authorities to ensure that those services are available.

I congratulate the Health Committee on an excellent report into mental health services and I welcome its close interest in the subject. Like all members of the Committee, the Government want to see those vital NHS services improve and expand so that we can begin to meet more effectively the mental health needs of millions of people in our country. As hon. Members have rightly pointed out, this is a big challenge and much needs to be done, but with the Committee's encouragement, we have made a good beginning to that long overdue programme of investment and modernisation.

In 1997, when the Government took office, we made improving mental health services one of the top three clinical priorities for the NHS. Given the condition of mental health services and their importance to the health and well-being of the nation, that was absolutely the right thing to do. Our programme of modernisation—[*Interruption.*] That crack in my voice reminds me of the time when my voice used to go up and down.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Many years ago.

Mr. Hutton: Yes, many years ago. I thank my hon. Friend for that generous observation.

Our programme of modernisation has involved three distinct elements. First, we needed to improve investment in mental health services and in doing so, to focus on the immediate priorities. Those included new and improved community-based services and secure beds. I will try to respond to questions about the numbers of secure beds in a moment. Secondly, we needed to set clear national standards in relation to

service provision and access to services that have quite often depended on where a person happened to live. The first of the national service frameworks has, I believe, begun to tackle this unacceptable state of affairs and has been widely welcomed. Finally, we needed to bring the mental health legislation up to date, and we have now set out in the White Paper how we intend to do that.

This is clearly a major programme of reform that will take years to complete. I know that the Committee has strong views on those three issues as well as on other matters, with which I will deal in a few moments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Erith and Thamesmead (Mr. Austin) wisely pointed out, it is important that we recognise, as I am sure that the Committee does, that good mental health is not just the responsibility or preserve of the NHS. The NHS has a crucial role to play, given the expertise and specialist care services that we provide, but wider issues have a key bearing too. The Government's successful economic policy of creating new jobs and securing economic stability will make a positive impact on promoting good mental health, as will the extra investment that we are making in other front-line public services such as housing and social services.

Mental health services have often been described as the Cinderella service of the NHS. We all know why. The proper range of services has not always been available to provide the care and support that people need when and where they need it. There has been inadequate care, poor management of resources and under funding.

The Department of Health's memorandum to the Health Committee on public expenditure demonstrated those problems clearly. From 1991-92 to 1995-96, expenditure on mental health services fell in real terms by £69 million. Given the pressure on mental health services throughout that period, it was clearly not helpful. More worryingly, the memorandum showed that NHS in-patient provision had fallen by almost 18,000 beds between 1987 and 1996. I accept that 15,000 of those were long stay NHS beds and we welcome the progress that has been made in those areas, but 3,000 of those beds were acute in-patient psychiatric beds and we could not afford to lose them. That is why we decided that the first national service framework should cover mental health services. The NSF published in 1999 will, we hope, help to drive up quality and remove the wide and unacceptable variations in provision that we inherited.

Mr. Hammond: The Select Committee report drew attention to health authorities' different spending levels on mental health from their general allocations. Does the Minister have a view on that? Does he intend to issue directions or give guidance on the appropriate percentage to health authorities or does he think that it is different in every case?

Mr. Hutton: I will certainly not give guidance or instructions to health authorities that identifies the percentage that they should spend on mental health. That would not be right. The hon. Gentleman would be the first to criticise me if I did so, because he is always complaining about Ministers' alleged micro-management of the NHS. Those issues must be resolved locally. Local priorities and local patients' needs must be reflected. We expect spending on mental health services to continue to improve and to reflect the national priorities that we have set.

Since 1997, expenditure on mental health services has increased by £466 million. For those who like to number crunch, that is a 16 per cent. increase. The NHS plan, to which I shall come later, will invest more than £300 million over the next few years in new community and primary care based mental health services. It sets out our plans to recruit a further 8,000 staff for mental health services over the next few years—more nurses, doctors, primary care workers and other support staff.

I think that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked about the extra 1,000 primary care workers identified by the NHS plan. They will be largely graduate psychologists. We hope to be able to provide brief, psychologically based therapies in primary care settings, which will certainly take a lot of pressure off many hard-pressed local GPs. All those measures will help to ensure that mental health services are no longer the Cinderella service of the NHS.

Our response to the Select Committee report attempts to highlight the extensive amount of work that is under way. The Committee's decision to launch an inquiry into mental health services stemmed from the strong impression that patients often ended up in the wrong part of the mental health care system or sometimes could not get treatment where and when they needed it. That is also our view. Over the past three years, therefore, the Government have set in train developments substantially to increase the range of local provision, so that by next April an extra 500 local secure beds and 320 extra 24-hour staffed beds will be available.

In addition, regions—particularly London, whose mental health services are under severe pressure—are using their own capital resources to develop schemes to provide locally based NHS services for the large number of people in private-sector secure provision, which is often far away from their homes. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge asked me to comment on the provision of secure accommodation in the private sector. We will continue to use it; we want to develop strong and continuing relationships with the private sector. As my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield made clear, however, the problem with much private-sector provision is that it is in the wrong place and is therefore of little use to patients. The inner cities and conurbations, such as London, need more locally based services. We certainly intend to increase the provision of long-term secure beds and community staffing. There will be more investment in services for dangerous people with severe personality disorder. Those developments should help to ease the pressure on various parts of the system and enable people to be treated in the most appropriate setting.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful for what the Minister has said, but will he elaborate on the increase in secure facilities? Will that be done by direct NHS investment or by contracting with private sector partners under the terms of the concordat?

Mr. Hutton: The numbers to which I have referred are for NHS beds, but we look forward to close

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relationships and partnerships with the private sector, which provides 30 per cent. of all secure beds. We must use that resource and will continue to get good value for money in doing so.

In response to particular comments made by the Committee, the Department has stressed to all chief executives of mental health services the importance of ensuring that all patients discharged from specialist services should receive clear information on how to re-access them in the event of a further onset of illness. We have set up a new national working group to develop guidance on good practice on dual diagnosis, which was a concern of the Committee. A further investment of £1.25 million will be available next year to provide a range of training in substance misuse for those who work in mental health services.

We have ensured that the needs of people with mental health problems and learning disabilities will be covered in the forthcoming learning disability White Paper. We have developed new model service specifications that reflect best evidenced-based practice for crisis resolution teams, assertive outreach teams and early intervention services. They will be launched at a conference for chief executive officers and directors of social services later in March.

We have started to address long-standing concern about the quality of in-patient care, which will be a major focus of our work in future. As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and other members of the Select Committee will be aware, the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee recently made several wide-ranging recommendations relating to the experience of users of acute in-patient facilities. NHS trusts and health authorities are expected to respond to the recommendations as part of their health improvement plans and national service framework implementation arrangements.

The acute in-patient care collaborative recently launched by the NHS executive offices of the Trent region and the northern and Yorkshire region will be a seminal piece of work that will, I hope, bring about real service improvement in other parts of the NHS. The purpose of the work is to improve user experience of mental health acute in-patient care and achieve better outcomes through the process of assessment, admission, stay and discharge by sharing good practice. There is plenty of good practice in the NHS, so we have another opportunity to learn from and share that experience. I believe strongly that there is nothing wrong with the NHS that cannot be put right through the use of its best qualities. I want to see such progress made in all regions, not only the two that I have named.

As the Committee knows, the Government are committed to removing mixed-sex accommodation, and ward sisters and charge nurses have been given new resources for improving the general environment on their wards. That will certainly include acute in-patient psychiatric wards. We now need to consider carefully the general ward environment and the physical conditions of all such wards as part of our continuing work to modernise and improve the NHS.

We take mental health promotion seriously, which is why we have brought it centre stage by including two new standards in the national service framework that will require health and local authorities to develop and implement coherent mental health promotion strategies. We shall support them in that endeavour by developing a mental health promotion framework that will draw together the evidence base for effective practice and highlight examples of good practice elsewhere.

The Department continues to work in collaboration with users of mental health services, the voluntary sector and professional bodies with a view to reducing discrimination. That relates to a point made by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge. I have recently approved the appointment of a communications consultancy to develop a new national campaign that will be launched later this month. It will be aimed at tackling stigma and discrimination faced by people with mental health problems and supporting their social inclusion. I hope that the campaign will have an innovative and exciting new style that will involve employers in a central role. I should be happy to share the details of the campaign with the Select Committee further, and would welcome its members to the launch. I shall ensure that they are invited to it.

As part of the NHS plan implementation arrangements, local services from next year will be required to include occupation, housing and benefits in care plans for the most severely disabled. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford was especially concerned about such issues. An employment group has been set up to consider ways to promote greater opportunities for people with mental health problems to access suitable employment. With the Department for Education and Employment and the Department of Social Security, we are planning new job retention and rehabilitation pilots this year to test the effectiveness of different health and employment strategies in reducing the number of people forced to give up work through prolonged illness or disability. The mental health pilots will take place in north and south Cheshire and the Wirral, and we will look for early lessons during the next two years in how we can take the initiative forward.

The mental health taskforce will shortly consider a wide-ranging report on ethnicity and mental health services provision. Many hon. Members have raised the subject of ethnicity today, and we take it seriously. NHS services must serve the whole community, not only sections of it, so people from black and ethnic minority communities must and will have better access to more effective services in future. A work force action team has been established to set a programme of work in several key areas with the aim of producing a national picture of the work force, education and training issues to support the implementation of the NHS plan. We have set up a new national working group on early intervention that involves clinicians from both adult and adolescent services. The new early intervention services will have no age barrier and will target children as young as 14.

On some issues, however, we have taken a different view from that of the Committee. There would be no point in pretending that we agreed with every recommendation in the report, as we did not. We have not accepted the recommendation to close the high-

secure hospitals and replace them with smaller regionally based units. My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield will be aware of the difference of opinion between us on that matter. Our policy for high-secure services is to secure the safety of the public, staff and patients and to ensure that the best possible services are offered to patients who need to receive care and treatment in a high-secure setting.

The three high-secure hospitals provide a unique service for people with the most severe types of mental illness, personality disorders and learning disabilities. We need to maintain those facilities and the valuable expertise of their staff in dealing with a challenging group of patients with complex mental health disorders and the opportunities for therapy and activity that are available on the existing large sites. I do not share the view of the Committee that the service provided by those hospitals cannot be improved. I believe that it can. Ending the professional isolation of the three high-secure hospitals from the wider NHS will be one way to bring those changes about.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I speak with some experience when I use the term bins. I spend much of my working life in the bins. My view of the three remaining special hospitals is that they are the three remaining bins of our psychiatric system. I should like the Minister, in the short time left to him, to demonstrate how, under the current institutional framework within which the special hospitals operate, we can move from those establishments remaining bins.

Mr. Hutton: I know that my hon. Friend has strong views on that subject, and I respect him for it. The existing organisational arrangements that he described are now being changed. He will be aware that later this year, Rampton and Broadmoor will form part of new NHS trusts. That is an important move. Other changes are under way that will support that reform.

Many hon. Members spoke today about the inappropriate use of those high-secure services and the consequential increase in waiting lists for those who need that type of specialist service. We have allocated £25 million of new resources to transfer people who need lower levels of security. I was asked how many people I thought were inappropriately housed in the high-secure hospitals. As many as 300 or 400 people are in high-secure hospitals who should not be there. The money that we are making available will ensure that more appropriate provision is made for them.

These are difficult issues. Everyone knows that the high-secure hospitals have had a difficult history, but I do not believe that the way to resolve the problem is to close them. That would be a serious mistake. We have the opportunity to develop the expertise necessary to end their professional isolation and to improve the pattern of services that are provided to people in those hospitals.

I am conscious of the fact that I have only two or three minutes left to respond to an extremely wide-ranging debate. I suspect that my officials will soon start to get concerned, because I shall no longer refer to my notes. I shall try instead to draw upon one or two themes and concerns that hon. Members have expressed during our well-informed debate.

Much concern was expressed about the mental health reforms that we propose in the White Paper. We heard the rather surprising confession that the Opposition now oppose our plans to improve public safety and patient services for people with severe forms of personality disorder. I am genuinely surprised that the Opposition have taken that view. I dare say that, in the weeks and months ahead, we shall be given further clarification. It is my humble opinion that few Conservative policies last more than a couple of weeks. Perhaps that is another policy that will be refined and changed as the mistakes become apparent.

We—not only Members of Parliament, but our community and society as a whole—must address the fundamental problem, which is that those services often let people down and there are no effective treatment or services available for them. We have to put that right. I believe that we can.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge who suggested that we cannot treat those people and that we propose to warehouse them indefinitely or detain them in facilities where they would be denied effective treatment and services. That is not so. The hon. Gentleman should consider what has been happening in Holland for many years, where effective treatment opportunities are available for people with severe forms of personality disorder. We believe that people in this country should have access to such services.

An equally pressing public protection issue must be addressed. It will not go away. Difficult though those matters are, we are conscious of the civil liberties issues involved. However, it is absolutely right to provide new forms of public safety and public protection while at the same time—it is important that the hon. Gentleman understands this—offering better levels of service and direct intervention treatment, that will modify behaviour which will allow those people to—

Mr. Eddie O'Hara (in the Chair): Order. Time is up.

It being fifteen minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 12 February 2001

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Trunk Roads (Cambridgeshire)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much was spent by his Department on trunk roads in Cambridgeshire in each year since 1990–91, at current prices. [142872]

Mr. Hill: This is an operational matter for the Highways Agency and I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Anne Campbell, dated 12 February 2001:

The Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Keith Hill, has asked me to write in response to your recent Parliamentary Question relating to how much has been spent on trunk roads in Cambridgeshire in each year since 1990–91. I apologise for the delay in replying.

As we do not keep financial data on a county basis, a very lengthy investigation of our records would be required to answer your specific question. In the early 1990's we used Local Authorities to manage trunk roads on our behalf; however, major Improvement Schemes and other major works were managed as a separate programme and costs were not necessarily attributed to an individual county and some schemes crossed county boundaries.

Since the introduction of private sector Managing Agents in 1996, the management of the trunk road network is not constrained by county boundaries. This approach will continue when these contracts are renewed. However, Lord Whitty has asked me to investigate how the Highway Agency's future records could be kept on a regional or sub-regional basis.

If you wish to discuss this matter further please contact Jim Bond, Highways Agency's Divisional Director, telephone 01234 796191.

Departmental Entertainment Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much was spent by his Department's Ministers on entertainment in 2000. [146372]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 22 January 2001]:* Expenditure on entertainment by my Department's Ministers in 1999–2000, the latest financial year for which information is available, was £8,347. This compares with expenditure of £14,672 for the former Departments of Environment and Transport in 1996–97.

Waste Regulation

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many enforcement officers are employed in London by the Environment Agency *(a)* to check trade waste agreements of businesses, *(b)* to check unauthorised waste carriers, *(c)* to tackle other breaches of the Environment Protection Act and the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 and *(d)* to tackle environmental crime in general. [148721]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The information is as follows:

(a) Trade waste agreements under section 45 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 are a matter for local authorities as waste collection authorities; and no enforcement officers are employed by the Environment Agency on checking them.

(b) and *(c)* The Agency employs 16 officers in the London area whose role includes checking unauthorised waste carriers and other breaches of the 1990 Act and the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989.

(d) A further seven full-time equivalents are employed by the Agency to deal with environmental crime in general in the London area.

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions have been brought by the Environment Agency for fly tipping in the past six years in *(a)* Lewisham and *(b)* London. [148728]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The information is as follows:

(a) Neither the Environment Agency nor the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit of the Home Office holds data on prosecutions brought in Lewisham.

(b) The term "fly-tipping" is not legally defined but is generally used to refer to the illegal disposal of waste on a site without either a waste management licence or a registered licensing exemption—in contravention of sections 33 or 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, it is also an offence under section 33 to dispose of waste in contravention of a licence. The available data neither separately identify the two different types of offence under section 33 nor distinguish between prosecutions brought by the Environment Agency, local authorities or the police.

Subject to these considerations, the total number of defendants prosecuted at magistrates courts for offences under sections 33 or 34 of the 1990 Act in the Metropolitan police area in the past six years is:

Year	*Number*
1995	31
1996	34
1997	39
1998	56
1999	70
2000	Data not yet available

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many prosecutions the Environment Agency has brought against unlicensed waste carriers in London. [148733]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The available records do not separately identify waste carriers involved in prosecutions brought for contravention of waste management controls other than section 1 of the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989 (offence of transporting controlled waste without registering). The number of prosecutions

brought under section I of the 1989 Act in the Metropolitan police area for calendar years during which the Agency has been in operation is:

Year	Number
1996	0
1997	1
1998	1
1999	0
2000	—

[1] Data not yet available

Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out the timetable for publishing and implementing the regulations under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [148920]

Mr. Meacher: Substantial parts of the Act came into force on 30 January 2001 and further provisions, including the whole of Part IV (Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty), will come into force on 1 April 2001. The implementation of many of the remaining provisions depends on the making of a large number of regulations which my Department will be preparing over the next two or three years. Where appropriate, these provisions will be subject to public consultation.

We expect to lay regulations on vehicular access over common land in May. Immediate priority is also being given to regulations for the mapping of access land, the establishment of local access forums, statutory guidance for the preparation of rights of way improvement plans and making provision for disabled people. The implementation of the right of access to open countryside depends primarily on the completion of the mapping programme which the Countryside Agency have in hand.

King's Cross Station

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recent reports he has received on the safety of King's Cross station in respect of the ventilation of smoke; and if he will make a statement. [149099]

Mr. Hill: I understand from London Underground that the magazine "Test" has published comparisons of fire safety at various European stations, which included King's Cross. It should be noted that, while the "Test" report contains some very valid points, it also appears to contain some errors in its description of escape routes from King's Cross and takes no account of the following points.

The basic controls against the risk of smoke at King's Cross are the same as those on the rest of London Underground.

1. Minimisation of potential sources of ignition, in particular strict enforcement of the ban on smoking;
2. Very careful selection of materials for the construction of stations and trains to minimise the degree to which they can support combustion and give off toxic fumes and smoke if affected by a fire. At King's Cross, all materials used since 1989 have been subject to these controls;
3. In areas of higher risk such as machine rooms and stores, the provision of automatic fire detection and, particularly in the case of escalators, automatic fire suppression systems; and
4. Well rehearsed evacuation routines, which are used if a fire is suspected. In the case of King's Cross, evacuation is achieved within six minutes.

It should also be noted that King's Cross station is being redeveloped. This redevelopment will take into account modern practice in ventilation systems, in particular lessons learned from the Jubilee Line Extension project on active control of air-flows in an emergency.

To summarise, fire safety controls at King's Cross are the best that London Underground can achieve within the current constraints of the site. However, they are compliant with relevant legislation and plans for further improvement are already in hand.

School Runs

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of cars on the road between 8 to 9 am are used by parents dropping children at school. [149064]

Mr. Hill: In Great Britain during the period 1997–99, 10 per cent. of car trips being made between 8 and 9 am during term time were parents dropping children at school. At the peak times of 8.50 in the morning 18 per cent. of car trips were for this purpose.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list for each fire authority in England and Wales the value of the coastline element contained in the Fire Service standard spending assessment. [148912]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The value of the coastline element contained within the Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) for Fire, for 2001–02, for each fire authority in England, is either zero or the amount listed in the table.

These figures are on an "all other things being equal" basis and provide the amount that is allocated by the coastline element. They specifically do not indicate how much each authority benefits from the inclusion of the coastline element, since other factors would change if the coastline element were to be removed from the SSA formula.

The National Assembly for Wales advises that SSAs in Wales do not contain a coastline element for fire services.

Fire authority	Coastline element (£)
Merseyside	496,023
Tyne and Wear	278,380
Isles of Scilly	293,564
Cornwall	3,355,745
Cumbria	1,240,057
Lincolnshire	981,922
Norfolk	1,032,537
Northumberland	1,062,906
Somerset	516,269
Suffolk	480,838
West Sussex	399,855
Isle of Wight	678,235
Avon	460,592

Fire authority	Coastline element (£)
Cleveland	308,749
Humberside	1,073,029
North Yorkshire	551,699
Dorset	875,632
Durham	101,229
East Sussex	531,453
Hampshire	480,838
Devon	2,353,577
Essex	1,417,208
Kent	926,246
Lancashire	369,486

Flooding

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many incidents of flooding have occurred in the last three years where raw sewage was involved in the contamination of people's homes and property; and if he will make a statement. [149080]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The last year for which information is available is 1999–2000 when 7,121 properties suffered internal flooding from sewers. In 1998–99 there were 5,202 properties and in 1997–98, there were 7,169.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what is the maximum amount which water companies can be fined for failing to ensure their customers are protected from flood damage and sewage flooding; how often, and on which companies, such a fine has been imposed in each of the last three years; and if he will make a statement. [149516]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Flood prevention generally is the responsibility of the Environment Agency. As far as sewer flooding is concerned, there are no statutory provisions in existing water and sewerage legislation which provides for the undertakers to be fined for failing to ensure their customers are protected from such flood damage. Nor does legislation provide for fines in the event of sewer flooding.

Under the Water Supply and Sewerage Services (Customer Service Standards) Regulations 2000, where effluent from sewerage undertaker's sewer enters a customer's building the customer is entitled, subject to certain exceptions, to a refund of his sewerage charges for the year, up to a maximum of £1,000, for each occasion on which it happens.

On 6 November 2000 my Department published for consultation a draft Water Bill containing proposals for legislation. These proposals include empowering the Director General of Water Services, Secretary of State and National Assembly for Wales to fine a water company up to 10 per cent. of its turnover if it fails to meet appointment conditions, standards of performance or certain statutory or other obligations. Subject to the outcome of the consultation exercise the Government propose to introduce the Bill as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the impact of the November floods on *(a)* council tax levels and *(b)* Council Tax Benefit subsidy limitation; and if he will make a statement. [149444]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We received 24 representations during consultation on the Local Government Finance Settlement 2001–02 concerned with the impact of floods on the flood defence levies and local authority budgets. Four responses were concerned with the overall impact on the authority's level of council tax. Two responses were concerned with the impact on the council tax benefit subsidy limitation scheme (CTBSL).

Local authorities affected by floods are eligible for funding under the Bellwin scheme. We have increased the grant for this from 85 per cent. to 100 per cent. of eligible costs above a threshold equivalent to 0.2 per cent. of an authority's annual budget. In addition, the Government have recently announced a package of £11.6 million to pay for the Environment Agency's emergency and repair costs, reducing the costs of flooding being passed on to council taxpayers.

Spending on flood defence is generally a relatively small component of an authority's total budget requirement. It is up to local authorities to determine their spending priorities in consultation with their taxpayers, taking account of the funding available to them. Flood defence expenditure is no different from other items of expenditure and the Government have decided not to make any allowances within the CTBSL scheme for expenditure on flood defence which is above the increase in flood defence SSA.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will reduce the period taken for a claim to be settled under the Bellwin Scheme. [149441]

Ms Beverley Hughes: As part of the special measures introduced to deal with the recent adverse conditions, the Department will settle valid claims within 15 working days of receipt of an application. We have also taken steps to encourage interim unaudited claims. Again these will be paid within 15 workings days.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received calling for an extension to the funding available under the Bellwin Scheme to parish and town councils. [149443]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Parish and town councils can claim eligible expenditure through their local authority. The local authority can in turn claim from my Department. Two parish councils have been in touch with my Department and were given the information they required.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how he plans to measure the effectiveness of local transport plans in reducing casualties. [149171]

Mr. Hill: Local authorities are required to produce road safety plans that support the national casualty reduction targets. The full five-year local transport plans have already been assessed and allocations for 2001–02 were based on those assessments. Indicative allocations have

been provided for subsequent years. We will be monitoring road safety performance throughout the period. If any authorities prove to be failing in their road safety performance, we will want to consider how that could be remedied.

Housing Investment

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the resources available to local authorities in East Lancashire *(a)* to improve below standard private sector terraced houses and *(b)* to declare clearance areas, where appropriate, over the period 2001 to 2004. [148942]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The six East Lancashire authorities will receive a total of £9,720 million in the coming year through the Housing Investment Programme. This resource can be used by the authorities concerned as they see fit. Additionally, they will receive a total of £11,870 million via the Major Repairs Allowance in line with the Government's commitment to bring all council housing up to a decent standard by 2010.

Housing capital resources for local authorities nationally in 2003–04, the end of the current spending review period, will be around £2.6 billion.

In December 2000 measures were announced enabling authorities to support the renovation and improvement of private sector housing in a better targeted way. At the same time, we announced our intention to proceed with more fundamental reforms to the legislation to give authorities more effective powers to turn around areas of low demand and unpopular housing.

Public Transport

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assistance he is providing for pensioners using public transport. [148961]

Mr. Hill: In total local authorities in England spend over £440 million on concessionary travel on public transport each year. That includes travel by young and disabled people, as well as by pensioners. The Local Government Finance Settlement 2001–02 takes account of local authorities responsibilities in this area. It includes an extra £54 million a year which has been made available to cover the costs of the statutory half-fare scheme for pensioners and disabled people on buses under the Transport Act 2000.

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will estimate how many new rural bus services have been established since 2 May 1997. [148968]

Mr. Hill: The data collected on the number of local bus service registrations do not specifically identify rural areas.

However, our survey of local authorities on the use made of the new Rural Bus Subsidy Grant introduced in 1998 shows that 1,800 new or enhanced services were being supported in 1999–2000 by the grant.

Asbestos

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has received over the past 10 years about rising asbestos liabilities; and what action he has taken to ensure that those suffering from asbestos-related diseases were covered by employers liability insurance. [148915]

Mr. Meacher: Under the Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, employers carrying on a business in Great Britain have been required since 1972 to insure their liabilities to employees for bodily injury or disease arising from their employment. The Act is enforced by the Health and Safety Executive. Most public sector employers are exempt from this requirement because their liabilities can be met from public funds. My Department is not aware of any case in the last 10 years where a sufferer was not compensated because an insurer did not indemnify a policyholder in accordance with their policy after liability had been established.

Fish Farming

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many discharge consents for fish farms have been issued by *(a)* the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and *(b)* the Environment Agency under the Control of Pollution Act 1974; and on what date each (i) was issued and (ii) is due to expire. [149202]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* No discharge consents for fish farms have been issued by the Environment Agency under the Control of Pollution Act 1974. The Environment Act 1995 established the Environment Agency as the regulatory body responsible, among other tasks, for the issuing of water pollution discharge consents. The legislation in force at the time of the Environment Agency's establishment was the Water Resources Act 1991, and it is under this legislation that the Environment Agency has issued discharge consents for fish farms. Information about how many discharge consents for fish farms have been issued by the Environment Agency is not held centrally and I will write to the hon. Member with this information as soon as it is available. The information that the hon. Member asks for in relation to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency is now a devolved matter for the Scottish Executive.

Council Tax (Empty Properties)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what recent representations he has received on the policy of charging council tax on empty properties; [149283]

(2) if he proposes to give local authorities discretion on levying council tax on empty properties where there is a large percentage of empty houses. [149284]

Ms Beverley Hughes: In the last three months we have received four representations on the policy of charging council tax on empty properties.

There are already a range of exemptions from council tax where a dwelling is left empty. These include up to six months for dwellings which are unoccupied and substantially unfurnished and up to 12 months where they

also need major repair work to render them habitable or are undergoing structural alteration. Once an empty dwelling ceases to be exempt, it will attract a 50 per cent. charge.

We believe that the current exemptions are fair. However, we are aware of concerns about council tax on empty homes in areas where demand for housing is very low and we will continue to keep the fairness of the council tax under review.

Business Rates

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much revenue was raised from the business rate in the Greater London area during the last 12 months. [149368]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not yet available. However, local authorities in the Greater London area contributed an estimated £2.720 billion from business rates to the non-domestic rating pool in 1999–2000. This figure is still subject to audit approval.

Social Housing

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 376–77W, if he will give the figures for investment in *(a)* council housing and *(b)* housing owned by registered social landlords at constant prices. [149590]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The capital resources made available by central Government to support housing investment by local authorities and registered social landlords in the years since 1990–91 at constant 1999–2000 prices are as follows:

£ million

	Cash	*(1999–2000) Constant*
Housing capital allocations to local authorities[1]		
1990–91	1,706	2,238
1991–92	1,682	2,079
1992–93	1,579	1,890
1993–94	1,391	1,622
1994–95	1,181	1,358
1995–96	1,147	1,282
1996–97	1,059	1,147
1997–98	926	975
1998–99	1,211	1,240
1999–2000	1,252	1,252
2000–01	1,891	1,854
2001–02	2,552	2,441
2002–03	2,853	2,662
2003–04	2,934	2,671
Housing capital allocations to registered social landlords[2]		
1990–91	986	1,293
1991–92	1,521	1,880
1992–93	2,284	2,733
1993–94	1,761	2,053
1994–95	1,441	1,657
1995–96	1,112	1,243
1996–97	1,007	1,090
1997–98	667	702
1998–99	603	617
1999–2000	634	634
2000–01	678	665
2001–02	787	753
2002–03	958	894
2003–04	1,274	1,160

[1] Covers credit approvals, capital grants, PFI schemes for council housing and the resources to be made available under the arms length management initiative but excludes Estate Action allocations (which are now part of Regeneration Budgets). Local authorities housing capital programmes provide resources to improve poor condition private sector housing or develop new affordable housing as well as renovating or improving the council housing stock.
[2] Public funded investment in RSL housing through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) and, from 2001–02, the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund.

Crown Immunity

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review the extent of the Ministry of Defence's immunity from *(a)* civil and *(b)* criminal action under Crown immunity in cases involving (i) death and (ii) personal injury. [149584]

Mr. Meacher: The Queen's Speech on 6 December 2000 announced the Government's intention to draft a Safety Bill. We intend to use this opportunity to fulfil the commitment in our strategy statement "Revitalising Health and Safety" to remove Crown immunity from statutory health and safety enforcement.

In cases of civil claims, Crown immunity was removed by the Crown Proceedings Act 1947, as amended by the Crown Proceedings (Armed Forces) Act 1987.

Council Chief Executives

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will review procedures for disciplinary proceedings in respect of chief executives in local government. [149470]

Ms Armstrong: We received a number of representations about these disciplinary procedures when consulting on drafts of our proposed guidance to underpin new council constitutions. In the light of these representations we have concluded that these procedures remain appropriate for Chief Executives and in the future should be extended to Chief Finance Officers and Monitoring Officers.

Harlow Council

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends to use his powers under the Local government Acts to intervene in Harlow Council; and if he will make a statement. [149469]

Ms Armstrong: A best value inspection of Harlow District Council has recently taken place, and I understand that the Audit Commission and the authority are currently in discussion about the content of the final report, and the recommendations for action by the Council arising from it. The Commission have powers under the Local Government Act 1999 to recommend that the Secretary of State intervenes. No such recommendations have been received.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce changes to controls on the granting of planning permissions for telecommunication masts; and if he will make a statement. [149748]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to mobile phone masts and associated guidance ended on 31 October 2000. The Department is currently analysing the responses. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Sellafield MOX Plant

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will announce a decision on the authorisation of the Sellafield MOX plant. [149630]

Mr. Meacher: A decision regarding the authorisation of the plant will be announced only when the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Secretary of State for Health have considered all the relevant information. Consultants are being appointed to assist the Departments in their consideration of the BNFL revised economic case received by my Department on 5 January.

River Wye

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the outcome of the public inquiry on the River Wye will be published; and if he will make a statement. [149523]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The application made by the Environment Agency for an Order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 to confer on it powers to regulate navigation on the River Wye has raised complicated issues which require very careful consideration. Following the public inquiry into the application we received detailed representations from parties to the inquiry, including the Agency. Last year, in the interests of proper administration, we made these representations available to others appearing at the inquiry so that they could comment on them. We are now considering their comments along with the Inspector's Report.

We will make a decision on the application as soon as possible. Before doing so, we will consult the National Assembly for Wales since the proposed Order would, if made, affect Wales as well as England.

Community Transport

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 318W, on community transport, if he will list those successful bids to the 1999 competition which included further funding for schemes successful in the 1998 competition; if he will estimate the amount granted within those bids for continuation funding; and what total amount was granted in the 1999 competition as a whole. [149594]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Four successful bids totalling £710,124 from Somerset, Wiltshire, West Sussex county councils and West Yorkshire PTA were for further funding for schemes funded by the 1998 competition. All this total was for continuation funding apart from some provision in the Somerset bid for expansion of the service to operate on additional days of the week. The total awarded in the 1999 competition was £16.8 million.

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what factors were taken into consideration in deciding the level of central grant allocation for Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service for 2001–2; and if he will make a statement. [149627]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service do not receive revenue support grant. A grant is allocated to Gloucestershire county council which provides necessary funding for the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service.

The Government allocate grant through Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs). The following indicators are used to determine the fire block of the SSA:

Resident population;

Fire calls;

Population density;

'A' Risk areas;

Coastline;

Fire safety enforcement;

Fire safety education; and

Fire pensions.

With the exception of the fire safety and pensions indicators the weightings are based upon expenditure of fire authorities in 1990–91.

An area cost adjustment is applied, where appropriate, to reflect differences in the cost of providing fire services in London, the rest of the South East and the remainder of the country.

Emergency Vehicle Drivers

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will introduce mandatory training for all drivers of emergency vehicles; what the minimum training requirements will be; and if he will make a statement. [149691]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Core competencies for driving emergency vehicles have recently been agreed by technical experts from the Driving Standards Agency, police, fire, ambulance and armed services. The services are now consulting their constituent members about adoption, which I hope will be by the autumn. Each service will tailor the supporting training to their drivers and vehicles, though experience and best practice will be shared. The public services concerned will be able to ensure that these new standards will apply to directly employed drivers, and those providing contracted services.

A66

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the outline proposals for the safety study of the A66 were presented to the regional planning authorities; when each planning body gave its approval; and when the study commenced. [149816]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The three regional planning authorities were consulted in December 1998/January 1999 on the proposed programme of studies identified in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England". Further consultants have been undertaken throughout the development stages of the A66 Safety Study with regards the terms of reference and study brief.

The regional planning authorities in the North-east, North-west and Yorkshire and the Humber continue to be individually represented on the A66 Safety Study Steering Group.

The consultants were appointed to undertake the study in March 2000 and the final report is expected in spring 2001. The final report will be presented to regional planning authorities for their consideration.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will have complete road accident figures for all highways for the year 2000. [149813]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Summary figures for the year 2000 are scheduled to be published in June as a Transport Statistics bulletin "Road Casualties in Great Britain: Main Results: 2000". A copy will be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how long he expects the regional planning bodies to take in considering the safety study of the A66. [149815]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* This is a matter for the three individual regional planning bodies representing the North-east, North-west and Yorkshire and the Humber regions.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions which regional planning conference needs to give its endorsement to the Temple Sowerby bypass before it can proceed. [149814]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The North West Regional Assembly, in its capacity as regional planning body, must endorse the Temple Sowerby bypass before it can proceed.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he announced that there would be a safety study into the A66. [149817]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The A66 Safety Study was included in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England" which was published in July 1998.

Road Traffic Accidents

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 534W, concerning road traffic accidents, when the information will be available; and if he will supply the information when it becomes available. [150082]

Mr. Hill: Full details of all road accident casualty figures for the period 17 October to 31 December 2000 will be published for analysis in early June 2001.

Between 17 October and 13 December 1999 there were 857 fatalities and 8,461 serious injuries arising from road accidents.

Regeneration Initiatives

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps his Department is taking to ensure that transport links support regeneration initiatives. [149381]

Mr. Hill: Transport has a key role to play in supporting regeneration. The increased investment of £180 billion set out in our 10 Year Plan for transport will, over the next 10 years, deliver significant improvements for our road, rail and local transport infrastructure. It will provide the funding to implement the transport priorities emerging from the new regional transport strategies, regional development strategies, local transport plans and community strategies. It will deliver significantly better public transport and reduced congestion on our roads, and provide better access to jobs and services. It will contribute to the vision set out in our Urban White Paper, published in November, which looks to make urban areas attractive places in which people want to live, with strong economies, better services and improved local environments.

Rail Services

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what mechanisms exist to *(a)* challenge and *(b)* review the Strategic Rail Authority's definition of the core proposition for rail franchises; [149496]

(2) what powers the Rail Regulator has in relation to the definition of the core proposition for rail franchises; [149502]

(3) what *(a)* instructions and *(b)* guidance he has given to the Strategic Rail Authority on the core proposition of the Transpennine Express Franchise; [149490]

(4) what powers he has to order a redefinition of the core proposition for a rail franchise; [149494]

(5) if his Department requires the Strategic Rail Authority to take account of *(a)* regional development plans, *(b)* SRB investment, *(c)* projected future passenger plans and *(d)* other factors in defining the core proposition for rail franchises. [149501]

Mr. Hill: The Secretary of State will in due course issue new Directions and Guidance to the Strategic Rail Authority under the Transport Act 2000 and in the meantime he has issued Interim Directions and Guidance effectively maintaining the instructions and guidance previously issued under the Railways Act 1993, a copy of which is in the Library. These include criteria for replacement franchises. The criteria do not include the specification of core propositions for the Trans Pennine Express or any franchise. These are matters for the authority.

The instructions and guidance require the authority to consult various bodies, including the Rail Regulator, regional planning bodies, regional development agencies and local authorities on the replacement of franchises. The authority also has a general objective to increase the

number of passengers travelling by rail. The Secretary of State's consent is required to the award of a new franchise.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if it is his Department's intention that the core proposition for rail franchises should be the level of service once provided by British Rail; [149498]

(2) what mechanisms he uses to safeguard existing levels of rail passenger service during refranchising; [149382]

(3) if he will instruct the Strategic Rail Authority to take account of the possible effect on the tourist industry of reducing the level of rail services. [149493]

Mr. Hill: The Strategic Rail Authority has stated that all new franchises will be based on existing Passenger Service Requirements (PSRs), providing for a specified minimum service level. The existing PSRs are based on the level of services provided by British Rail at the time initial franchises were let.

The Authority expect bidders for the new franchise to surpass the minimum requirements, making proposals for development of services during the course of the new franchise. There are no plans to reduce the level of services. The core proposition for the new Trans Pennine Express (TPE) franchise is all limited stop, inter urban services currently operated by the existing North Western and Northern Spirit franchises. As a guide to the proposals expected, the Authority has produced specific development objectives for the TPE franchise which have been well publicised. The Authority has been consulting widely about the aspirations of key stakeholders.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) on how many occasions officials from Strategic Rail Authority have met representatives from *(a)* Blackpool council and *(b)* Barrow in Furness council to discuss the Trans Pennine Express franchise in the last 12 months; [149383]

(2) what discussions there have been between the Strategic Rail Authority and *(a)* the North West Development Agency, *(b)* the North West Regional Assembly and *(c)* his Department concerning the refranchising of the Trans Pennine Express Service; [149491]

(3) on how many occasions officials from the Strategic Rail Authority have met representatives from *(a)* Cumbria county council and *(b)* South Lakeland district council to discuss the Trans Pennine Express refranchising in the last 12 months. [149492]

Mr. Hill: The Strategic Rail Authority have been consulting key stakeholders about the Trans Pennine franchise for some time. Initial consultation meetings took place in Newcastle (6 June), Leeds (7 June) and Manchester (8 June). Invitees include all those authorities mentioned by my hon. Friend. A specially convened meeting took place on 19 January which included representatives of Blackpool borough and Cumbria county councils. In addition, the authority has met, separately, the North West Development Agency and the North West Regional Assembly. My Department is kept informed of progress on all replacement franchises.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his Department's definition of the terms *(a)* large towns and cities, *(b)* key transport hubs and *(c)* centres of economic activity is as used by the Strategic Rail Authority in its strategic development objectives. [149495]

Mr. Hill: The Strategic Rail Authority's definitions are not specific and are flexible but focus on key destinations on inter city rail routes, airports, motorway intersections and ports.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the local transport plan settlement for Blackpool was made on the assumption of maintenance of the current level of rail services to the town. [149497]

Mr. Hill: When assessing the local transport plan for Blackpool, we considered both the current level of rail services and their growth potential. We took account of the proposal to provide a new multi-modal interchange and the fact that negotiations were taking place with train operators and authorities to increase the frequency and quality of rail passenger services to Blackpool.

South West Regional Development Agency

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many applications for funding have been made to the South West Regional Development Agency; how many have been approved; how many are awaiting the release of funds for approved projects; and what the average waiting time has been between approval and release of funds. [149580]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Since 1 April 1999 to date, the South West RDA has received 1,312 applications; 879 have been approved; there are none (0) awaiting the release of funds for approved projects; and there is no waiting time between approval and release of funds.

Brownfield Developments

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the European Commission on finding an alternative to the Partnership Investment Programme for brownfield developments. [149581]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My Department and the European Commission have made good progress in finding an alternative to the Partnership Investment Programme. A direct development scheme has now been approved, and the Commission have indicated that a decision is likely to be made by the end of this month on two new gap-funding schemes, and a scheme designed to help local communities participate in regeneration projects. In addition, we are continuing to explore with the Commission the possibility of a new regeneration framework under which State aid would be permitted for the physical regeneration of derelict or disused sites throughout the community.

Sheltered Housing

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to address the concerns of tenants living in local

authority sheltered housing that their landlords could be forced to raise charges for warden services in order to implement the Supporting People policy. [150380]

Mr. Raynsford: Many local authority and large scale voluntary transfer (LSVT) landlords cross subsidise the costs of support services for their tenants, such as warden services in sheltered housing, from their general rent income. This practice will stop when the Supporting People policy is implemented in April 2003. However, I am pleased to say that the Government will be making additional provision available through the new Supporting People grant in 2003–04 to cover these costs in full.

In the light of this, there will be no need for local authority or LSVT landlords to increase charges to tenants, either now or in 2003–04 when Supporting People is introduced. Draft guidance will shortly be circulated to local authority and LSVT landlords setting out how these cross subsidies should be identified and recommending that these particular landlords freeze the amounts that sheltered housing tenants pay for their support services at 2000–01 levels in real terms.

When Supporting People starts funding these services in April 2003, the local authority and LSVT landlords concerned will retain the savings they make by ending cross subsidies. As a condition of paying the additional Supporting People grant, we will expect these landlords to demonstrate how they will make effective use of these resources to deliver the Government's housing policy objectives more fully and more quickly, for example by improving the condition of their housing stock and the quality of their housing management services.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Policies (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Staffordshire, Moorlands constituency, the effects on Staffordshire, Moorlands of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* since 2 May 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months ending on 1 May 1997. [149191]

Mr. Byers: In the periods in question, the following amounts of grant were offered to businesses in the Staffordshire, Moorlands local authority district:

(a) since 2 May 1997: £44,639 under the Smaft (innovation grant) scheme;

(b) in the 12 months ending 1 May 1997: £28,080 under the Smart scheme.

These were to assist small businesses to develop new products and processes. It is not possible to state the impact they would have had on the economy of the area. From 1 March 2000 businesses in the area have also been eligible for Enterprise Grants.

In addition, I announced a number of measures in August 2000 to benefit the area, including £1.6 million funding for the Ceramics Industry Forum.

Latest Office for National Statistics estimates show that, since the introduction of the national minimum wage in April 1999, there has been a direct and beneficial impact on the pay of the lowest paid workers in the west Midlands. The minimum wage benefits some 130,000 workers and their families in the west Midlands. No estimates are available for parliamentary constituencies. The latest data also show that it has helped close the gap between the highest and lowest earners and helped reduce the differential between men's and women's pay. This has been achieved without any discernible adverse impact on the economy.

Since November 1998, 3.1 million workers across the UK have benefited from the entitlement to four weeks' paid annual leave. No estimates are available for parliamentary constituency or region.

We estimate that 38,000 female employees in the west Midlands give birth each year. All of these who have been employed for longer than six months with their current employer will now benefit from enhanced maternity leave, as introduced on 15 December 1999. There are no estimates available for Parliamentary constituencies.

Nissan

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assurances have been sought from Nissan, in agreeing future industrial assistance, about the UK content of cars produced at Sunderland. [149602]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The offer of an RSA grant to Nissan did not require any assurances on future sourcing of components. This is a matter for the company and its suppliers.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the percentage UK content of cars produced by Nissan at Sunderland is; and what the UK content will be following the group of industrial assistance. [149601]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Nissan confirm that there is 70 per cent. UK content in the cars produced in Sunderland. It is not yet known what the UK content will be following the approval of the RSA grant.

Premium Rate Phone Lines

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals he has to give ICSTIS further powers to regulate the establishment and prices charged for premium rate phone lines. [149886]

Ms Hewitt: The regulation of Premium Rate Services (PRS) lines is a matter for the Office of Telecommunications (Oftel) and The Independent Committee for the Supervision of Standards of Telephone Information Services (ICSTIS). ICSTIS effectively supervises and enforces Codes of Practice which concern the establishment and running of PRS including provisions relating to pricing information. The provisions of the Code in relation to live conversation services are underpinned by a condition in network operators' licences which is enforceable by Oftel. Following consultation in 1999–2000, Oftel drew up a statement proposing measures to strengthen the regulatory regime through statutory underpinning of a Code applying to most PRS, not just live services.

Mirror Group Newspapers

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the

progress of the inquiry into Mirror Group Newspapers; when the report of the inquiry is due to be published; and what is the inquiry's total cost to date. [149699]

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will (1) estimate the cost to public funds to date of the inquiry into Mirror Group Newspapers plc; [149927]

(2) make a statement on the progress of the inquiry set up in 1992 into the affairs and membership of Mirror Group Newspapers plc. [149928]

Mr. Byers: The inspectors have made substantial progress towards completing their inquiries and I am hopeful that they will be submitting their report to me shortly. A decision on whether to publish the report will only be made following its receipt. The cost of the inspection to date (excluding Value Added Tax) is £8,205,446.

Tobacco

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet representatives of British American Tobacco prior to 24 February. [149883]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is currently considering a number of requests for meetings about the draft EU Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products including one from British American Tobacco.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies he has made on the economic impact of the European Directive on Tobacco Control. [149882]

Ms Hewitt: None. However, the European Commission has undertaken such a study.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received regarding the European Directive on Tobacco Control; and if he will make a statement. [149881]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received a number of representations from MPs, MEPs, firms, trade union representatives and individuals about aspects of the draft EU Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the impact on employment of the European Directive on Tobacco Control. [149884]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry understands the concerns that have been raised about the possible impact on employment of certain aspects of the draft EU Directive on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products. However, he does not accept that job losses and factory closures are inevitable if the directive is passed as currently worded.

Transtec

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects the inquiry into the collapse of Transtec plc to be published. [149926]

Mr. Byers: I hope to be able to publish the report in the near future.

Corus

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the UK steel market is controlled by Corus. [149357]

Mr. Byers: The UK steel market is open and competitive and not subject to control by individual companies. Corus does not release figures showing its share of the UK market but in the year 2000 UK demand for steel mill products was 13.8 million tonnes of which 53 per cent. (7.3 million tonnes) was supplied from UK steel mills. We estimate that 90 per cent. of this was produced by Corus.

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advance information Corus provided to his Department prior to its closure and redundancy announcement. [149360]

Mr. Byers: Since early December when Corus announced a fundamental review of operations my Department was in frequent contact with Corus. The company refused to discuss details of their overall plan. The detailed information broken down by numbers of jobs proposed to be lost and at which plant was provided at 8.00 am on 1 February.

Workplace Bullying

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his Department's estimate is of the *(a)* number of working days per year lost as a result of workplace bullying and *(b)* annual cost to industry of working days so lost. [149991]

Mr. Alan Johnson: This information is not available. There are no official estimates of either days lost per year as a result of workplace bullying, or, consequently, of annual costs to industry of days lost.

Universal Bank

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Universal Bank will be available to people who hold a bank account. [149658]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Universal Banking Services has two elements. Under the first element the banks will make their basic bank accounts accessible at post offices. The second element of the proposition is a service for people who are unable or unwilling to open even a basic bank account. This account, available only through post offices will allow benefits claimants to access their benefits in cash at a post office using a Post Office based card instead of an order book or giro. Both basic bank accounts and the Post Office card accounts will be available to people with an existing bank account. The Post Office card account will, however, be available only to persons in receipt of pensions, benefits or tax credits. Beyond that there are no plans for there to be any other eligibility restrictions.

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if people who *(a)* have and *(b)* do not have a bank account will be able to open the new Post Office-based Universal Bank service account. [149847]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Post Office card account will only be available to persons in receipt of pensions, benefits and tax credits. Beyond that there are no plans for there to be any other eligibility restrictions.

PRIME MINISTER

Policy Presentation (Corrections)

Mr. Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister what instructions he issues to officials about volunteering corrections to mis-statements of, and righting misunderstandings concerning, his policy, opinions and reactions to public issues. [146439]

The Prime Minister: The Ministerial Code sets out the responsibilities of Ministers in relation to the correction of errors.

Patrice Lumumba

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government have published all records relating to the death of Patrice Lumumba, the Congolese leader; and if he will make a statement. [148278]

The Prime Minister: Official records over 30 years old are routinely transferred to the Public Record Office (PRO) in accordance with the Public Records Acts. Any records of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Cabinet Office, the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Defence which refer to the death of Patrice Lumumba in 1961 are available at the PRO and can be found using the PRO's website www.pro.gov.uk. None have been identified as withheld from release.

Lord Paul

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister under what circumstances Lord Paul represents the Government; and if he will make a statement. [149113]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* Lord Paul was appointed Ambassador for British Business in November 1997, along with some 35 other leading figures in British commerce and industry. These positions are voluntary, and their role is not to represent the British Government, but to promote British commercial interests.

Ministerial Code

Mr. Robathan: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions Ministers have submitted cases to him in line with paragraph 109 of the Ministerial Code. [149612]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 7 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 316W.

Anglo-French Summit

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Anglo-French Summit of 9 February. [150382]

The Prime Minister: The twenty-third UK/French Summit took place in Cahors on 9 February. I was accompanied by my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary, the Home Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Minister of State for Transport. We had productive exchanges on a range of bilateral issues, and agreed measures to deal with the problem of illegal immigration. We established a Cross-Channel commission to improve joint management of issues that affect Cross-Channel relations. In addition we agreed to take forward joint work in the fields of maritime safety, food safety, drugs trafficking and the environment.

We also discussed EU, foreign policy and defence issues, and issued declarations on our shared priorities for the Stockholm Special European Council in March, and on further bilateral work in Africa. Copies of these and other agreed declarations have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Asylum Appeals

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what average time is taken to process asylum *(a)* initial appeals to the Special Adjudicator and *(b)* further appeals to the Immigration Appeals Tribunal; and if she will make a statement. [150035]

Jane Kennedy: The average times taken during January 2001, for the Immigration Appellate Authority to process cases from receipt to determination, are:

(a) 17.4 weeks for appeals cleared at the Adjudicator tier; and

(b) 33.8 weeks for appeals heard by the Immigration Appeal Tribunal.

The figure for the Immigration Appeal Tribunal (IAT) naturally includes the Adjudicator process. Average times for the IAT only—from receipt of application for leave to appeal until appeal determination—are not available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Malawi

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her letter of 20 January, regarding the Malawi Mission of Buckfastleigh, what progress she has made in her representations to the Malawi Customs concerning the release of the consignment of tools airfreighted for building an orphan village. [149582]

Clare Short: The Malawi Revenue Authority is happy to discuss with the Malawi Mission or its partners in Malawi how to achieve duty free status for the organisation or the consignment in question within the law. The British High Commission in Lilongwe will assist if necessary.

Commonwealth Scholarships

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 164W, on Commonwealth scholarships, if she will discuss with the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Chairman

whether scholarships will be offered to dissidents in addition to those nominated by Governments concerned. [148758]

Clare Short: I welcome the Commission's review of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. I am considering, in consultation with the Commission's Chairman, their report's recommendations, which include proposals for ensuring greater openness and transparency in the selection process.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Paisley South (Mr. Alexander) of 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 355W, if she will give a breakdown of the money spent on HIV/AIDS related work last year, outlining major headings of expenditure. [149324]

Clare Short: Last year, the Department of International Development spent around £85 million on major bilateral sexual and reproductive health programmes in the range of countries including, Malawi, South Africa, Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe, China and India. The work of these programmes impacts directly on HIV/AIDS. My Department also made the following contributions and commitments in 1999–2000 to agencies involved in tackling HIV/AIDS.

Agency	*£ million*
United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)	15
World Health Organisation, Human Reproduction Programme (WHO/HRP)	1
United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)	3
International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) over five years	14

UN Desertification Convention

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps have been taken to implement commitments under the UN Desertification Convention. [149857]

Clare Short: My Department is implementing the UK's commitments under the UN Convention to Combat Desertification through its bilateral and multilateral assistance programmes. Given that there are close links between poverty and the problems of desertification and land degradation, much of DFID's work to combat poverty in rural areas helps to meet the objective of the Convention. Over £200 million is currently committed to DFID activities which help poor people protect their livelihoods against problems such as desertification and drought.

India

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Indian Government owe to *(a)* the UK and *(b)* other European Union countries; and what action her Department is taking to press for the cancellation of this debt. [149462]

Clare Short: According to the Government of India's most recent published data, in 1999 their official debt to the UK was 167.9 million rupees (£2.5 million at the present exchange rate), while their official debt to the European Union was 212.53 billion rupees (£3.16 billion).

The UK supports and advocates debt relief for Heavily Indebted Poor Countries which are undertaking pro-poor economic reforms. But India's external debt position is moderate, with a debt-service ratio of 16 per cent. (as of March 2000), and large-scale international reserves (estimated at US$ 40 billion). We are not therefore pressing for cancellation of India's debt. However our development assistance in India includes substantial support to help the Indian Government reform and improve their fiscal management, particularly at the State level where fiscal deficits are high.

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is on humanitarian aid to the children of Iraq. [147787]

Clare Short: The opportunities for assisting Baghdad-controlled Iraq are greatly constrained by the regime's policies. We are spending some £5 million this financial year to help rehabilitate water and sanitation systems which should reduce risks to children's health. In northern Iraq, through Save the Children's Fund and other non-governmental organisations, we are funding programmes to improve children's well-being. This financial year we expect to spend some £1.25 million.

The UN's oil-for-food programme is contributing significantly to improved life opportunities and reduced infant and child mortality for children in the areas of Iraq not controlled from Baghdad. Tragically in Baghdad controlled Iraq, children are suffering badly as the Government of Iraq manipulate the suffering of their people for propaganda purposes.

Expenditure (GDP)

Mr. Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made towards meeting the Government's target for expenditure on overseas development as proportion of gross domestic product. [145774]

Clare Short: Preliminary estimates on the ratio of official development assistance to Gross National Product suggest that the UK will report a ratio of at least 0.29 per cent. of GNP for the year 2000. This is consistent with the Government's commitment to reach a level of 0.33 per cent. by 2003–04. Provisional data for the year 2000 will become available in April, with final figures confirmed in June.

CABINET OFFICE

Ombudsman Review

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she plans to *(a)* publish the results of the consultation exercise and *(b)* announce the Government's policy on the review of the Ombudsman. [149551]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) on 17 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 333.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has undertaken of the impact on the *(a)* working hours, *(b)* staffing and *(c)* financial cost to SMEs of operating the Working Families Tax Credit. [149369]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the impact on small and medium-size enterprises of operating the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) are given in paragraphs 43 to 62 of the Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Tax Credits Bill 1999. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many farmers in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* England are in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit. [149742]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that about 11,000 families in England where the main earner was either a farmer or a worker in agricultural, forestry or fishing occupations were in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit at the end of August 2000.

The 5 per cent. sample of awards on which these estimates are based does not yield a reliable estimate of the number of these families that were in Lancashire.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is his current estimate of the cost of answering *(a)* a written and *(b)* an oral parliamentary question. [150381]

Mr. Timms: As at April 2000, the latest date for which data are available, the average cost of answering a written parliamentary question and an oral parliamentary question was £123 and £285 respectively.

Fuel Duty Rebate

Caroline Flint: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many representations he has received supporting the introduction of a fuel duty rebate for community transport operations; [149077]

(2) what estimate he has made of the annual cost of introducing a fuel duty rebate for community transport operations. [149078]

Mr. Hill: I have been asked to reply.

We have received a considerable number of representations about this matter.

Our 10-year transport plan, "Transport 2010", announced that we would be working up detailed proposals for extending fuel duty rebate to a wider range of community transport services. We will shortly be consulting relevant organisations as part of this process. Our aim is to have the new arrangements up and running in the next financial year.

The term "community transport" covers a wide range of different services and organisations and the cost of extending the scope of the rebate scheme would depend on the precise definition of eligibility adopted. Decisions will be made on this in the light of the consultation. Further announcements will be made as soon as possible.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

BSE Inquiry

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations of the BSE Inquiry report. [150420]

Mr. Nick Brown: The BSE Inquiry report was published on 26 October 2000. In welcoming it, I said that the Government's substantive response would be announced in the coming months. I announced on 21 December 2000 that we would be making an interim response as a basis for public discussion before finalising the Government's full response.

The Government's interim response was published on Friday, 9 February. There will be a parliamentary debate on 15 February. The response has been prepared with contributions from across Whitehall and the devolved Administrations and seeks to present the actions being taken in all the legislatures.

This response is intended to focus on the future. It sets out what has happened since March 1996—which was the point to which we asked the Inquiry to take its examination. It gives full attention to the 167 specific findings and conclusions in the Inquiry report, and to the major themes that emerge from it: management of scientific advisory committees and how scientific advice is used in developing policy; openness; risk and uncertainty; the structure of government and the legislative framework; and the need for rigour in the development and implementation of policy.

The response takes the opportunity to set out how the Government are taking the lessons and comments in the report as a spur to developing the action already under way as a result of the Modernising Government agenda, the Office of Science and Technology's work on the use of science in government and work on developing a Government Statement on Risk.

The Government intend that this interim response should be the subject of positive action to seek the views of interested parties. Public debate on how the lessons in the report can be most effectively applied and embedded across Departments will help to ensure a comprehensive final Government Response to the BSE Inquiry report.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the outcome was of the review of the civil servants who were criticised in the BSE Inquiry report. [150291]

Mr. Nick Brown: Sheila Forbes, as an independent Civil Service Commission, has now completed her review of the criticisms in the report of serving civil servants. She has recommended to the Permanent Secretaries of the Departments involved that there is no justification for disciplinary action to be taken against any serving civil servant. They have accepted this recommendation and the civil servants involved have been informed.

Farm Holdings

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to the oral answer of 24 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 920, to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Mr. George), if he will publish Her Majesty's Government's estimate of *(a)* the percentage of farm holdings in the United Kingdom which they do not regard as efficient, *(b)* the number of farmers and farm workers obtaining their livings from them and *(c)* the proportion of the UK agricultural workforce they represent. [148403]

Ms Quin: The Government do not forecast or publish estimates of the percentage of farm holdings in the United Kingdom which we do not regard as efficient. We do not obtain the detailed business information on the 300,000 or so holdings in the United Kingdom which would be required to attempt to do this. Information on the productivity and performance of the agriculture industry was published by the Ministry on 30 March 2000 as part of the announcement of the Government's Action Plan for Farming in "Strategy for Agriculture: Current and prospective economic situation" paragraphs 26–35.

The Action Plan, now backed by £500 million, is providing short-term relief to the sectors hit hardest by the current economic crisis but also supports longer-term action to encourage industry restructuring. Good progress is being made in delivering the commitments in the plan.

The establishment of the Rural Development Regulation (RDR), or "second pillar" of the CAP, was a substantial step forward in redirecting the CAP away from production support and towards rural development and environmentally-friendly farming. By extending support to activities beyond food production, the RDR will open up new options for farms of differing types, sizes and economic characteristics.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Euro

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what programme of work has been undertaken by his Department and agencies for which his Department is responsible as part of the national changeover plan for preparation for the UK's entry to the euro at current exchange rates; and if he will make a statement. [148411]

Angela Eagle: The Department is conducting work in accordance with the guidance given in the Outline National Changeover Plans and reported in the Fourth Report on Euro Preparations published on 6 November 2000.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of reprinting documents issued by his Department and its executive agencies to replace sterling entries with entries in euros. [148409]

Angela Eagle: In the event of UK entry to the single currency any changes to documents would be dealt with through existing contractual arrangements as part of a normal reprint cycle.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the changes required in the Government's benefits system which would be necessary as a result of a changeover to the euro. [148413]

Angela Eagle: In the event of the UK entering the single currency, benefits systems would not require rule changes although IT system changes would be required to convert amounts in accordance with EU and UK legislation.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost at current exchange rates of changing his Department's, and agencies for which his Department is responsible, computer systems in preparation for the euro. [148408]

Angela Eagle: Should the UK decide to enter the single currency, costs will depend on the approach taken and this is not yet known. There are currently no plans to change existing computer systems prior to a Referendum.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what consultants his Department is using to advise on the implications and implementation of the changeover plan to the euro; and what budget has been set aside for this purpose. [148412]

Angela Eagle: A number of private sector companies contribute to the normal operational running of the Department. Where appropriate as part of the normal arrangements, consultants in these roles have contributed to preparatory analysis work. No specific budget has been set aside and any costs are contained within the figure published in the Fourth Report on Euro Preparations.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the cost of training staff in his Department and executive agencies for which his Department is responsible in preparation for the euro, at current prices and exchange rates. [148410]

Angela Eagle: In the event of the UK entering the single currency, costs will depend on the approach taken and this is not yet known. No estimate for the cost of training has been made.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and

breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149268]

Mr. Rooker *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Full figures for 1996–97 are available only for the Department's Headquarters. These are Public Opinion Research £301,083.20, Advertising £3,691,169.64, Direct Mail £63,861.16.

A breakdown of expenditure for the years 1997–98 was given on 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns 718–19W.

A breakdown was given for the estimated spend for 1998–99. The breakdown of expenditure for the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 is given as follows, as is the estimated spend for the year 2000–01.

For 1998–99 figures for the Benefits Agency were Public Opinion Research £83,703, Advertising, £29,738. Direct Mail £10,524.

The Contributions Agency transferred to the Inland Revenue in April 1999 and no figures are available.

Work done on behalf of the Child Support Agency is done by the Department's Headquarters and these figures are included in that breakdown.

For the War Pensions Agency figures are: Public Opinion Research £4,569, Advertising £1,400, Direct Mail £1,100.

For the Department Headquarters, which includes Communications Directorate and Analytical Services Directorate the figures are: Public Opinion Research £668,179, Advertising £4,617,945.81, Direct Mail £315,346.46.

For the year 1999–2000 for the Benefits Agency figures were: Public Opinion Research £207,440, Advertising £24,406, Direct Mail £98,332.

For the War Pensions Agency figures were: Public Opinion Research £2,388, Advertising £18,000, Direct Mail £1,200.

For the Department's Headquarters the figure was: Public Opinion Research £792,115.14, Advertising £2,756,705.70, Direct Mail £144,301.29.

The estimated spend for the year 2000–01 in the Benefits Agency is: Public Opinion Research £219,499, Advertising £11,502, Direct Mail Nil.

In the War Pensions Agency it is: Public Opinion Research £5,000, Advertising £23,500, Direct Mail £1,400.

In the Department's Headquarters the estimated spend is: Public Opinion Research £1,154,112, Advertising £11,336,000, Direct Mail £5,815,000.

Notes:

1. The term Advertising in my answer relates to TV, Radio and Newspaper advertising.

2. The estimated increase in spending on Advertising for the year 2000–01 takes into account the work being undertaken by the Department around the Minimum Income Guarantee uptake campaign, Pensions Education and anti-fraud activity.

Maternity Benefits

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement about extending maternity benefits. [149589]

Angela Eagle: We are improving maternity benefits as part of our drive to help women achieve a better balance between paid work and family life. Last year we extended Maternity Allowance (MA) to low-paid employed and self-employed working women and increased the rate of benefit for self-employed women. These improvements mean that around 16,000 low-paid working women will get MA for the first time and around 11,000 self-employed women will receive a higher rate of benefit.

On 7 December last year the Department of Trade and Industry published a consultation document "Work and Parents: Competitiveness or Choice" which sets out a wide range of options and invites views on what the priority measures are that will help working parents at the same time as helping business. The document contains options to extend maternity benefits, which include increasing the flat rate of maternity pay and extending the maternity pay period as well as improvements to parental leave.

The consultation period ends on 7 March 2001 and we will take account of the responses we receive when considering which options should be taken forward.

Child Poverty

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many children in Yorkshire and Humberside were living under the official poverty line in each of the years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and (e) 2000. [149439]

Mr. Bayley: There is no official poverty line defined by the Government. Poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of people's lives—their income, health, housing, the quality of the environment, opportunities to work and to learn. There is no single measure which can capture the complex problems which need to be overcome.

The annual report, "Opportunity for all—one year on: making a difference" (Cm 4865) sets out and monitors the Government's strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sports Council Funding

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total Sports Council funding was for *(a)* tennis, *(b)* swimming, *(c)* basketball, *(d)* netball, *(e)* football, *(f)* rugby union and *(g)* rugby league in England for each year since 1990. [149048]

Kate Hoey: The English Sports Council is collating this information and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as possible. I will place a copy of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Art Works

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many, and what

percentage of the total, works of art and artefacts in each of the national collections are in storage because of insufficient space to exhibit them. [149460]

Mr. Alan Howarth: DCMS does not hold all of this data centrally. We have therefore contacted the National Museums and Galleries to request the information for a reply to my hon. Friend. I will write to him as soon as this is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Library and Leisure Services

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the levels of spending on *(a)* library services and *(b)* leisure services per head of population in (i) Staffordshire and (ii) each other county of England (1) in the current year and (2) in each of the last three years. [150018]

Mr. Alan Howarth: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 684–88W.

HEALTH

Contraception

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned of the safety of post-coital contraception with respect to girls aged *(a)* 12 years to 14 years and *(b)* 14 years to 16 years; and if he will make a statement. [146771]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 23 January 2001]:* Once a young woman becomes fertile, the Faculty of Family Planning and Reproductive Health Care advise that there are no physiological reasons why emergency contraception should not be used if she is at risk of pregnancy because she has had unprotected sex.

The safety profile of EHC is believed to be similar in those under 16 years of age to those over 16. Emergency contraception has been used worldwide, including by women aged under 16, since the 1980s, and no major safety concerns have arisen.

Clinical trials for new drugs are not routinely conducted on young people under 16 unless there is a specific indication such as childhood leukaemia.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 484W, what guidance he has given to schools regarding the potential liability of school staff who dispense emergency contraception to girls under the age of 16 years in the event of medical complications arising as a result of the emergency contraception. [150085]

Yvette Cooper: Emergency contraception in schools can be provided only by school nurses with a family planning background and specialised training to work under patient group directions. School nurses in maintained schools are employed by the National Health Service. Potential liability is covered by the arrangements of the NHS body concerned.

Vaccinations (Barnsley and Doncaster)

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster were vaccinated against (i) MMR and (ii) meningitis in (A) 1999 and (B) 2000. [147318]

Yvette Cooper: Information about the percentage of children immunised against measles, mumps and rubella by age 2 and by age 5 is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 1999–2000." A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website, www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0026.htm.

Information on uptake of meningitis C vaccine in all age groups immunised through the current programme is still being collected. This information will be published when it becomes available.

Nurses

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital and community health service nurses who are *(a)* qualified, *(b)* unqualified, *(c)* midwives, *(d)* learner staffs, and *(e)* Project 2000 students, as whole-time equivalents were employed (i) in each region and (ii) in total in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [148608]

Mr. Denham: Data from 1990 onwards are in the table. To provide data from 1979 would incur disproportionate costs.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and learners in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	Qualified nursing	*of which: Midwives*	*Unqualified nursing*	*Learners*
1990				
England	242.340	19.980	90.450	58.840
Northern	16.950	1.270	5.890	3.880
Yorkshire	18.540	1.650	6.380	4.890
Trent	23.090	1.890	9.330	5.330
East Anglia	9.760	820	4.170	2.060
North West Thames	15.590	1.200	5.250	5.080
North East Thames	19.800	1.620	6.320	6.600
South East Thames	18.740	1.410	5.960	4.290
South West Thames	13.760	980	5.250	2.860
Wessex	13.970	1.140	6.540	2.750
Oxford	11.030	1.010	3.870	2.130
South Western	16.320	1.230	7.670	3.270
West Midlands	25.460	2.340	9.900	6.500
Mersey	12.930	1.110	4.870	3.060
North Western	22.920	2.160	8.550	5.330
Other	3.460	80	460	800
1991				
England	243.250	19.760	90.550	47.340
Northern	16.880	1.290	5.960	3.240
Yorkshire	18.480	1.630	6.330	3.620
Trent	23.290	1.880	9.350	4.020
East Anglia	9.810	790	4.190	1.730
North West Thames	16.280	1.140	5.400	3.600
North East Thames	20.050	1.610	6.340	5.830
South East Thames	16.620	1.320	5.650	3.790
South West Thames	14.120	1.040	5.030	1.950
Wessex	14.130	1.150	6.560	2.190
Oxford	11.320	1.030	4.000	1.280
South Western	16.130	1.180	7.410	2.460
West Midlands	25.210	2.240	9.790	5.800
Mersey	12.620	1.100	4.780	2.420
North Western	23.230	2.200	8.720	4.480
Other	5.070	90	1.030	940

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health-visiting staff and learners in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	Qualified nursing	*of which: Midwives*	*Unqualified nursing*	*Learners*
1992				
England	246.570	20.350	90.840	34.740
East Anglia	9.320	740	4.000	1.250
Mersey	12.700	1.110	4.650	1.780
North East Thames	16.290	1.280	5.100	4.320
North West Thames	14.960	1.100	4.980	2.020
North Western	22.810	2.180	8.510	2.720
Northern	16.770	1.390	5.590	780
Oxford	11.600	970	3.860	780
South East Thames	14.920	1.340	5.250	1.590
South West Thames	17.360	1.380	5.610	3.110
South Western	16.580	1.220	7.660	1.000
Trent	23.230	1.870	9.500	2.310
Wessex	13.570	1.070	5.990	880
West Midlands	22.920	2.160	8.690	2.400
Yorkshire	18.130	1.610	5.990	2.890
Other	15.420	850	5.480	6.900
1993				
England	241.850	19.630	91.940	21.040
Northern	17.650	1.400	5.840	820
Yorkshire	18.910	1.670	6.310	1.830
Trent	22.420	1.700	9.810	1.540
East Anglia	9.740	740	4.380	620
North West Thames	15.290	1.070	4.990	850
North East Thames	18.540	1.590	5.910	3.320
South East Thames	16.200	1.300	5.700	1.730
South West Thames	14.110	1.120	5.350	1.390
Wessex	14.720	1.140	7.140	480
Oxford	11.970	980	4.370	460
South Western	16.660	1.210	7.920	760
West Midlands	25.480	2.350	9.900	3.270
Mersey	12.400	1.040	4.470	1.100
North Western	22.740	2.180	8.740	2.250
Other	5.020	70	1.120	610
1994				
England	238.780	19.340	92.550	11.080
Anglia and Oxford	21.140	1.710	8.550	600
North Thames	33.090	2.700	11.440	2.060
North West	34.960	3.130	13.240	1.810
Northern and Yorkshire	35.190	3.000	12.310	1.740
Trent	23.490	1.610	10.160	630
South Thames	30.070	2.340	11.380	1.470
South and West	31.120	2.390	14.590	410
West Midlands	25.090	2.350	9.510	1.910
Other	4.640	70	1.360	440
1995				
England	246.820	18.030	82.910	4.580
Anglia and Oxford	23.600	1.900	8.620	270
North Thames	36.030	2.400	9.900	990
North West	37.560	3.170	12.300	760
Northern and Yorkshire	35.580	2.580	10.780	570
South and West	30.860	2.370	11.600	360
South Thames	31.740	2.190	9.830	600
Trent	23.610	1.580	9.270	270
West Midlands	25.910	1.840	8.360	760
Other	1.920	—	2.240	[1]—
1996				
England	248.070	18.260	83.650	2.670
Anglia and Oxford	23.590	1.700	9.000	250
North Thames	37.130	2.480	9.800	490
North West	37.180	3.090	12.460	380
Northern and Yorkshire	35.520	2.650	10.890	240
South and West	30.820	2.420	11.610	230
South Thames	32.510	2.220	9.870	450
Trent	23.570	1.670	9.530	160
West Midlands	26.070	2.020	8.290	460
Other	1.680	—	2.190	[1]—

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and learners in England as at 30 September each year

Whole-time equivalents

	Qualified nursing	*of which: Midwives*	*Unqualified nursing*	*Learners*
1997				
England	246.010	18.050	84.020	2.250
Anglia and Oxford	23.310	1.640	8.720	210
North Thames	36.810	2.500	10.080	460
North West	36.770	3.040	12.520	230
Northern and Yorkshire	33.600	2.410	11.390	190
South and West	30.670	2.410	11.120	190
South Thames	32.460	2.160	9.790	370
Trent	25.150	1.770	9.610	150
West Midlands	25.620	2.110	8.570	440
Other	1.620	—	2.220	—
1998				
England	247.240	18.170	84.520	2.080
Anglia and Oxford	23.650	1.790	8.660	230
North Thames	36.570	2.480	10.080	510
North West	36.820	2.930	12.910	240
Northern and Yorkshire	33.750	2.340	11.120	180
South and West	31.100	2.390	11.000	180
South Thames	31.930	2.180	10.000	320
Trent	25.390	1.820	9.540	140
West Midlands	26.350	2.240	9.010	290
Other	1.680	—	2.200	—
1999				
England	250.650	17.880	87.440	1.880
Eastern	21.260	1.540	9.570	220
London	42.810	2.870	8.690	480
North West	37.420	2.930	13.720	220
Northern and Yorkshire	34.540	2.170	11.380	140
South East	36.620	2.530	14.320	330
South West	24.040	1.830	8.550	120
Trent	25.950	1.840	9.540	130
West Midlands	26.340	2.170	9.300	250
Other	1.670	—	2.380	—

[1] Five or less and greater than zero

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Figures exclude agency staff.
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts zero.
4. "Others" includes staff employed by SHAs, OSAs and other centrally based services.
5. A new classification of the non-medical workforce was introduced in 1995. Information based on this classification is not directly comparable with earlier years.
6. New regional office boundaries were introduced in 1994 and 1999.
7. Since 1989 traditional pre-registration nurse training was gradually replaced by Project 2000 training. Project 2000 students are funded by bursaries and are not employed by the HCHS; they are not therefore included in the workforce numbers.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

Cardiac Diseases

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died of cardiac diseases in the Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority area in 2000. [148745]

Yvette Cooper: In 2000, 927 residents from the Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority area died from cardiac diseases. This includes those who died as a

result of ischaemic heart disease and heart failure. A small percentage of deaths will be excluded as it is more difficult to attribute them to cardiac diseases.

Source:

Public Health Mortality File, Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority

Smoking

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is introducing to encourage and support smokers who wish to stop smoking. [148743]

Yvette Cooper: As set out in the White Paper, "Smoking Kills", the Government's tobacco control strategy involves a comprehensive health education programme backed up by local cessation services.

The education programme is supported by a national telephone helpline which, besides offering information, advice and support, can direct smokers to their local services.

A national network of National Health Service smoking cessation services provides expert help to smokers wanting to give up, and up to six weeks free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) is available to smokers entitled to free prescriptions. The cessation aid Zyban (Buproprion) is already available on NHS prescription and we are considering the outcome of a recent consultation exercise on a proposal to provide all NRT products on this basis.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died of smoking-related diseases in the Gateshead and South Tyneside area in 2000. [148744]

Yvette Cooper: In 2000, at least 442 residents from the Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority area died from smoking related diseases. This figure is based on percentages of lung cancer, ischaemic heart disease and cerebro-vascular disease deaths. The true figure is likely to be higher as other diseases have been excluded and smoking rates in the area are higher than the United Kingdom average.

Source:

Public Health Mortality File, Gateshead and South Tyneside health authority

Good Health (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is introducing to encourage healthy eating and exercise and to promote good health in the Jarrow constituency. [148746]

Yvette Cooper: Parts of the Jarrow constituency have been classed as an area for special action within the Tyne and Wear Health Action Zone (HAZ). The HAZ co-ordinates a positive health campaign within the constituency which tackles areas such as smoking cessation, healthy eating, health promotion, accident prevention and physical activity.

Examples of projects within the Positive Health Campaign include the Jarrow Festival smoking cessation project; positive health campaigns at St Aloysius and Greenfields Schools; an aromatherapy project at the PHAB Club; Fitness Up North; a rehabilitation service at the Charles Palmer Centre, Palmer Community Hospital; an older persons information and advice centre; a mobile chip pan fire demonstration unit; a weekend contraception service and the appointment of education for health and healthnet workers.

In addition to the above, the South Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust's Palmer Hospital is affiliated to the World Health Authority's health promoting hospital initiative and is involved in the provision of health related information for patients. The Community Learning Centre project uses the district hospital site as a computer and training access point for the South Tyneside College. The Food Education and Action in South Tyneside partnership with the local authority aims to revive the place of healthy eating among young people. Smoking cessation initiatives include specialist clinics and "smokefree schools awards". Finally, the trust gives seminars to local employers on health issues such as developing policies on stress, smoking and alcohol.

HIV

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines exist for the provision of post-exposure prophylaxis with anti-HIV drugs following potential sexual exposure to HIV. [148671]

Yvette Cooper: The United Kingdom's Chief Medical Officers' Expert Advisory Group on AIDS published updated guidance on HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis in July 2000. This includes advice on non-occupational (including sexual) exposure. Copies of this guidance are available in the Library and on the Department of Health website at: www.doh.gov.uk/eaga.

Teenage Pregnancy

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into the relationship between levels of support for parents of young children and levels of teenage pregnancy. [148666]

Yvette Cooper: Development of the cross-departmental teenage pregnancy strategy drew on a full analysis of United Kingdom and international research in the area. There is no direct evidence to suggest any relationship between levels of teenage conceptions and material or financial support for teenage parents. Research does, however, suggest that support offered by a young woman's parents may impact on her decision whether to continue with a pregnancy. Further information on this will become available as the impact of the strategy is evaluated.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has assessed on the nature of the connection between levels of financial or other service support for parents of young children and levels of teenage pregnancy *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in other European countries. [148665]

Yvette Cooper: Development of the cross-departmental teenage pregnancy strategy drew on a full analysis of United Kingdom and international research in this area. Research conducted to inform the Social Exclusion Unit's report on teenage pregnancy found little relationship between a country's allocation of its funds to family related benefits and teenage birth rates. Research in the UK does, however, suggest that support offered by a young woman's parents may impact on her

decision whether to continue with a pregnancy. Further information on this will become available as the impact of the strategy is evaluated.

Hospital Developments

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital developments were started in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000. [149131]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is shown in the table. Since May 1997, 38 major hospital building projects worth over £3.9 billion have been approved to proceed. Of these, 24 schemes had signed final contracts and started construction by the end of 2000.

	Major hospital developments given approval to proceed	*Started construction*
1997	19	4
1998	13	9
1999	6	7
2000	—	4
Total	38	24

North Cumbria Health Authority

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the impact of his Department's financial allocation has been on the budget of the North Cumbria health authority in real terms in each year since 1997; and what his estimate is of the impact in 2001–02 on the basis of his proposals in the pre-Budget report. [149297]

Mr. Denham: North Cumbria health authority will have received additional funding in excess of £57 million from 1997–98 to 2001–02. This equates to nearly £35 million extra in real terms. A yearly breakdown is shown in the table.

	Cash increase £ million	*Percentage*	*Real terms increase £ million*	*Percentage*
1997–98	5.609	4.02	2.767	1.99
1998–99	6.512	4.71	2.639	1.91
1999–2000	12.632	6.78	7.788	4.18
2000–01	13.822	6.92	8.611	4.31
2001–02	18.697	8.66	12.974	6.01

Polio

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the specialist units dealing with the late effects of polio and their location. [149101]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* The information requested is not held centrally, but the Lincolnshire Post-polio Network website states that 10 clinics deal with the late effects of polio. These are shown in the table.

Clinic	
City Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	Department of Neurology
South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust	Department of Neurology
Papworth Hospital, Cambridge	Respiratory Support and Sleep Centre
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	Essex Centre for Neurological Sciences, Department of Neurology
The Glenfield Hospital NHS Trust, Leicester	Department of Respiratory and Thoracic Surgery
St. Thomas' Hospital, London	LANE-FOX UNIT
The Royal Victoria Infirmary and Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	Department of Neurology
Queens Medical Centre University Hospital Nottingham	Neurosciences Directorate
Hope Hospital, Salford	Department of Neurophysiology
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	Department of Neurophysiology

Nurse/patient Ratios

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average qualified nurse to patient ratio was in each of the last 10 years, broken down by region; and if he will make a statement. [149351]

Mr. Denham: The data requested are not collected centrally.

Dental Charges

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of dental treatment provided to people aged 60 and over required patients to pay *(a)* under £100, *(b)* £100 to £199, *(c)* £200 to £299 and *(d)* £300 or over in the last year for which figures are available. [149328]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* For people aged 60 years and over paying full patient charges up to the maximum limit for dental treatment in the General Dental Services, the number of courses of treatment with patient charges of *(a)* under £100 *(b)* £100 to £199 *(c)* £200 to £299 and *(d)* £300 or more is shown in the table for England in 1999–2000.

General Dental Service: Number of courses of treatment by patient charge for patients aged 60 and over

Thousand

Patient charge	*Number of courses of treatment*
Under £100	4,777.7
£100 to £199	187.9
£200 to £299	13.4
£300 or more	8.0

NHS Psychiatric Counsellors

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times have been over the last year to see an NHS psychiatric counsellor in *(a)* London, *(b)* Surrey and *(c)* Devon. [149610]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not available centrally.

Oxted Hospital

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the redevelopment of Oxted Hospital to commence; and if he will make a statement. [149698]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Surrey and Sussex Healthcare National Health Service Trust, of which Oxted and Limpfield Hospital is part, is due to submit its full business case for the new community hospital at Oxted to the South East Regional Office of the NHS Executive in March. It is anticipated that work on the new site will start before the end of the year.

Fluoride

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 31 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 217W, on fluoride, if he will list the research upon which he bases his conclusion; what research he has evaluated which suggests that calcium fluoride is better for dental health than sodium fluoride; if he keeps this situation under constant review; how much money his Department has spent on research into the impact on dental health of *(a)* calcium fluoride and *(b)* sodium fluoride in each of the last 30 years; and if he will make a statement. [149762]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Sodium salts are generally used in fluoridation schemes because they are more soluble than calcium salts. In the 1960s the Government undertook three research studies of fluoridation schemes using sodium salts. The cost of the studies is not now available. We have asked the Medical Research Council how, in the light of the recently conducted systematic review of water fluoridation conducted by the University of York, the knowledge base concerning water fluoridation and its effects on health could be strengthened.

Waiting Lists (Essex)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were waiting for hospital treatment in the Mid Essex hospital trust area in *(a)* the latest month for which figures are available and *(b)* the previous month. [149695]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Month	*Total number of patients waiting*
November 2000	9,050
December 2000	9,466

Source:
Monthly waiting list returns, KH07 quarterly returns

Primary Health Care

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the difference in cost between primary health groups and primary health trusts; if their funding will come from local health authority budgets; and if he will make a statement. [149679]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* As sub-committees of health authorities, the management costs of a primary care group (PCG) fall to a health authority. Primary care trusts (PCTs) are, however, free standing National Health Service bodies and therefore their management costs are separate from a health authority. However, where PCTs are established, the local health authority will contribute management resources as part of their delegation of functions to a PCT. In addition, PCTs will also receive additional management resources from within that health system to reflect any provider responsibilities that they take on from local NHS trusts.

PCT management costs reflect their increased responsibilities compared to PCGs. The overall expenditure on the management and administration of the NHS is falling in real terms under this Government. The management cost savings achieved so far have included the additional costs of PCGs and the targeted continued reductions for current and future years will include the cost of PCTs.

Outside Contracts

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which services hospital managers are *(a)* permitted and *(b)* not permitted to contract out to private companies; and if he will make a statement. [149674]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The list shows services which may be provided under contract by the private sector to National Health Service bodies:

Grounds and gardens maintenance
Property and building maintenance
Equipment maintenance
Domestic services
Catering
Laundry
Waste disposal
Pest control
Portering
Security
Non-emergency patient transport
Courier services
Information Management and Technology Systems
Financial services
Car parking
Telecommunications
Energy and utilities
Sterile supply services/SSDs
Stores
Reception
Post services
Residential accommodation
Day nursery and creche services.

Any proposals which include categories of services or staff other than those on the list must be submitted to the NHS Executive for approval by Ministers.

Mental Health Care

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the reports into untoward incidents involving

(a) the disappearance and *(b)* the deaths of patients receiving care for mental health problems in each health authority for each of the past five years. [149500]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Details of all deaths of patients detained under the Mental Health Act are reported to the Mental Health Act Commission. A report of the findings between 1997 and 2000 is due to be published later this month. Copies of the report will be placed in the Library when published.

Suicides

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, by health authority, the number of suicides of patients in community health care trusts in each of the past five years. [149499]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally. However, the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness does collect data on suicides by people in contact with mental health services in the year before death. The National Confidential Inquiry began collecting this data in only April 1996. In May 1999 the Inquiry published its report "Safer Services" outlining its findings over the two year period from April 1996. Copies of this report are available in the Library.

Transplant Centres

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria will be used to decide whether Manchester, Birmingham or Sheffield will be the fourth transplant centre to remain in operation following the proposed rationalisation of services. [150073]

Mr. Denham: The study currently under way will determine which of the three units is best able to accommodate an enlarged transplant team based on least disruption to existing and future transplant patients and least disruption to meeting the priority targets for other essential cardiac operations as set out in the National Service Framework for Coronary Heart Disease.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many unfilled places there were within the higher education sector in *(a)* autumn 1997, *(b)* autumn 1998, *(c)* autumn 1999 and *(d)* autumn 2000. [147637]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* Planned student numbers are set out each year covering home and EU students funded by the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) and the Teacher Training Agency (TTA). The table shows the total student numbers (full-time equivalents) planned for HEFCE and TTA prior to the academic year in question, and the comparable estimated outturn for each year. Equivalent figures for Autumn 2000 are not yet available. The growth in financial year FTEs between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 was 34,000. The total number of home, EU and overseas students in English institutions (headcounts on 1 December) rose by 76,000 between 1996–97 and 1999–2000.

Home and EU domiciled Higher Education students in England

Thousand[1]

Academic year	*Planned FTEs*	*Estimated*	*Outturn FTEs*
1996–97	1,001	1,009	—
1997–98	999	1,024	—
1998–99	1,021	1,024	—
1999–2000	1,043	1,037	—

[1] Figures relate to 1 December. The FTE factor used for part-time students is 0.35. For comparability, figures include some students studying professions allied to medicine for which funding responsibility was transferred to the Department of Health for 1998–99 and exclude 18,500 FTEs in 1999–2000 in further education colleges for which funding responsibility transferred to the Higher Education Funding Council in England in 1999–2000.

UCAS data show that accepted applicants for full-time undergraduate courses rose by 5,000 between 1999–2000 and 2000–01. Early data on applications for 2001–02 show an increase of 2,000 applicants over 2000–01.

New Deal (Job Placements)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what is the projected average cost of obtaining for a person currently on Incapacity Benefit a sustainable job with the New Deal for Disabled People involving the use of a job broker; and what the average cost is per job of placements under other New Deal programmes. [147735]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* We have yet to see what the costs per job will be in practice in the national extension of the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP).

New Deal is about giving the individual help each person needs to become employable, find a job and keep a job in the future. Some people will need more help than others and so the cost for each person will also vary. Simply calculating or comparing the cost per job alone cannot measure its success.

The information for the other New Deals is set out in the table:

New Deal	*Average cost per job (£)*
Young people	Less than 4,000
25+	Less than 3,500
Lone parents	[1]1,388
Partners	[2,3]—
50+	[2,4]—

[1] Independent evaluation of the first phase of the New Deal for Lone parents found that the cost per participant moving into work was £1,388.

[2] Not available

[3] The New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People is a relatively new programme. Independent evaluation is being carried out and we will be looking at unit costs.

[4] Detailed information to calculate the actual cost per job for people returning to work through New Deal 50 plus is not yet available.

Investors in People

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment who is responsible for administering the Investors in People scheme locally in the Vale of York; and if he will make a statement. [148956]

Mr. Wicks: The North Yorkshire Training and Enterprise Council administers the Investors in People Standard in the Vale of York. From 1 April 2001, the Learning and Skills Council will assume this responsibility.

Child Care

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he has taken to ensure that good quality affordable child care is available in *(a)* Morecambe and Lunesdale and *(b)* the United Kingdom. [148963]

Ms Hodge: The National Child Care Strategy aims to ensure that affordable, accessible, quality child care is available in every neighbourhood. The Working Families Tax Credit offers help with child care costs to lower income families. £170 million is also being made available until the end of 2003 through the New Opportunities Fund to help start up out of school hours care. By 2003–04, the Department's investment in child care will have trebled from £66 million in this financial year to over £200 million. The Government also intend to make a further £155 million available over the next three years from the New Opportunities Fund. This extra investment will be largely targeted in disadvantaged areas and on childminders. Through the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, we expect to create 45,000 child care places, in up to 900 new 50-place nurseries. Around 50,000 out of school hours clubs in disadvantaged areas are expected to achieve extra start-up support. The Morecambe and Lunesdale area is eligible for the new support being made available for disadvantaged areas. 145,000 childminder places and 450 childminder networks will have been started up by 2004.

New child care places for 546,000 children have been created between April 1997 and September 2000. Taking into account turnover, this has helped an extra 343,000 children. As part of the Strategy 150 Early Years and Child Care Development Partnerships (EYDCPs) have been set up across England[1] to develop new child care places and maintain existing ones across the whole of their local area. Since April 1999 Lancashire EYDCP has created child care places for 487 children in the Morecambe and Lunesdale area and, taking into account turnover, this has helped an extra 125 children.

Lancashire EYDCP is assisting the DfEE in a pilot programme to test innovative approaches to combining early education with care throughout the day. The project is based in the Morecambe and Lune Valley areas and focuses on establishing a partnership between early education providers and the voluntary and private sectors and childminders leading to a co-ordinated seamless child care and early education service for children and families. One of the aims of the project is to help meet the needs of families for whom lack of transport is a barrier to accessing child care, and will include the provision of a mobile nursery facility to operate in rural areas.

Age Discrimination

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to combat age discrimination in the work force. [148964]

Ms Hodge: We made a commitment, last October, to introduce age legislation within six years, by signing the European Employment directive on Equal Treatment. We have negotiated a long implementation period to give us the scope to consult closely with employers and expert groups to prepare workable and beneficial age legislation.

In the meantime we will continue to tackle age discrimination by promoting vigorously the non-statutory Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, which was launched in June 1999. The Code has been promoted to employers through trade press, events and awards initiatives. It sets the standard for non-ageist practices and promotes the business benefits of age diversity in the work force. We must overcome ageist stereotypes and employers need to understand that younger and older workers can add value to their business. In the years leading up to legislation, we want to take employers with us, so that they work with the spirit, not just the letter of the law. In that way we will build up the real culture change we need to overcome discrimination.

Modern Apprenticeships

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many modern apprenticeships in agricultural and land-based industries were *(a)* initiated, *(b)* completed and *(c)* in progress in each of the past five academic years. [149473]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The number of Modern Apprenticeships in agricultural land-based industries for each of the last five academic years were:

(a) Initiated

Academic year	*Modern apprenticeships*
1995–96	430
1996–97	1,170
1997–98	2,030
1998–99	3,530
1999–2000	3,960

(b) Total leavers and the percentage of leavers gaining a qualification

	Advanced modern apprenticeships:		*Foundation modern apprenticeships:*	
Academic year	*Total leavers*	*Leavers gaining a qualification at level 3 and above (percentage)*	*Total leavers*	*Leavers gaining a qualification at Level 2 and above (percentage)*
1995–96	50	35	N/A	N/A
1996–97	350	49	N/A	N/A
1997–98	780	41	40	5
1998–99	990	39	680	32
1999–2000	1,160	42	1,880	42

Because the award of a Modern Apprenticeship entails completion of the whole framework, achievement of a qualification at the levels shown is broadly synonymous with completion.

(c) In progress on 30 September each year

Year	*Modern apprenticeship*
1995	120
1996	570
1997	1,520
1998	2,820
1999	4,770

National Training Organisations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what public funds were received by each national training organisation in the last three years, broken down by their sourcing from *(a)* his Department, *(b)* their sponsoring department, *(c)* other Government Departments and *(d)* European Union funds. [149476]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* National Training Organisations (NTOs) received £7,102,204 in 1998–99, £14,271,987 in 1999–2000 and are planned to receive £14,943,474 in 2000–01 to help meet their sector skills priorities.

Details from other budgets can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Secondary Modern Schools

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he intends to publish the benchmark information for secondary modern schools intended to assist the evaluation of their work and be available to Ofsted inspectors. [149652]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Secondary modern school benchmark information will be available within four weeks from our Standards website (www.standards.dfee.gov.uk/performance) and Ofsted will use this information during their inspections.

School Performance Targets

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he is taking to ensure that head teachers of maintained schools agree performance targets with their governing bodies by the revised deadline of 6 April. [149802]

Ms Estelle Morris: The published regulations on performance management, "The Education (School Teacher Appraisal) (England) Regulations 2000" and "The Education (School Teacher Appraisal) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2000", extended the deadline requiring the appointed governors responsible for the head's review to meet the head and a trained external adviser to agree objectives to 6 April 2001. As a result of the extension of the deadline 86 per cent. of appointed governors have now arranged or completed discussions with advisers. We are reminding schools that have not already made arrangements to do so.

Schools (South Derbyshire)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the capital expenditure in schools was in the South Derbyshire constituency supported by the Funding Agency for Schools in each financial year from 1993–94. [149780]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the total number and value of allocations for capital projects at Grant Maintained (GM) schools in Derbyshire for each financial year from 1993–94. The Funding Agency for Schools was not established until 1 April 1994. The allocations shown in the table for 1993–94 were made by the Department for Education. Capital funding to GM schools from 1994–95 was made by both project specific allocations to individual schools and by formula allocation to all schools. The total allocations for both types of grant are shown in the table.

Details of actual capital expenditure in each financial year are not readily available as this information was not collected before individual project records were achieved.

Financial year	*Number of allocations*	*Value of allocations (£)*	*Formula capital allocations (£)*	*Total each year (£)*
1993–94	12	1,016,929	0	1,016,929
1994–95	16	2,903,894	254,610	3,158,504
1995–96	11	413,778	294,355	708,133
1996–97[1]	18	2,806,266	671,868	3,478,134
1997–98	12	864,899	392,758	1,257,657
1998–99	22	3,072,220	288,912	3,361,132
1999–2000	7	1,208,026	158,420	1,366,466

[1] The formula capital allocations include allocations for improvements to security and condition related work that were distributed via the formula capital mechanism.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* Educational Welfare Officer posts and *(b)* vacancies for Educational Welfare Officers there are in each local education authority. [149809]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not collated centrally.

Education Welfare Officers have a long history of working directly with school and families to promote regular attendance. We are currently piloting whether Education Welfare Officers employed directly by schools would help to improve this liaison and assist in our overall aim of reducing the number of school truancies. There are 16 local education authorities involved in the pilots and we will be looking closely at them throughout the year.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what guidance has been given to schools on whether the dispensation of emergency contraception to girls under the age of 16 years should be allowed by the sex and relationship education policy of the school; [150071]

(2) what provisions have been made to allow parents to stipulate that their daughters under the age of 16 years should not be dispensed emergency contraception

without parental consent in cases where the school's sex and relationship education policy allows emergency contraception to be dispensed. [150072]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 484–85W.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Russia

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 171W, on Russia, if he will place in the Library copies of the minutes of the meetings of the Plutonium Disposition Planning Groups, each month until it reports. [148862]

Mr. Wilson: The Plutonium Disposition Planning Group is an informal working group and, as such, there are no formal minutes of its meeting. However, we have secured agreement to place details of the main headings of that Agenda and the list of action points arising from the agenda in the Library and will do so after each meeting of the Group.

Qualified Majority Voting

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if those matters in the councils of the European Union that will be added to decision making by qualified majority vote after the coming into effect of the Treaty of Nice are within the categories of shared, or exclusive competence, of the Community and Union and its member states. [149183]

Mr. Vaz: Of those areas which will move to qualified majority voting after the entry into force of the Treaty of Nice, three are within the exclusive competence of the community. They are Articles 111(4) and 123(4) of the EC Treaty concerning monetary policy, and Article 133(5) of the EC Treaty which extends the Common Commercial Policy to trade in some services and the commercial aspects of intellectual property, subject to unanimity in certain situations. All of the remaining areas which will move to qualified majority voting fall either within the shared competence of the Community and the member states or come within the intergovernmental pillars of the Treaty on the European Union where the concept of shared and exclusive competence is not relevant.

Europe Houses

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Europe Houses there are in the United Kingdom; and what is their purpose and their cost. [142968]

Mr. Vaz *[pursuant to his reply, 19 December 2000, c. 131W]:* We have now been informed by the International Federation of Europe Houses that there are three Europe Houses in the UK.

I am depositing an up to date list of Europe Houses in the Library.

Barzan Al-Takriti

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts Ministers in his Department have had with Barzan Al-Takriti and his representatives. [149585]

Mr. Wilson: There have been no contacts between FCO Ministers and Barzan Al-Takriti or his representatives.

Southern Serbia

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the plan for Southern Serbia presented by Deputy Prime Minister Covic of Serbia. [149773]

Mr. Vaz: The United Kingdom welcomes Serbian Deputy Prime Minister Covic's plan for Southern Serbia, and its approval by the Government of Serbia and of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The UK welcomes in particular the plan's emphasis on the need for a political solution to the crisis in the Presevo Valley, and its focus on the need to establish a multi-ethnic community based on respect for common human and civil rights. The UK calls on armed groups in the Ground Safety Zone to abandon violence and to join the search for a peaceful resolution of the area's problems.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his *(a)* EU and *(b)* American counterparts regarding developments in Southern Serbia and Kosovo. [149779]

Mr. Vaz: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs is in frequent contact with his European and US counterparts on developments in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY), including Southern Serbia and Kosovo. Latest developments in the Balkans were discussed with US Secretary of State Colin Powell in Washington on 6 February.

North Korean Workers Party

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the outcome of his recent discussions in London with representatives of the North Korean Workers Party. [149740]

Mr. Battle: I met a senior delegation from the International Department of the Korean Workers Party on Tuesday 6 February. We exchanged views on the development of UK/DPRK relations following the establishment of diplomatic relations on 12 December 2000.

Common Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from the US Administration on the further development of the European Union's common security and defence policy. [149793]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed ESDP during his talks in Washington on 6–7 February. The talks

confirmed consensus between the US and UK in support of a European defence policy which strengthens NATO and the EU.

DEFENCE

Ballistic Missiles

19. **Mr. Paice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the threat to the UK and the rest of Europe from ballistic missiles. [148236]

22. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the perceived threat of attack on the United Kingdom by states with rogue Governments. [148239]

Mr. Hoon: We assess that there is currently no significant ballistic missile threat, nor any other significant threat of attack, on the United Kingdom at present. We do, however, continue to monitor developments closely. It is not for the UK to make such assessments in respect of other countries.

30. **Mr. Clappison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his Russian counterparts about ballistic missile defence. [148247]

Mr. Hoon: I last met my Russian counterpart on 7 December 2000 and discussed a range of issues, including missile defence.

Armed Forces (Retention)

21. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the steps being taken to improve retention in the armed forces. [148238]

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the steps taken to improve retention in the armed forces. [148223]

Mr. Spellar: Armed Forces retention is being tackled as a high priority. Our aim is to maintain good levels of retention through policies that genuinely reflect the priorities of our people and their families.

Internal attitude surveys tell us that separation is a factor in both the retention and overstretch of our personnel. We have sought to mitigate the impact of overstretch upon service personnel and to make improvements to the welfare of those who are deployed on operations. For example, we have provided a guaranteed period of post operational tour leave for those returning from operations and wider access to e-mail facilities for personnel to remain in contact with their families.

In addition to these measures a number of single service retention positive initiatives have been or are being introduced.

36. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve *(a)* morale and *(b)* retention in the armed forces. [148253]

Mr. Spellar: High morale is a vital factor in retaining personnel which in turn improves manning levels, reduces overstretch and helps to obtain the optimum return on investment in training. Our aim is to maintain excellent levels of retention and morale through implementing policies that reflect the priorities of our people and their families.

Internal attitude surveys tell us that separation is a negative factor in the morale and retention of our personnel. We have sought to mitigate the impact that separation has on our people by introducing a number of welfare initiatives, for example:

A guaranteed period of Post Operational tour leave to enable Service men and women to spend some quality time with their families following an operational deployment;

20 minutes free telephone call time per week for personnel who are deployed on operations;

a greater spread of e-mail facilities to maintain family communications including electronic "blueys".

Recent enhancements to the families' Concessionary travel scheme give the families of personnel deployed on operations from an overseas base a wider range of choice when planning their return to the UK.

In addition to these measures, a number of single Service retention positive initiatives have or are being introduced; for example: the creation in each Service of easily accessible Career Managers for all ranks; Financial Retention Incentives have been introduced to stop the outflow of Leading Rate Operator Mechanics and Royal Signallers in the Navy and Army respectively; and the RAF has introduced the "Link-up" scheme to fund Civilian Pilots licences in return for longer service.

Sierra Leone

23. **Ms Squire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he next plans to visit Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [148240]

Mr. Hoon: I returned on 31 January from a short visit to Sierra Leone, and as yet I do not have further plans to visit.

I was able to see for myself the impressive work of the UK armed forces in training the Sierra Leone Army. It was clear to me that we are making a real difference in enhancing the capability and confidence of the Sierra Leone Army battalions that have been trained.

Army (Front-line Equipment)

24. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to enhance front-line equipment for the Army. [148241]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my right hon. Friend the Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mr. Jones).

Army Support (Bosnia and Kosovo)

25. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement about the role of the reserve forces in supporting the regular Army in Bosnia and Kosovo. [148242]

Dr. Moonie: We value the significant contribution which members of the reserve forces continue to make to operations in the Balkans. Reservists bring a wide range of specialist skills to the regular units they support in the combat, combat support and combat service support areas.

The reserves have consistently provided between 10 and 14 per cent. of the manpower for the UK's contribution to NATO operations in the former Yugoslavia since operations commenced in 1995. Currently, reservists represent about 10 per cent. of our forces in Bosnia and Kosovo.

Procurement

26. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what savings his Department expects to realise from the Smart Procurement programme. [148243]

Dr. Moonie: Over the three successive annual planning rounds since the inception of the Smart Procurement Initiative, we have identified cost reductions attributable to Smart Procurement which total £2 billion over the ten-year period 1998 to 2008.

We expect to improve on this in the current and future planning rounds.

32. **Ms Rosie Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs have been created as a result of procurement decisions announced since May 1997. [148249]

33. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many jobs he estimates have been *(a)* created and *(b)* sustained as a result of procurement decisions announced since May 1997. [148250]

Dr. Moonie: Over 60,000 new contracts are placed each year and the Ministry of Defence does not record the number of jobs created or sustained as a result of each individual procurement decision. However, it is estimated that the number of UK jobs dependent on defence expenditure and equipment exports was 355,000 in 1997–98 and 345,000 in 1998–99.

These figures are drawn from the Defence Analytical Service Agency report on UK Defence Statistics 2000, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

European Defence

28. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to meet the US Defence Secretary to discuss defence co-operation. [148245]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson).

38. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to meet the new United States Secretary for Defence to discuss the European rapid reaction force. [148255]

Mr. Hoon: There is no standing European Rapid Reaction Force. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman) and for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), *Official Report*, 12 February 2001, columns 1–3.

New DERA

29. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is regarding the transfer of Royal Air Force equipment to new DERA following privatisation. [148246]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the announcement I made in the House on 24 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 777–89, about our decision to proceed with the implementation of the Core Competence model for the DERA public-private partnership. Under Core Competence, around three-quarters of the current DERA organisation will be turned into a company, referred to as new DERA. For strategic reasons, the remainder will be retained within the Ministry of Defence to carry out functions that could not appropriately be transferred to the private sector.

At the present time no firm decision has been made as to exactly which assets currently held by DERA will be transferred to the new company. If, however, the equipment is RAF owned and on loan to DERA then it will retain that status and be issued to the new company under normal contractual arrangements.

Multinational Defence Co-operation

34. **Ann Keen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in multinational defence co-operation. [148251]

Mr. Hoon: Multinational Defence Co-operation is a long established feature of Britain's defence. It brings a variety of benefits, including enhanced inter-operability, more efficient provision of capability and a fairer sharing of the defence burden. We are currently pursuing a number of new co-operative initiatives with a range of Allies and partners.

Royal Air Force

35. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the manpower strength of the Royal Air Force. [148252]

Mr. Spellar: The total strength of the Royal Air Force on 1 January 2001 was 54,251. This figure includes 252 Full Time Reserve Service personnel.

Armed Forces (Women)

39. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on women in the armed forces serving in front-line combat roles. [148256]

Mr. Hoon: Women already serve on the front line in ships and aircraft and in combat support roles in the Army. The remaining posts closed to women are mainly in the Royal Marines General Service Cadres, Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps, Infantry and the RAF Regiment. In addition, for health reasons women do not serve in submarines or as clearance divers.

We are considering whether employment options for women in the armed forces can be expanded still further. This work will be completed later this year.

Strategic Defence Review

40. **Ms Coffey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in implementation of the Strategic Defence Review. [148257]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Putney (Mr. Colman).

Warships

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the numbers of skilled craft people required for the Government's warship building programme; and if he will make a statement. [148234]

Dr. Moonie: It is not feasible for the Ministry of Defence to make such an assessment as the numbers required depend on how contractors construct the ships, and we are encouraging them to be innovative in this to improve value for money. None the less, we keep under review a broad assessment of whether there is sufficient capacity in UK shipyards to undertake our forward Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary shipbuilding programme. From this we believe that there is sufficient capacity in UK shipyards to undertake our forward warship building programme.

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the state of readiness of the Royal Navy's type 42 frigates. [148235]

Mr. Spellar: There are currently 11 type 42 destroyers in service. Of these, seven are available for operations, fulfilling operational tasking, exercises and training requirements. The remaining four are in periods of refit or upgrade and maintenance.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the type 45 destroyer. [148237]

Dr. Moonie: A contract was placed on 20 December with BAE Systems Electronics—the nominated prime contractor for the type 45 programme—for the Demonstration and First-of-Class Manufacture phase covering the completion of the design and build of the first three type 45 destroyers.

Our procurement strategy as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in the House on 11 July 2000 has not changed. Under this, subject to agreement between prime contractor and shipbuilders, the first and third ship would be assembled by BAE Systems Marine with a substantial contribution by Vosper Thornycroft (VT) and the second ship by VT. It is expected that the prime contractor will be in a position to place shipbuilding contracts later this year.

Vessel Repairs

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on the repair of HMS Tireless and other vessels in that class. [148254]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 64–65W. I would also refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on 19 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 94W.

Defence Jobs (Scotland)

Mr. Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence related jobs were based in each Scottish local authority area in each year since 1996. [149079]

Dr. Moonie: The number of directly employed Ministry of Defence jobs in each Scottish local authority area since 1996 is set out in the table.

Table 1: Direct MOD employment in Scottish local authority areas

Local authority area	*Service*	*Civilian*	*Civilian casual*
1 July 1996			
City of Aberdeen	37	109	2
Aberdeenshire	473	72	11
Angus	1,119	121	8
Argyll and Bute	4,039	3,487	13
Borders	1	1	0
Dumfries and Galloway	2	64	0
City of Dundee	43	43	6
City of Edinburgh	1,830	516	22
East Dunbartonshire	2	8	0
East Lothian	0	12	0
Falkirk	1	2	0
Fife	1,673	1,369	44
City of Glasgow	446	1,309	30
Highland	560	76	10
Inverclyde	20	152	1
Midlothian	674	84	5
Moray	3,896	557	20
North Ayrshire	3	606	14
North Lanarkshire	3	3	0
Orkney	0	5	0
Perth and Kinross	19	432	13
Renfrewshire	4	26	0
Shetland Islands	184	49	7
South Ayrshire	460	57	1
South Lanarkshire	2	7	0
Stirling	17	360	33
West Dunbartonshire	0	23	1
West Lothian	0	3	1
Western Isles	150	108	20

Local authority area	*Service*	*Civilian*	*Civilian casual*
1 July 1997			
City of Aberdeen	27	90	2
Aberdeenshire	389	88	7
Angus	1,189	121	7
Argyll and Bute	3,543	3,381	19
Borders	0	1	0
Dumfries and Galloway	0	69	0
City of Dundee	41	52	4
City of Edinburgh	1,503	516	18
East Dunbartonshire	2	7	1
East Lothian	0	12	1
Falkirk	1	3	0
Fife	1,455	1,248	45
City of Glasgow	578	1,745	24
Highland	62	86	10
Inverclyde	7	61	1
Midlothian	602	89	2
Moray	3,726	680	15
North Ayrshire	1	608	4
North Lanarkshire	3	2	0
Orkney	0	5	0
Perth and Kinross	21	450	12
Renfrewshire	4	27	0
Shetland Islands	174	59	1
South Ayrshire	395	60	2
South Lanarkshire	1	7	0
Stirling	22	367	21
West Dunbartonshire	0	19	0
West Lothian	2	4	0
Western Isles	143	103	7

Local authority area	Service	Civilian	Civilian casual
1 July 1998			
City of Aberdeen	25	96	0
Aberdeenshire	356	89	2
Angus	987	118	5
Argyll and Bute	3,336	3,039	16
Borders	1	1	0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	58	0
City of Dundee	40	54	1
City of Edinburgh	1,589	509	16
East Dunbartonshire	0	0	0
East Lothian	0	11	0
Falkirk	1	3	0
Fife	1,605	1,111	22
City of Glasgow	1,089	1,765	26
Highland	33	80	7
Inverclyde	6	60	1
Midlothian	807	101	2
Moray	3,830	704	12
North Ayrshire	2	598	2
North Lanarkshire	4	3	0
Orkney	0	5	0
Perth and Kinross	20	427	8
Renfrewshire	6	10	0
Shetland Islands	156	59	0
South Ayrshire	389	63	0
South Lanarkshire	0	7	0
Stirling	22	327	8
West Dunbartonshire	2	28	0
West Lothian	1	4	1
Western Isles	100	55	2

Local authority area	Service	Civilian	Civilian casual
1 July 1999			
City of Aberdeen	18	94	1
Aberdeenshire	335	87	2
Angus	1,075	123	2
Argyll and Bute	3,516	3,155	15
Borders	1	1	0
Dumfries and Galloway	1	87	1
City of Dundee	54	63	1
City of Edinburgh	1,736	503	18
East Dunbartonshire	0	0	0
East Lothian	0	9	0
Falkirk	0	2	1
Fife	1,800	1,069	28
City of Glasgow	1,217	1,824	9
Highland	27	88	2
Inverclyde	6	59	1
Midlothian	708	103	4
Moray	3,767	732	20
North Ayrshire	4	570	3
North Lanarkshire	2	3	0
Orkney	0	5	0
Perth and Kinross	13	400	16
Renfrewshire	8	24	0
Shetland Islands	148	56	3
South Ayrshire	385	62	1
South Lanarkshire	2	6	0
Stirling	22	289	21
West Dunbartonshire	2	40	2
West Lothian	2	3	0
Western Isles	88	14	2

In addition to this direct employment, the MOD supports a significant number of defence-related jobs throughout the UK. While DASA (the Defence Analytical Services Agency) does not produce estimates of these employment levels for local authority areas, their estimate[1] of the defence-related employment for Scotland as a whole is set out in the table.

[1] The method used to provide national and regional employment estimates requires the combination of two elements. First, a breakdown of MOD equipment expenditure with UK industry (using the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC)) and second, a measure of sales per employee for each of the industries receiving defence spending (derived from the ONS Business Enquiry and the Labour Market Survey). Dividing the first by the second gives an estimate of those employed directly on defence contracts. These estimates do not include indirect employment. The figures exclude MOD Civilian and Service Personnel. The full estimation methodology is outlined in Defence Statistics Bulletin No. 3). There is no internal method of isolating the amount of employment generated as a direct result of any one procurement decision. The sales per head data used in calculating the data do not distinguish between individual projects and is more an indiction of permanent or ongoing employment within a defence contractor. DASA rely for their information on a Defence Bills Agency (DBA) database—the Monthly Journal of Records (MJRECS), which is populated, in part by data from the DEFFORM 57. This form is completed by commercial staff each time a new MOD headquarters contract is placed (as opposed to Local Purchase Order). The DEFFORM gives quite a detailed picture of the type of contract placed e.g. on pricing, and information describing the region where a contract is placed. The form utilises a 'location of work code'. MOD expenditure on equipment in the UK is derived from the MOD Central Ledger (Return 5) and can be split by region using data from MJRECS—detailed. Each expenditure has a location code for the prime contractor in the transaction. The proportion of expenditure, which might be spent in the region, is determined by the location of the prime contractor and does not take account of those of sub-contractors. The proportions calculated from MJRECS are then applied to total expenditure on equipment in the UK to find the values in each region. Using sales per head data we are able to calculate estimates of employment dependent on equipment expenditure by applying them to regional breakdown derived from MJRECS.

Table 2: estimated direct MOD related employment in Scottish local authority areas

Year	Employment
1995–96	8,000
1996–97	7,000
1997–98	6,000
1998–99	6,000

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much depleted uranium is left behind in tank gun barrels after the firing of depleted uranium rounds; [146579]

(2) how much depleted uranium is extracted from the barrel of tanks and evacuated into the atmosphere during the firing of depleted uranium rounds; [146580]

(3) what research his Department has undertaken into the potential risks to tank crews of firing depleted uranium rounds; and if he will publish the research. [146578]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 22 January 2001]:* MOD officials are researching the reports addressing the issues raised. I will write to the right hon. Member once the review is complete, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 358W, if he will publish a list

on the reports on depleted uranium commissioned by his Department from DERA; and if he will place copies of these reports in the Library. [149650]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Pensions

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the cost of retrospectively increasing the pensions of those ex-servicemen retiring in a pensions trough; and if he will make a statement. [149542]

Mr. Spellar: The cost of any adjustment could not be considered in isolation from other public service schemes.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from ex-servicemen affected by the pensions troughs of 1977 and 1991. [149541]

Mr. Spellar: The number of inquiries which the Ministry of Defence has received is set out in the table:

Letters to Ministers and officials—including letters from MPs

	1977 Pension trough	*1991 staging*
1996	8	0
1997	12	0
1998	6	0
1999	12	0
2000	10	0
2001[1]	24	2

[1] Up to February

KFOR

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of British troops in KFOR. [148229]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), *Official Report*, 12 February 2001, column 5.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total value of the change which has not been given to asylum seekers using vouchers in shops. [149289]

Mrs. Roche: Retailers participating in the asylum voucher scheme are not required to keep records of the sums they retain as a result of the no change policy. We believe that asylum seekers are managing to combine their vouchers and cash to ensure they do not lose out. However, we are looking into this issue as part of our review of the operation of the voucher scheme.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the practice of detaining asylum seekers in other European countries; what European countries have a policy of the systematic detention of asylum seekers in secure reception centres; and if he will make a statement. [149547]

Mrs. Roche: The Government monitor the asylum practices of other European Union member states.

All member states detain asylum seekers in certain circumstances. The criteria for detention vary considerably between member states.

Some member states also operate a system of reception centres to accommodate asylum seekers. Most such centres are not secure, but in some cases the freedom of movement of asylum seekers is restricted by a requirement for continuous residence or regular reporting.

Mr. Michael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to encourage asylum seekers to undertake voluntary activity while they are awaiting a decision on their case; and what guidance is offered on this matter by his Department. [149890]

Mrs. Roche: The Government are keen that asylum seekers should have the chance to contribute to their local community by taking part in voluntary activity.

Guidance which will be of help to organisations and to asylum seekers interested in this area has today been placed in the Library.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of people who have had their applications for refugee status refused, but remain illegally in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [150075]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the right hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) on 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 700.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers eligible for support from NASS are receiving voucher-only support; and if he will make a statement. [150038]

Mrs. Roche: As at the end of December 2000, 8,870[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated voucher-only support by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

[1] Figure rounded to the nearest 10

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many unaccompanied minors who are classified as asylum seekers are under the protection of local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [150034]

Mrs. Roche: The latest available estimate is that, as at 31 March 2000, the number of unaccompanied minors who were classified as asylum seekers and are under the protection of local authorities was 5,190.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many adult asylum seekers are resident in the United Kingdom awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications, but are not in receipt of support from NASS; and if he will make a statement. [150037]

Mrs. Roche: The number of asylum applications awaiting an initial decision at the end of December 2000 was 66,195.

Information is available on the number of asylum seekers that were allocated National Asylum Support Service (NASS) support, however these figures may include some family cases who have received a final

decision on their asylum claim and are awaiting removal. In total, as at end December 2000, 25,500[1] asylum seekers (including dependants) were allocated NASS support.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 100

3. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with local authorities regarding the dispersal of asylum seekers. [147089]

Mrs. Roche *[pursuant to her reply, 5 February 2001, c. 647]:* The year for which the figure 3,190 refers is 1995 and not 1996.

Robbery

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average custodial sentence imposed by the courts for robbery was in *(a)* the last six months of 2000 *(b)* the first six months of 2000 and *(c)* each of the previous four years. [149208]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* Available information, taken from the Home Office's court proceedings database, regarding the average custodial sentence imposed by the courts for robbery offences under S8 of the Theft Act 1968 for the period 1996 to 1999 and for the first half of 2000 (provisional data) is given in the table. Data for the second half of 2000 are not yet available. The offence of robbery carries a maximum sentence of life imprisonment.

The average custodial sentence (in months) imposed by type of court, and the numbers sentenced to life imprisonment at the Crown court, for the offence of robbery, England and Wales, 1996 to 2000[1]

	Average sentence length (months)		
Year	Sentenced at magistrates courts[2]	Sentenced at the Crown court[3]	Total number sentenced to life at the Crown court
1996	3.8	40.1	8
1997	3.7	40.9	4
1998	3.9	37.3	16
1999	3.7	37.3	37
2000[1]	3.7	36.8	9

[1] Data for 2000 are for the period 1 January to 30 June only and are provisional

[2] Offenders aged 10 to 17

[3] Excludes those offenders sentenced to life imprisonment

Child Abuse

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suspects have been identified and charged using the trawling method by the police in connection with child abuse allegations in the last three years. [149430]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The conduct of child abuse investigations is an operational matter for the police. Information on the investigative methods used by the police is not collected centrally.

The police have a duty to investigate all allegations of child abuse thoroughly, and to undertake a complete investigation, pursuing all lines of reasonable inquiry in accordance with the law. When considering whether a charge should be brought, the police must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to form the basis of a prosecution, which requires that the offence is capable of being proved beyond reasonable doubt. It is then a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service, an independent body responsible for determining whether a prosecution should proceed, to assess the weight of this evidence, and in particular whether there is any indication that false evidence might have been offered against the individual accused of the crime.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who acted as referees in the application for naturalisation submitted in 1998 by S. P. Hinduja. [149592]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Ruffley) on 30 January 2001, *Official Report,* column 166W.

Mr. Cawsey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which persons other than his Department's *(a)* officials and *(b)* Ministers are permitted access to the files relating to the applications for naturalisation of S. P. and G. P. Hinduja; and what requests he has received from such persons for access to those files. [150041]

Mr. Straw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Ruffley) on 30 January 2001, *Official Report,* column 166W.

Offences (Hertsmere)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will break down the offences committed within the Hertsmere police division in each year since 1992. [150050]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested was not collected centrally prior to September 1999 and is currently collected only for offences of violence against the person, sexual offences, robbery, domestic burglary, theft of a vehicle and theft from a vehicle. Table 1 presents the number of offences recorded in Hertsmere in the year to September 2000; there are no previous comparable year data held centrally. This information, and that on all other Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, was published in table 5 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1/01, "Recorded Crime England and Wales October 1999 to September 2000", available in the Library.

Table 1: Hertsmere Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership—notifiable offences recorded by the police October 1999-September 2000

Title/reference	Hertsmere Hertfordshire
Population (thousand)	97.3
Households (thousand)	39
Violence against the person (class 1–8, 11–15, 37/1, 104, 105)	
Offences	731
Per 1,000 population	7.5

Table 1: Hertsmere Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership—notifiable offences recorded by the police October 1999-September 2000

Title/reference	*Hertsmere Hertfordshire*
Sexual offences (class 16–27, 74)	
Offences	50
Per 1,000 population	0.5
Robbery (class 34)	
Offences	51
Per 1,000 population	0.5
Burglary dwelling (class 28,29)	
Offences	489
Per 1,000 population	5.0
Per 1,000 h/h	12.6
Theft of a motor vehicle (class 37/2, 48)	
Offences	344
Per 1,000 population	3.5
Theft from a vehicle (class 45)	
Offences	1,309
Per 1,000 population	13.5

Emergency Services (Hoax Calls)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 435W, on emergency services (hoax calls), what proportions of *(a)* 999 calls received by the Metropolitan police and *(b)* hoax calls and calls to which a police response was not deemed necessary were made from mobile phones. [149657]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that this information is not collected.

British Citizenship Applications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria govern the access of *(a)* the security service, *(b)* the secret intelligence service and *(c)* the police to information about individual applications for British citizenship. [148340]

Mr. Straw: No Department or agency routinely seeks access to information about individual applications for British citizenship. On the infrequent occasions when information is sought for legitimate crimefighting or national security purposes it will normally be provided.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on inviting other Government Departments and agencies to comment on individual applications for British citizenship. [148341]

Mr. Straw: In furtherance of the requirement laid down in the British Nationality Act 1981 for me to be satisfied, before granting naturalisation that an applicant is of good character, my Department carries out checks with the police and where appropriate comments may be sought from other Government Departments and agencies.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for naturalisation were received by his Department during *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000; what was the average time taken to determine an application in each of those years; and if he will make a statement. [147600]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 January 2001]:* Persons wishing to become British citizens under the British Nationality Act 1981 apply under two broad categories. Some, including all minors, apply for registration, either as an entitlement or at the Home Secretary's discretion. Others apply for naturalisation, which is always discretionary, on the grounds of residence or marriage to a British citizen. The Integrated Casework Directorate has reliable intake figures only for both types of application combined. Separate intake figures for naturalisation are not available.

The table therefore gives total nationality intake for the years in question, and the average waiting times for all naturalisation cases.

Year	*Total intake*	*Average waiting times (naturalisation) for the whole year (months)*
1997	66,000	16.9
1998	68,030	19.9
1999	67,000	20.5
2000	69,714	18.5

The average waiting time for naturalisations at the end of January 2001 was 14.4 months.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average annual per person cost of employing an additional Immigration and Nationality Directorate caseworker is, including training and capital costs. [149545]

Mrs. Roche: By April 2001, staffing levels in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) are expected to have doubled compared to 1998. Since November 1999, we have recruited about 500 extra asylum decision-makers and recruitment is still continuing. Staff who take asylum decisions are normally Executive Officer grade. The annual average unit cost of employing an Executive Officer in the Integrated Casework Directorate is £21,000. This figure includes salary, Earnings Related National Insurance Contributions (ERNIC) and superannuation costs. Other overhead costs such as training, Information Technology and accommodation overheads are not currently recorded in a way which can be attributed to casework staff alone.

Migrants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last received representations from *(a)* Caritas Europa, *(b)* the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, *(c)* the Commission of the Bishop's Conferences of the European Community and *(d)* the International Catholic Migration Commission; and if he will make a statement. [147517]

Mr. Straw: So far as I can ascertain I have received no representations from these organisations.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149256]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* For expenditure on public opinion research I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 718W and the answer I gave to the hon. Member on 8 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 373W. Further work would incur disproportionate cost.

Total expenditure on television, radio and newspaper advertising is as follows:

Year	*£ million (including VAT)*
1996–97	5.23
1997–98	1.4
1998–99	1.8
1999–2000	5.65
2000–01	[1]22.56

[1] Planned expenditure.

The budget for 2000–01 covers £8.67 million for a vehicle crime reduction campaign; £7.35 million for the police recruitment campaign; £3.34 million to publicise rolling electoral registration; £2.4 million on a fire safety campaign; and £800,000 on a campaign to make people aware of the introduction of the Human Rights Act.

Expenditure on direct mail on 1999–2000 was £716,537 spent on a United Kingdom-wide door drop as part of the campaign to explain changes to the voting system for the European elections campaign. In 2000–01 £683,807 was spent on a door drop in England and Wales as part of a fire safety campaign.

Police Recruitment

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many expressions of interest have been received as a result of the national police recruitment campaign in each month of the campaign to date; and how many have resulted in recruits joining the police *(a)* in England and Wales as a whole and *(b)* in each police force in England and Wales. [150044]

Mr. Charles Clarke: To 4 February, there had been over 100,000 inquiries through the website and call centre. These have resulted in over 22,000 formal Expressions of Interest (EOIs). The breakdown by month is as follows:

	Number
End of August/September	7,317
October	5,616
November	1,503
December	727
January	7,051
February (to 4 February 2001)	349
Total	22,563

The table shows the breakdown of EOIs and the forces to which they have been passed.

Responsibility for processing EOIs rests with forces. Forces are being asked to report on the outcome of the EOIs with a view to assessing the effectiveness of the campaign.

Expressions of interest to 4 February 2001

Force	*Number*
Avon and Somerset Constabulary	680
Bedfordshire Police	128
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	274
Cheshire Constabulary	685
City of London	239
Cleveland Constabulary	423
Cumbria Constabulary	415
Derbyshire Constabulary	578
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	555
Dorset Police	278
Durham Police	504
Dyfed-Powys Police	317
Essex Police	378
Gloucestershire Constabulary	157
Greater Manchester Police	1,390
Gwent Constabulary	227
Hampshire Constabulary	333
Hertfordshire Constabulary	192
Humberside Police	471
Kent Constabulary	328
Lancashire Constabulary	1,044
Leicestershire Constabulary	272
Lincolnshire Police	283
Merseyside Police	1,124
Metropolitan Police	1,946
Norfolk Constabulary	316
Northamptonshire Police	186
Northumbria Police	683
North Wales Police	278
North Yorkshire Police	623
Nottinghamshire Constabulary	859
South Wales Constabulary	963
South Yorkshire Police	819
Staffordshire Police	676
Suffolk Constabulary	188
Surrey Police	174
Sussex Police	324
Thames Valley Police	385
Warwickshire Constabulary	182
West Mercia Constabulary	418
West Midlands Police	930
West Yorkshire Police	1,191
Wiltshire Police	147
Total	22,563

Best Value

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the additional cost to each police force in England and Wales has been of administration associated with Best Value; and if he will make a statement. [150042]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The administration cost associated with Best Value is not collected centrally by the Home Office.

The Government are confident that Best Value will, over the five year period, save police authorities and forces more than they spend as well as improving police performance across the board.

Entry Clearance (IT Professionals)

Sir Patrick Cormack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals have been granted permission to enter the UK on the basis of their qualifications in information technology in the last three years; and from which countries they have come. [148903]

Ms Hodge: I have been asked to reply.

The number of foreign nationals, broken down by country, granted permission through the work permit arrangements to undertake information technology related jobs during 2000 is given in the table. Directly comparable figures for 1998 and 1999 are not available as the way in which work permit management information is collected was changed in October 1999.

Country	*Total number of IT applications approved for 2000*
Albania	5
Algeria	11
Angola	3
Argentina	8
Armenia	4
Australia	708
Azerbaijan	3
Bahrain	2
Bangladesh	15
Barbados	3
Belarus	18
Bermuda	5
Bolivia	1
Bosnia-Herzogovina	2
Botswana	2
Brazil	39
British Dependant Territories	2
British National Overseas	23
British Overseas Citizens	4
Bulgaria	65
Burundi	2
Cameroon	17
Canada	377
Chile	6
China Peoples Republic of	221
Colombia	16
Congo	1
Costa Rica	2
Croatia	35
Cuba	3
Cyprus	11
Czech Republic	49
Dominica	2
Ecuador	3
Egypt	21
Estonia	2
Ethiopia	4
Gambia	3
Georgia	5
Ghana	11
Grenada	1
Guatemala	1
Guinea	1
Guyana	2
Haiti	1
Hong Kong (British)	9
Hong Kong (Chinese)	3
Hungary	46
India	11,474
Indonesia	36
Iran	21
Iraq	1
Israel	90
Ivory Coast	1
Jamaica	9
Japan	191
Jordan	16
Kazakhstan	7
Kenya	27
Kuwait	2
Latvia	2
Lebanon	14
Libya	2
Lithuania	7
Macedonia	2
Malawi	2
Malaysia	111
Malta	13
Mauritius	20
Mexico	32
Morocco	11
Myanmar	10
Namibia	2
Nepal	3
New Zealand	358
Nigeria	45
Pakistan	132
Palestine	3
Panama	1
Peru	3
Philippines	103
Poland	86
Romania	54
Russia	158
Saudi Arabia	6
Senegal	8
Serbia	6
Sierra Leone	3
Singapore	62
Slovakia	19
Slovenia	7
South Africa	748
South Korea	44
Sri Lanka	69
St. Lucia	3
Sudan	5
Swaziland	1
Switzerland	77
Syrian Arab Republic	3
Taiwan	31
Tanzania	6
Thailand	23
Trinidad and Tobago	19
Tunisia	5
Turkey	85
Turkmenistan	2
Uganda	6
Ukraine	52
United States of America	2,034
Uruguay	1
Uzbekistan	2
Venezuela	9
Vietnam	2
Yugoslavia	69
Zambia	6
Zimbabwe	17
Total	18,257

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 13 February 2001

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Hinduja Brothers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Ministers and officials in his Department have *(a)* been contacted by and *(b)* contacted (i) Mr. G. P. Hinduja and (ii) Mr. S. P. Hinduja since 2 May 1997; if he will list the occasions on which there was such contact; and if he will make a statement. [148077]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 31 January 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State gave the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 278–79W.

It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of officials' meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the current monthly running costs are of the Millennium Dome; for what proportion of these costs the Millennium Commission is liable; and if he will make a statement. [148522]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* The current monthly running costs of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are between £2.5 million and £3.5 million excluding physical decommissioning costs. Monthly running costs are intended to reduce as the company moves towards solvent liquidation. The NMEC is liable for the company's costs but is able to draw on National Lottery grant awarded by the Millennium Commission.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to ensure that the contents of the Dome are not sold until the future use of the site has been finalised. [149341]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* Nothing will be sold at the forthcoming auction which would prejudice uses of the Dome including as a visitor attraction. The Government remain in negotiations with the preferred bidder, Legacy plc, in the competition to buy the Dome. The New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) has a timetabled decommissioning programme. Leased assets, such as lighting and sound equipment, have been returned to avoid incurring additional charges. Third party assets, such as Ford's Journey Zone and BT's Talk Zone, are being removed.

Granada/Anglia Merger

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the impact of the Granada/Anglia merger on the location of jobs in television production and quality of programme production. [149512]

Janet Anderson: Reorganisation of television production with Granada is a matter for the company itself. The licence commitments of ITV regional companies, which include obligations to provide high-quality programming, remain unaffected by changes in ownership. The recent White Paper, "A New Framework for Communications", announces that the new regulator, Ofcom, will be required to undertake a review of the regional obligations in each ITV licence whenever its ownership changes, and will be empowered to amend licence conditions to meet any concerns arising.

School Sports

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many School Sports Co-ordinators have been appointed; and how many are in post; [148708]

(2) what moneys have been *(a)* committed and *(b)* paid over by the New Opportunities Fund to Sport England to fund School Sports Co-ordinators. [148709]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* 140 School Sport Co-ordinators are now in place in 33 partnerships across the country. No money has been committed by the New Opportunities Fund to Sport England for this programme. Direct support for activities within the School Sports Co-ordinator Programme is available under the New Opportunities Fund Out of School Hours Learning initiative.

Terrestrial Television

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what powers he has to require broadcasters to ensure the transmission of television programmes on the five terrestrial channels. [149669]

Janet Anderson: The responsibility for ensuring the transmission of television programmes on the five terrestrial channels lies principally with the BBC Governors in respect of BBC1 and BBC2, the Independent Television Commission in respect of Channels 3, 4 and 5 and the Welsh Authority in respect of S4C.

Digital Radio

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will publish the criteria he intends to apply for digital switchover of radio. [150058]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Digital radio is at a relatively early stage of development with take-up by consumers still very low. We have not therefore determined criteria to be met in order to achieve switchover. However, we shall keep our approach under review as the roll-out of digital radio services and receiving equipment increases.

Television Licensing Telephone Number

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many telephone calls were

received in each of the last three months on the television licensing telephone number; and what the cost of responding was. [150342]

Janet Anderson: TV Licensing, which administers the television licensing system as agent for the BBC, operates several different telephone inquiry numbers. Information provided by the BBC shows that the total number of telephone inquiries received by TV Licensing in each of the last three months for which information is available was:

	Number of calls
October 2000	87,869
November 2000	727,400
December 2000	528,972

Of these, the number of calls to the over-75 helpline were as follows:

	Number of calls
October 2000	242,508
November 2000	150,733
December 2000	104,748

Information on the cost of responding to these calls is not available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

India

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what advice her Department is giving to people who wish to undertake voluntary work in Gujarat State, India, following the recent earthquake. [149464]

Mr. Mullin: India has a great deal of expertise in relief and rehabilitation operations and substantial resources have been mobilised in response to the earthquake in Gujarat, including medical and paramedical personnel, engineers and logisticians.

The Department for International Development has advised those volunteers with specialist skills to contact organisations that maintain databases of suitably qualified individuals, such as RedR (Registered Engineers for Disaster Relief; 1 Great George street, London, SW1P 3AA, 010 7233 3116) and the International Health Exchange (1st Floor, 134 Lower Marsh, London SE1 7AE; 020 7620 3333). These databases are used by the United Nations agencies, the Red Cross and other non-governmental organisations when personnel are needed quickly for short-term missions as well as longer-term assignments.

The DFID encourages people without specialist skills who wish to contribute to do so in cash rather than in kind by contributing towards the operational agencies working in the area. The best way for individuals to help is to contribute to the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) at 52 Great Portland street, London W1N 6TB (0870 60 60 90). The DEC is the umbrella organisation that is responsible for co-ordinating the response to emergencies from charitable organisations as well as donations from the public. The DEC appeal has raised £5 million to date.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what items have been urgently requested of her by the Indian Government following the earthquake in Gujarat State; to what extent her Department is able *(a)* to supply and *(b)* to advise on these items; and if she will make a statement; [149463]

(2) what requests she has received from the Indian Government for assistance to survivors from the recent earthquake in Gujarat State. [149466]

Mr. Mullin: The Indian Government have not made any formal request for assistance, but have announced that appropriate support would be welcome.

I refer my hon. Friend to my previous response detailing the material and financial assistance my Department has given to date, given on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 408-09W.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what long-term programme of assistance and advice her Department is developing with the Indian Government to help in the area affected by the recent earthquake in Gujarat State. [149467]

Mr. Mullin: The Department for International Development's priority is to ensure that those who have survived the earthquake are cared for until normal services can be restored. The Indian Government are developing plans for rehabilitation and reconstruction; it is expected that these will be largely funded by the World bank and the Asian Development bank. We have offered advice to the Indian Government on strengthening disaster preparedness arrangements, which will include Gujarat.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is offering to the Indian Government to help young children orphaned by the recent earthquake in Gujarat State. [149468]

Mr. Mullin: The Department for International Development has made a total allocation of £10 million for humanitarian assistance to Gujarat.

This is being channelled through the United Nations, the Red Cross and a number of non-governmental organisations for the provision of essential relief items such as tents, blankets, medical supplies, food, water and sanitation. All these agencies aim to focus their assistance on the most vulnerable, which will inevitably include young children who have been orphaned as a result of the earthquake.

More specifically we have provided £1 million to UNICEF, part of which will support their child protection programme. This programme aims to identify and care for children who have been orphaned or separated from their families.

We have also contributed £450,000 to Save the Children for the provision of shelter and non-food relief items for children and their families. They will also make efforts to ensure that those children placed in orphanages make contact with any remaining family by offering specialist advice to all organisations working with separated children.

Pakistan

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what requests for assistance she has received from the Pakistan Government following the recent earthquake; [149622]

(2) what reports she has received from the British High Commissioner in Islamabad about the effects of the recent earthquake which affected Pakistan; [149624]

(3) what discussions she has had with the Pakistan High Commissioner to the UK about the effects of the recent earthquake; and if she will make a statement about the loss of life and damage suffered by Pakistan. [149623]

Mr. Mullin: According to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) the worst affected state in Pakistan is Sindh Province, where 109,000 houses are said to be damaged (of which nearly 11,000 have been destroyed) with over 180,000 families affected. Fifteen people are reported to have died in Pakistan as a result of the earthquake. The UN continues to monitor the situation. To date no appeal for assistance has been made by the Pakistan Government.

International Family Planning Aid

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of President Bush's reinstatement of restrictions on US international family planning aid. [149613]

Mr. Mullin: The implications of the decision by the new US Administration to block funding to international non-governmental organisations that offer abortion and abortion counselling will become clearer over the coming weeks as guidance is issued from USAID.

The Administration's decision is a matter for the US Government; it will make no difference to the commitment of this Government to help poor people access good quality family planning and reproductive health services.

PRIME MINISTER

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister on how many occasions, and for what purpose, Lord Levy has met one or more of the Hinduja brothers since May 1997 on behalf of the Prime Minister. [148363]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* None. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 391W.

No. 10 Website

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Prime Minister what the most recent audience figures are for the Prime Minister's broadcasts on the No. 10 website. [148654]

The Prime Minister: There have been 20 broadcasts, all of which are available on the website.

No total viewing figures are available. This is because the broadcasts can be accessed in a number of different ways—either as a streamed file, a downloadable MP3 version or as a transcript.

The streamed versions of the broadcasts have been requested nearly 50,000 times since the first one was posted on the site on 11 February 2000. Downloads of the MP3 version and hits on the transcript page will be additional to this figure. The site statistics do not show how often these have been accessed, but the site as a whole received over 99 million hits in the nine months since it was relaunched on 11 February 2000.

HEALTH

Blood Products

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his policy that user-patients should be informed if the Bio Products Laboratory withdraws blood products on the basis of past donation information relating to CJD protection requirements. [143857]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 21 December 2000]:* The Department's current guidance, based on the advice from ethical experts, is that clinicians should not tell patients if they have received such products. This is because:

the risk that vCJD might be transmitted in this way is low;

there is no diagnostic test for vCJD;

even if a test was available, there is no treatment.

The guidance goes on to state that:

"In deciding whether or not to inform a particular patient, the benefit/harm balance for their individual situation must be carefully considered. In communicating with patients who have received implicated products, it is therefore for individual clinicians to decide whether to follow this general ethical advice."

The Department is continuously reviewing this advice to ensure that it is in line with current scientific information and ethical thinking.

Levonorgestrel

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Levonorgestrel is licensed for use by girls between the ages of 11 and 15. [147133]

Ms Stuart: Levonorgestrel is available as a prescription-only medicine, without an age limit. It may therefore be prescribed to women aged under 16 years. When given for the purposes of emergency contraception, prescribers are expected to satisfy themselves, in accordance with guidelines, that the young person understands the advice and it is in their best interests to receive the treatment. From 1 January 2001, pharmacists have been permitted to supply Levonorgestrel 0.75 mg to women aged 16 years and over for use as an emergency contraceptive.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clinical trials involving girls between the ages of 11 and 15 years have been conducted with respect to Levonorgestrel. [147134]

Ms Stuart: No clinical trials specific to this age group have been undertaken in the United Kingdom. The marketing authorisation granted in 1999 for Levonorgestrel 0.75 mg tablets as a prescription-only medicine was supported by evidence from two large randomised controlled studies, one conducted by the World Health Organisation, and published data from uncontrolled studies. Most women in the clinical trials were aged between 16 and 48, but a few girls aged 14 and 15 were included. There were no data available for girls between aged 11 and 14 years. Age analysis of efficacy and safety in the randomised studies did not identify any population that responded differently to treatment.

Professions Allied to Medicine

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much extra money was allocated to the professions allied to medicine under the NHS National Plan. [147276]

Mr. Denham: Under the NHS Plan there will be an extra £140 million by 2003–04 to support a major programme of training and development for all staff, including the allied health professions (formerly known as the professions allied to medicine). This is in addition to the extra £6 million made available this year to support the strategy for the allied health professions which was published in November 2000.

Drugs Bill

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total drugs bill was, in cash terms, for the *(a)* Hospital and Community Health Service and *(b)* Family Health Service for each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [149431]

Ms Stuart: The information requested is shown in the table.

Total National Health Service spending on drugs (England only)

£ million

Year	*Family health services (FHS) cash outturn*	*Hospital and community health services (HCHS) cash outturn*	*Total*
1990–91	2,080	460	2,540
1991–92	2,317	591	2,908
1992–93	2,641	643	3,284
1993–94	2,951	710	3,661
1994–95	3,230	764	3,994
1995–96	3,498	874	4,372
1996–97	3,774	961	4,735
1997–98	4,085	1,088	5,173
1998–99	4,339	1,211	5,550
1999–2000	4,833	1,369	6,202

Note:

The figures for FHS cash outturn are net of pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) receipts.

NHS Waiting Lists (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to shorten NHS waiting lists in the Jarrow constituency. [148748]

Mr. Denham: No patients in South Tyneside currently wait over 12 months for inpatient treatment and the South Tyneside Health Care National Health Service Trust has consistently met their over-13-week target for out-patient appointments during the last year.

The South Tyneside Healthcare NHS Trust is implementing several initiatives at the Charles Palmer Community Hospital, Jarrow which will help to reduce waiting times for the local community. These include a new digital X-ray service linked to the district general hospital which will allow specialist and one-stop clinics to be provided in a local setting and a new direct access audiology service which will help to shorten waiting lists and times for ear, nose and throat appointments.

Air Ambulance Services

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many air ambulance services are provided in England; and how each of them are funded; [149781]

(2) what representations he has received about provision of air ambulance services during the last 12 months; [149782]

(3) what plans he has for the provision of air ambulance services within the NHS; [149783]

Ms Stuart: We recognise that air ambulance services have a role in delivering emergency care especially in rural areas and where road access is a problem. The services can be an effective way of getting better and faster access to hospital, and valuable in supporting inter-hospital transfers.

Information on the number and funding of air ambulances is not collected centrally.

During the last 12 months the Department has received letters from the general public and hon. Members asking whether the National Health Service should provide and fund air ambulance services.

Evidence supporting the introduction of air ambulances in the NHS, however is not convincing. In 1995, the Department commissioned Sheffield university to report on air ambulances. The report failed to show benefits which would justify NHS investment.

This lack of evidence to support the clinical or cost-effectiveness of these services does not support the funding of these services by the NHS. However, we will constantly review the position.

North Staffordshire Health Authority

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the allocation per weighted head of population for the North Staffordshire health authority for each year from 1996–97 to date. [149638]

Mr. Denham: Revenue allocation per weighted head of population for North Staffordshire health authority is shown in the table.

	Allocation	Population	Allocation per weighted head of population
1996–97	202,568	484,138	418
1997–98	210,721	480,270	439
1998–99	221,771	491,270	451
1999–2000	304,458	496,215	614
2000–01	335,037	494,419	678
2001–02	362,936	496,124	732

Organ Retention

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the reasons why NHS hospital trusts have been prevented from telling members of the public how many adult and children's organs they have retained in their hospitals; [149824]

(2) when he will tell NHS hospitals trusts the form in which he will require them to set out for public information the numbers of adult and children's organs which are being retained in their hospitals; [149820]

(3) by what means NHS hospital trusts are required to obtain his permission to tell members of the public how many adult and children's organs are being retained in their hospitals; [149822]

(4) for what reason NHS hospital trusts have to obtain his permission before they can tell members of the public how many adult and children's organs are being retained in their hospitals; [149821]

(5) if he will appoint counsellors to support members of the public who may be distraught after not being given information, on his guidance, by NHS hospital trusts on how many adult and children's organs are being held by their hospitals; [149818]

(6) for what reason NHS hospital trusts have been told that they can inform the public about how many adult and children's organs are retained in their hospitals only in a form that he approves. [149823]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Following the publication of the Royal Liverpool Children's inquiry report last week, a special Commission, under the chairmanship of Professor Margot Brazier, has been established to oversee the cataloguing and return of organs and tissue by National Health Service trusts in England.

The Commission has issued comprehensive guidance to trusts on the sensitive and sympathetic handling of inquiries from relatives. This includes establishing dedicated telephone helplines and teams, maintaining contact, and providing bereavement support and counselling where necessary.

The Commission has asked trusts not to provide specific information or begin the process of returning organs and tissue until comprehensive and accurate catalogues of organs and tissue have been completed, and approved by the Commission. This is aimed to avoid repeating the problems of misleading information and multiple burials criticised in the inquiry report.

Transplant Centres

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to announce a final decision on whether Manchester, Sheffield or Birmingham will be the fourth transplant centre to remain in operation following the proposed rationalisation of services. [150074]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* We will issue a document in due course setting out proposals for the future of the National Cardiothoracic Transplant Service. The document will invite views on the proposals from patients, the public and appropriate organisations. A decision will be made following careful consideration of those views.

Health and Social Services Expenditure

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expected funding is of *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* personal social services in England per head of population in 2000–01. [150224]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is set out in the table.

£

	Spend per head in 2000–01
Net NHS expenditure[1]	890
Personal Social Services[2]	190

[1] 2000–01 planned expenditure

[2] 2000–01 planned provision for PSS. Includes resources made available to local councils in England for social services through Standard Spending Assessments and special and specific grants.

General Medical Council

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what monitoring he undertakes of the handling by the General Medical Council of complaints raised against medical practitioners practising in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [149503]

Mr. Denham: Although no specific monitoring of complaints is undertaken, there are regular liaison meetings between departmental officials and the General Medical Council, where both policy and specific cases are discussed. In order to better address the concerns of patients, the GMC is currently carrying out a fundamental review of its structure.

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the appeal structure for claimants dissatisfied by the decision of the General Medical Council. [149504]

Mr. Denham: Currently, the only legal course of action open to complainants is to seek leave for the decision to be judicially reviewed. However, my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor has stated in another place on 20 July 2000, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA 103, that there are strong arguments for dealing with these cases at a lower judicial level. I understand a number of organisations, including the General Medical Council, are examining alternative models for new appeals arrangements. I shall expect them to consider whether these should include a legal appeals route for complainants.

Private Hospital Referrals

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS patients have been redirected to private hospitals under his recently announced scheme; and what the position of such patients is in cases where treatment received proves defective *(a)* at the time of treatment and *(b)* subsequently. [150424]

Ms Stuart: There are no centrally held figures for the numbers of patients treated under the terms of the concordat. Health authorities have allocated funds to local commissioning bodies to make local arrangements as the concordat does not set out detailed contractual arrangements; these are left to be secured locally according to local need.

Any patient treated making use of the private or voluntary sector under the terms of the concordat remains a National Health Service patient and their treatment remains NHS treatment. Such patients remain the responsibility of the NHS and continue to have full access to the NHS complaints procedure should they have any need to complain about treatment received.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Low-sulphur Petrol

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he estimates that all filling stations in the UK will have replaced standard unleaded petrol with low-sulphur petrol. [150227]

Mr. Hain: This is a matter currently under discussion between my Department and petrol retailers.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of filling stations had replaced standard unleaded petrol with low-sulphur petrol by December 2000; and how many he estimates will have done so by April 2001. [150226]

Mr. Hain: According to HM Customs and Excise's "Hydrocarbons Oils Bulletin", in mid-December 2000, ultra-low sulphur petrol constituted around 46 per cent. of petrol released for consumption in the UK. We are monitoring the continued roll out of ULSP across the country.

General Mediterranean Holdings (Export Credits)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which projects involving General Mediterranean Holdings (UK) or its subsidiary companies the ECGD extended credit cover to *(a)* between 1992 and 1997 and *(b)* since 1997. [150235]

Mr. Caborn: ECGD has no record of any dealings with this company or any other of its listed subsidiaries.

Steel Industry (Wales)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the cost of the climate change levy on each steel factory in England and Wales; if he will list the estimated cost for each of the factories; and if he will make a statement. [150256]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The climate change levy has been designed to safeguard the competitiveness of manufacturing industry as a whole. It recognises the special position of energy intensive industries exposed to international competition, including the steel sector. Sites in these sectors which meet eligibility criteria will, subject to EU state aid clearance, get an 80 per cent. levy discount provided they deliver energy saving targets in negotiated agreements with the Government.

The final impact of the levy on individual steel industry sites will depend on whether they participate in the steel sector's energy saving agreement to get the levy discount; and also on the extent to which they benefit from or take advantage of the various levy exemptions, and also the new scheme of enhanced capital allowances for investments in energy efficiency.

Family Friendly Employers

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of mothers from low-income households work for employers with a policy of allowing employees to reduce their hours on return from maternity leave. [150108]

Mr. Alan Johnson: A survey of working parents recently conducted by my Department asked mothers whether a number of support provisions were made available to them by their employer on return from maternity leave, including returning to the same job on a reduced hours or part-time basis.

83 per cent. of mothers in households with gross income of less than £20,800 said that their employer allowed them to return to the same job on a reduced hours or part-time basis, compared with 60 per cent. of those in households with gross income of £20,800 plus.

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of fathers work for employers who allow them to reduce their hours in *(a)* the aftermath of the birth of a child and *(b)* for general childcare reasons. [150110]

Mr. Alan Johnson: A survey commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment in 2000 reports that 34 per cent. of fathers in workplaces employing five or more staff said that their employer would allow them to reduce their hours for an agreed period of time at reduced salary.

Enterprise, Skills and Innovation

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to support enterprise, skills and innovation. [150126]

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I are today publishing "Opportunity for All in a World of Change: A White Paper on Enterprise, Skills and Innovation" (Cm 5052). Copies will be laid in the Libraries of the House and will be available in the Vote Office

The White Paper unveils the Government's active industrial policy to help people and businesses in all regions prosper in our fast-changing world, and sets out the Government's action plan for the future. It sets out the Government's next steps for raising GDP in the regions,

closing the skills gap, supporting industry through restructuring and nurturing new industries as they develop.

University Innovation Centres and Technology Institutes

The measures include a major new drive to create hubs for growth in the regions based on imaginative new partnerships between universities, colleges and businesses. World-class university innovation centres will be established in England. The first five are announced today involving companies such as BAE and Proctor and Gamble in the north-east and Hewlett Packard in Bristol. New technology institutes will be developed in each region to boost the supply of ICT and other high-tech skills and transfer of know-how to SMEs. This new network will produce a step change in the capacity of regions and communities to grow new dynamic businesses and high-tech employment. The involvement of colleges will ensure skills and know how are cascaded into the wider community.

A new regional policy

The Government's goal is to increase the rate of growth in all regions, addressing underperformance and building on success. Raising the trend rate of growth by 0.5 per cent. for the worst-performing regions would increase GDP in 10 years by £20 billion. The measures include:

a new £75 million incubator fund to support start-ups and growth businesses;

special support to manufacturing industry through a new manufacturing advisory service.

a boost for R&D in the regions—university innovation centres and technology institutes

developing strategies for success

support for clusters.

Closing the Skills Gap

The Government inherited a situation of poor standards in schools and neglect of skills. Much has been done to tackle these problems. The goal now is to ensure all our people have the skills they need to be enterprising and creative and to deliver the world beating technical skills business needs. The measures include:

an action plan to drive up ICT skills including training up to 10,000 people each year through the new technology institutes which will have £25 million new pump priming funding;

reducing the number of adults with literacy and numeracy problems by 750,000 by 2004;

building a world-class technical education system with a major rationalisation in qualifications and building up training in colleges and through apprenticeships

a job transition service to help communities and individuals affected by redundancy to find the rights jobs more quickly.

Innovation

The Government's goal is to strengthen the ability of British business to innovate, ensuring that Britain has a world-class ICT infrastructure and promoting the exploitation of scientific advances by business.

Initiatives include:

an additional £90 million to promote the commercial exploitation of research in basic technologies, genomics and e-science;

a £30 million fund to begin the process of ensuring as many people and businesses as possible across the UK have access to affordable broadband services. This forms part of the "UK online: the broadband future" strategy which is being published today. Copies are available in the House of Commons Library;

measures to promote take up of digital TV, giving people without PCs access to the internet.

Companies (EU Political Expenditure)

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many United Kingdom companies he anticipates will be covered by article 3(1) of the Companies (EU Political Expenditure) Exemption Order 2001. [149925]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The draft Companies (EU Political Expenditure) Order 2001 seeks to exclude activities such as the publication of newspapers from the definition of "political expenditure" under Part IX of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, while at the same time ensuring that the principles of accountability and transparency are properly applied in relation to political donations and expenditure by companies. The draft order would exempt any company or subsidiary undertaking whose ordinary course of business includes the preparation, publication or dissemination to the public of material such as views, opinion and comment on the news, or on public or political affairs and events, from the requirement to seek prior shareholder authorisation in respect of such activities; it would not exempt such companies from the requirement to seek prior shareholder authorisation for donations to political parties and organisations or for other forms of political expenditure.

The order has been drafted so as to take account of possible future technological advances, and the Department does not have detailed information on the number of companies which will come within the exemption. The Newspaper Publishers Association, which represents national daily and Sunday newspapers, has eight members. The database of The Newspaper Society, which represents the regional newspaper industry, indicates that there are currently 106 regional press publishers.

Mortgage Code Compliance Board

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response his Department has made to the most recent annual report of the Mortgage Code Compliance Board. [149838]

Dr. Howells: I have not made a response to this report.

Workplace Bullying

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action his Department is taking to *(a)* tackle and *(b)* raise awareness of the incidence of workplace bullying. [149992]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Bullying has no place in today's work environment and is unacceptable wherever it occurs.

Legislation exists to protect workers from the most serious kinds of bullying, for instance under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974. Laws also cover harassment and discrimination on the grounds of sex, race and disability.

Non-legislative methods currently available include the adoption of best practice and the dissemination of guidance to employers, employees and their representatives i.e. the ACAS 'Code of Practice on Disciplinary and Grievance Procedures'.

The Government's partnership strategy is based on co-operation and good communication between employers and employees, which should result in a more constructive relationship in the workplace.

The DTI's partnership at work fund provides £5 million over a four-year period to help projects develop better employment practices within the workplace. The third round will see bullying as one of its areas of particular interest.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ex-miners from *(a)* Barnsley and *(b)* Doncaster claiming compensation for chronic bronchitis and emphysema have died before their claims were fully processed. [149631]

Mr. Hain: IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have been informed of 10 claimants in the Barnsley area who, sadly, died before their claims were fully processed, and 14 claimants in the Doncaster region.

In all these cases, the claim will be continued by the claimants' widow or dependants. In addition, where a claimant's death certificate shows that one of the respiratory disease conditions for which British Coal was found liable either caused or materially contributed to the death, the Department will also make a bereavement award to the claimant's widow.

Export Licences

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his target is for processing Standard Individual Export Licence applications; and how actual performance compared to these targets in the last eight quarterly periods for which figures are available. [149634]

Dr. Howells: The Government's aim is to provide a substantive response to standard individual export licence applications (SIELs) within 20 working days. Our overall target is to achieve this in 70 per cent. of all cases, excluding applications concerning Iran or Iraq, or applications for licences to export goods which are subject to control solely because of UN sanctions.

In December 2000, 47.7 per cent. of SIELs were processed within this target. For figures from January to November 2000, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Mr. Ruane) on 9 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 496–97W. Figures were not collected on a quarterly basis before 1 January 2000. The performance for the whole of 1999 can be found in the Government's annual report on strategic export controls.

Corus

Mr. MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will examine the anti-competition implications of the decision of Corus not to sell its Llanwern plant to a competitor. [149358]

Mr. Byers: Responsibility for investigating any possible breach of competition law by Corus would be a matter for the competition authorities, the European Commission and the Director General of Fair Trading. I have drawn their attention to my hon. Friend's question.

Research Councils

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the quinquennial review of the six grant-awarding research councils will take place; and what the terms of reference for the review will be. [150466]

Mr. Byers: I am today launching the quinquennial review of the grant-awarding research councils.

Reviews of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are a key part of our programme to modernise government. The Government are committed to achieving better public services that are of higher quality and are more responsive to the needs of the people who use them. Regular NDPB reviews are an important element in ensuring that we have in place the right structures to deliver the Government's agenda effectively and to provide a strong focus on improving future performance.

The purpose of the six grant-awarding councils is to deliver Government policy for publicly funded research and postgraduate training. It would be impossible to conduct a fundamental review independently from that policy. For this reason, although quinquennial review of the six councils was due in 1999, it has been appropriate to postpone their quinquennial review until the outcome of the relevant policy reviews had been completed, so that the role of the councils could be considered in that context. Together, the White Papers on Science and Innovation ("Excellence and Opportunity"; Cmd 4814) and the Knowledge Economy ("Opportunity for All in a World of Change"; Cm 2250) now provide the context for the review.

The terms of reference for the review of the research councils are:

> The review will consider the six grant-awarding research councils individually and collectively.

The review of councils will be undertaken in two stages:

> The first stage will examine the role and organisation of the councils, by reference to their charters and missions, evidence of work already undertaken to review and improve performance, current best practice for NDPBs and the councils' contribution to the delivery of Government policy for publicly funded scientific research and training in the context of the new White Paper. It will set the detailed terms of reference for the second stage.
>
> The second stage will examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the councils' operations. It will look for further opportunities for improving performance by reference to such issues as boundaries between the councils, management structures, aims and objectives, role of funded institutes, performance targets and service standards, use of processes and new technology, delegated authority and accountability and changes to the operating environment since the councils were awarded their royal charters in 1994, including the modernising government agenda.

The review will consider, in particular, how the councils can best fulfil their strategic role in identifying the key areas for future investment in research that will offer the best opportunities for science, social development, industrial application and economic growth.

The review will be conducted in accordance with the current Cabinet Office guidance (published on 31 January 2000) and will include consultation, either in person or in writing, with members of council, staff of the executive

and the councils' customers and key stakeholders. It is expected that a number of working groups will be established to address key issues in detail in the second stage.

The review team will be directed by a review board, which is chaired by the Director General of the Research Councils, Dr. John Taylor, and with a membership which will include key representatives of both industry and academia drawn from the stakeholder communities. The review board will ensure that Ministers, the Treasury, the Cabinet Office, and the staff and customers of the councils are kept informed of the progress of the review and will facilitate the gathering of information for the review team and their communication with staff and other stakeholders.

The review team will be supported by officials in the Office of Science and Technology, with specialist advice as appropriate. The aim will be to complete the review within approximately six months, as recommended in the Cabinet Office guidance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97, *(f)* 1997–98, *(g)* 1998–99, *(h)* 1999–2000 and *(i)* 2000–01, (I) his Department's total spending on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces or other means and (II) the cost of each individual project. [146595]

Mr. Wilson: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not collect separate data on expenditure on the categories listed. It would involve disproportionate expense to retrieve this information from various sources and itemise the individual projects.

Iraq

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in the Arab world about the continuation of sanctions on Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [149745]

Mr. Wilson: We maintain regular dialogue with the Governments of the Arab world on Iraq. I recently had the opportunity to discuss this matter with the Foreign Minister of Egypt.

Kosovo

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received from the UN Interim Administrator for Kosovo regarding the security situation in Kosovo and Southern Serbia. [149775]

Mr. Vaz: The new special representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) visited London shortly before taking up his post, and held discussions with me and with senior officials. Staff of the British Office in Pristina are in close touch with him, and we seek actively to support him in his important work. This mandate does not extend to Southern Serbia outside Kosovo, but we receive regular reports on the situation there from various sources.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the security situation in *(a)* Kosovo and *(b)* Presevo Valley. [149774]

Mr. Vaz: UNMIK and KFOR are working actively to improve public order and counter extremist activity in Kosovo. Although isolated violent incidents continue to occur, most of the province is calm. There have been a number of violent demonstrations recently in Mitrovica, to which KFOR and UNMIK have responded. British troops, as part of the KFOR reserve, were temporarily deployed there. We fully support UNMIK's efforts to promote greater inter-communal peace in the town.

We remain concerned about the risk of serious violence in the Presevo Valley area of Serbia, and commend the FRY authorities for the restraint they have so far shown. We welcome the recent announcement by Belgrade of proposals to resolve the conflict, and the fact that some representatives of the ethnic Albanian armed groups also seem prepared to negotiate. The United Kingdom, with our partners and allies, will want to do whatever we can to support a peaceful outcome.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the UN Interim Administrators for Kosovo regarding the current violence by military demonstrators against NATO peacekeepers in Kosovo. [149776]

Mr. Vaz: We have been in regular contact with the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) about the demonstrations against KFOR peacekeepers in Mitrovica. We condemn all acts of violence against KFOR. We support UNMIK's attempts to build confidence and ethnic tolerance in the town.

WEU

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the European Union is required to abide by the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 1981 when it takes over as the new employer of the Western European Union staff. [149899]

Mr. Vaz: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly and place a copy of my letter in the Libraries of the House.

Sierra Leone (Conflict Diamonds)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact on dealing in illegal diamonds in Sierra Leone of his initiatives on conflict diamonds. [149989]

Mr. Wilson: As part of HMG's initiative to tackle the problem of conflict diamonds, the UK played the lead role in promoting UN Security Council resolution 1306, which was adopted on 5 July 2000 and imposed a ban on the direct or indirect import of all rough diamonds from Sierra Leone to the territory of UN member states. The resolution provided for an exemption from the ban for diamonds controlled by the Government of Sierra Leone through a certificate of origin regime. This exemption came into effect on 6 October 2000 when the UN

Sanctions Committee Chairman reported to the President of the Security Council that an effective regime was fully in operation.

It is too early to assess the impact of the new regime on the illicit diamond trade. However, we anticipate that it will enhance the capacity of the Government and people of Sierra Leone to benefit from the country's diamond wealth, while limiting the rebels' income from illegal trade. In addition to the combative systems already in place, the UK is promoting a UN Security Council resolution recommending a package of measures against Liberia, identified as the rebel Revolutionary United Front's primary supporter in a recent expert panel report. We also co-sponsored resolution 55/56 on conflict diamonds, adopted by the UN General Assembly last December, and are working with Governments, industry and civil society to develop an international certification scheme, as mandated by that resolution.

Pakistan

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations he intends to make to the Pakistani authorities over the use of the blasphemy laws in Pakistan; [150210]

(2) what recent representations he has made to the Pakistani authorities concerning the use of blasphemy laws. [150211]

Mr. Wilson: We remain concerned at reports that Pakistan's blasphemy laws continue to be abused. We have repeatedly raised our concerns with the Pakistani authorities and have called for the abolition of the death penalty under the law, or for them to be repealed. Most recently, an ad hoc EU Troika mission visited Pakistan on 20–21 November and raised these concerns with the Pakistani authorities.

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Pakistani Government regarding the situation of Ahmadi Muslims. [150217]

Mr. Wilson: We remain concerned about the position of Ahmadis in Pakistan. We are particularly worried over the application of the blasphemy laws to them. We have ensured that the Pakistani authorities remain in no doubt about these concerns. We continue to raise our concerns with the Pakistanis and will monitor closely the plight of the Ahmadis.

United Nations Security Council

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his counterparts in other EU countries regarding seats on the United Nations Security Council. [150115]

Mr. Battle: The Secretary of State has regular exchanges with a number of EU partners on issues relating to membership of the United Nations Security Council.

We continue to press for early enlargement of the Council, including new non-permanent and new permanent seats. We support the creation of five new permanent seats: for Germany and Japan plus three developing states.

The question of an EU permanent seat is not on the agenda. Under the UN Charter, only states can be members of the United Nations or its Security Council.

SCOTLAND

Public Bodies

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the new public bodies established by her Department since May 1997. [145639]

Mrs. Liddell: Between May 1997 and 30 June 1999, the following non-departmental public bodies were established by the Scottish Office:

NDPB	*Date established*
Clinical Standards Board for Scotland	1 April 1999
Scottish Advisory Committee on Distinction Awards	9 November 1998
Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission	1 April 1999

The Scotland Office was set up in its present form on 1 July 1999. No new public bodies have been established by my Department since that date.

Long-term Care

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what representations she has received on proposals by the Scottish Executive to provide free care for the elderly; and if she will make a statement. [148947]

Mr. Foulkes: Health care and social care are devolved matters for the Scottish Executive.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pre-paid Envelopes

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many hon. Members have been requested to make payments for prepaid House of Commons envelopes which have not been used in accordance with the rules of the House; and how many hon. Members have been ordered to make such payments following complaints since May 1997. [150348]

Mrs. Roe: Supervision and enforcement of the regulations for the use of House stationery and post-paid envelopes are a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Education and Employment Committee

Dr. Harris: To ask the President of the Council what information she received on the contents of the Education and Employment Committee's report on access to higher education, and the proceedings of the Committee prior to the publication of the report. [150052]

Mrs. Beckett: None.

DEFENCE

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it is intended to restart test firing of depleted uranium shells at Dundrennan in Kirkcudbrightshire; how many shells will be fired; and over what period. [148152]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 1 February 2001]:* The current programme of proof firing Charm 3 depleted uranium rounds is due to recommence on 19 February 2001. A total of 60 rounds will be fired in five serials during the next seven months. Subject to weather conditions, the programme is expected to be completed by the end of September.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he is considering the availability of cost-effective alternatives to depleted uranium munitions; and if he will make a statement. [150216]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence has for many years conducted research into weapon and armour materials and designs. Research and consultation with allies continues to include the search for potential alternatives to depleted uranium and to identify and characterise their cost effectiveness and environmental impact. Depleted uranium still has a significant margin of operational effectiveness over alternative materials when employed in anti-armour weapon systems. In recent years, a new tungsten round has been developed for the Royal Navy's Phalanx close-in weapons systems that offers superior performance (anti-armour qualities are not important for this weapon system). So, since 1996, all replacement ammunition for the Phalanx system has been of the tungsten variety.

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with work to identify a voluntary screening programme for service personnel and civilians who have served in the Balkans and who are concerned about exposure to depleted uranium. [150464]

Mr. Spellar: The first phase of work to identify a screening programme, which we intend should be equally applicable to Gulf veterans as to those who have served in the Balkans, has been completed. We are publishing today a consultative document setting out the technical issues associated with such a programme, inviting advice and comment in particular from a wide range of expert bodies. A copy of the consultative document is being placed in the Library of the House, and it will also be available on the MOD internet website.

The next step in our work is to develop firm proposals for screening, taking into account the advice and comments we receive in response to the consultative document. Those proposals in turn will be the subject of wide consultation.

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if enriched uranium, U-236, and other radioactive material from nuclear processing plants is used in the manufacture of depleted uranium munitions in Britain. [147412]

Mr. Spellar: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 521W.

HMS Gannet

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to extend the use of HMS Gannet for anti-submarine warfare beyond April 2002. [149852]

Mr. Spellar: Beyond April 2002, HMS Gannet will be used as a forward operating base for anti-submarine warfare activated as and when required, as well as a permanent base for search and rescue operations.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in securing an alternative MOD use for the site of HMS Gannet when it ceases to operate on anti-submarine warfare function in 2002. [149853]

Mr. Spellar: No alternative military use has so far been identified by my Department. Naval Air Command is currently reviewing the options for the provision of single living accommodation (SLA) as part of the conversion of HMS Gannet to a forward operating base. One option could be to retain the SLA on the Greensite, but no decisions have yet been taken.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will consider the availability of adjacent sites to HMS Gannet in his assessment of its alternative future use by his Department. [149854]

Mr. Spellar: No alternative military use for the Greensite at HMS Gannet has so far been identified. The availability of adjacent land has been taken into account, as have the very strict commercial aviation safety regulations which would constrain any development.

Defence Estate

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list *(a)* the properties from the Defence Estate (i) disposed of since July 1988 and (ii) scheduled for disposal by June 2002 and *(b)* the disposal receipts (i) received and (ii) estimated to be received by June 2002. [148938]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on employing short-term locums by the Defence Secondary Care Agency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [149894]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mess facilities are available to DMS officers at the Centre for Defence Medicine in Birmingham; when a dedicated officers' mess for personnel at the centre will be established; and if he will make a statement. [149895]

Dr. Moonie: Currently, there are no dedicated mess facilities for Defence Medical Services (DMS) officers at the Centre for Defence Medicine, which is to open in April in Birmingham. In the short-term, arrangements are

being made to hold some mess functions at other officers' mess facilities in the local area. Several options to provide mess facilities in the longer term are now being explored. Precise time scales cannot be determined, but we envisage having such facilities in place within about four years.

Royal Navy Aircraft (Radar Altimeters)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which RAF and Royal Navy aircraft are fitted with RADALT; if he plans to introduce RADALT as standard across all aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [149898]

Mr. Spellar: Radio altimeters (RADALT) are fitted to the following Royal Air Force and Royal Navy in-service aircraft types:

RAF—Hercules; C130K; Nimrod; Jaguar; Canberra; Sentry; Islander; VC10; Sea King; Wessex; Chinook; Puma; Tornado; Harrier; BAE 125; BAE 146; TriStar; Dominie.

RN—Sea Harrier; Sea King; Lynx.

A feasibility study is under way to determine whether radar altimeter fitment to RAF Hawk aircraft would be practical.

Hawk Crash (Cumbria)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the conclusions and recommendations of the inquiry into the fatal crash of a Hawk aircraft over Cumbria in October 1999; what steps his Department is taking to address the conclusions of the inquiry; at what cost; and if he will make a statement. [149897]

Dr. Moonie: The RAF board of inquiry into this accident concluded that the aircraft deviated from a safe flight path and hit the ground.

The board recommended that consideration should be given to the fitting of either a ground proximity warning system (GPWS) or a radar altimeter (RADALT) to the Hawk fleet. Due to compatibility difficulties with the existing avionics and the anticipated remaining life of the Hawk fleet, the fitting of a GPWS is not being pursued. However, the feasibility of fitting RADALT to the fleet is being explored as a matter of urgency. The board also recommended that a voice channel should be incorporated in the Hawk accident data recorder (ADR) and this is currently being investigated.

The costs associated with the fitting of RADALT or a voice channel in the ADR have not yet been determined.

A further minor recommendation, with no safety implications, concerned a revision to post-crash management procedures. This is being done, with no additional costs.

Low-flying (Northumberland)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hours of low-flying are logged per day by pilots over Northumberland; how many days of low-flying there are per year over Northumberland; which countries the pilots who practise low-flying over Northumberland are from; and if he will make a statement. [149896]

Dr. Moonie: From information available for the last three years, the number of hours low-flying booked by aircraft in low-flying area (LFA) 12, the airspace over Northumberland, Durham and north-east North Yorkshire, was as detailed:

	Total hours booked in LFA 12
1997	4,926
1998	3,983
1999	3,009

It is likely that LFA 12 would have experienced some low-flying on most weekdays.

In 1999 there were 1,917 fewer hours flown than in 1997, a reduction of 39 per cent.

An annual statement on the pattern of low-flying in the United Kingdom is produced by the MOD, and this is placed in the Library of the House. The next annual statement will be published in the summer and will cover the period from April 2000 to March 2001.

Detailed statistical information by LFA is not held of the country of origin of those pilots flying in the UK low-flying system. However, during 2000 foreign aircraft took part in less than 0.5 per cent. of the total sorties booked in the UK low-flying system.

International Criminal Court

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will take steps to ensure the protection of military personnel from prosecution for their activities in both operational and non-operational activities in the proposed International Criminal Court; and if he will make a statement; [150032]

(2) what measures he has taken and representations he has made to ensure the protection of military personnel and their activities in both operational and non-operational mode from prosecution in the proposed International Criminal Court. [150031]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* A principal purpose of the International Criminal Court (ICC) Bill now before Parliament is to ensure that UK service personnel are protected from malicious or ill-founded prosecution by the ICC. The Ministry of Defence has been closely involved with the legislative details to guarantee this.

The Bill has been constructed to achieve this protection by using the principle of complementarity embodied in the ICC statute. Complementarity means that individuals cannot be tried before the ICC if they have been subject to genuine and effective national legal investigation or proceedings. Any allegations of war crimes against UK service personnel would therefore be dealt with by the UK and not by the ICC.

All offences included in the ICC Bill are already reflected in international law, and the armed forces are already bound by them in their conduct of operations.

To preserve the principle of complementarity, it is essential that domestic law allows investigation and, where necessary, prosecution of all offences contained in

the ICC statute. The ICC Bill accordingly defines offences exactly as in the ICC statute. To do otherwise, or to exclude service personnel from the provisions of the Bill, would leave them without full protection from malicious or ill-founded allegations and prosecutions.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Work Permits (Professional Sport)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many work permits have been issued to non-European Economic Area *(a)* professional basket ball players, *(b)* golf professionals, *(c)* rugby football union players, *(d)* rugby football league players, *(e)* horse racing jockeys, *(f)* cricket players, *(g)* ice hockey players and *(h)* association football players in *(i)* England and Wales and (ii) Scotland in (A) 1996–97, (B) 1997–98, (C) 1998–99 and (D) 1999–2000. [148882]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* Information held by the Department does not distinguish between England and Wales, and Scotland, and it does not separately identify rugby football union players from rugby football league players. As the seasons between the different sports overlap, for ease of reference the information requested has been presented by calendar year.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Professional basketball players	85	92	70	88	87
Golf professionals	0	0	0	0	0
Rugby players	227	261	204	180	158
Horse racing jockeys	12	3	3	3	6
Cricket players	189	239	263	285	352
Ice hockey players	66	55	52	64	79
Association football players	53	53	67	78	76

Figures include all approvals for work permits, work permit extensions, and change of employers.

Departmental Policies (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [149121]

Mr. Wills: Details of the effect on the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency and Lancashire LEA of a range of the Department's policies have been placed in the Library.

Teacher Vacancies (Wandsworth)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school teacher vacancies there are in schools in the London borough of Wandsworth. [149367]

Ms Estelle Morris: Full-time teacher vacancies in maintained schools in the London borough of Wandsworth at January 2000 are as follows.

	Number of vacancies	*Vacancy rate (Percentage)*
Nursery/primary		
Wandsworth	13	1.7
England	1,420	0.8
Secondary		
Wandsworth	10	1.7
England	1,250	0.7

The number of regular teachers in maintained schools in England increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000 (7,400 in England and Wales).

There was a growth of more than 2,000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the impact of tuition fees and the abolition of maintenance grants on (1) student drop-out rates; [149456]

(2) the number of applicants for university. [149457]

Mr. Wicks: We have no evidence to suggest that the student support arrangements we introduced are affecting non-completion rates or the demand for higher education. The non-completion rate in the UK has remained broadly steady at 17–18 per cent. since 1991–92. Data from the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) on the number of people accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich courses in higher education in the UK in 2000–01 show an overall rise of 1.5 per cent. or over 5,000 students compared to the previous year. This follows an increase in enrolments in both 1998–99 and 1999–2000.

Student Expulsions

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students have been expelled from universities in England and Wales as a result of non-payment of debts in each of the last five years. [149459]

Mr. Wicks: Data are not held centrally on expulsions from higher education institutions as a result of non-payment of debts.

Bett Report

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what recent representations he has received from higher education bodies and institutions on the recommendations of the Bett report. [149664]

Mr. Wicks: My Department has received several representations from higher education bodies, institutions and individuals. The Bett report was to the employers, not the Government. However, the Government recognise that funding is a factor in recruitment and retention of staff and is providing £50 million in 2001–02, rising to £110 million in 2002–03 and £170 million in 2003–04, to support increases in academic and non-academic pay. The Higher Education Funding Council for England is currently consulting institutions, representative bodies and unions on the human resource strategies which will underpin the allocation of funds.

Higher Education

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the effect of the cost of living in the south of England on recruitment of non-academic staff in higher education. [149665]

Mr. Wicks: My Department has made no such assessment. The recruitment of staff is a matter for higher education institutions. However, the Government are providing £50 million in 2001–02, rising to £110 million in 2002–03 and £170 million in 2003–04, to support increases in academic and non-academic pay. This will give higher education employers more flexibility to address recruitment and retention difficulties and modernise their reward systems.

Music and Ballet Scheme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many children are assisted with their fees with the music and ballet scheme; how many are recruited annually; and what is the average cost per child to public funds. [149751]

Ms Estelle Morris: In the current academic year 2000–01, 749 children hold aided places under the music and ballet scheme at an average cost per pupil to public funds of £14,845. All parents using the scheme are required each year to make a declaration of the family's income in order for their contribution towards school fees to be assessed.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the conclusions of the recent review of the music and ballet scheme and the subsequent consultation with interested parties. [149753]

Ms Estelle Morris: We value the music and ballet scheme, and want to see it continue and develop. The final report on the review was received in summer 1999 and we consulted more than 60 organisations and other interested parties in the autumn of that year. We announced last April that we accepted, in principle, all 20 recommendations in the report: they covered scheme objectives and decision-making, scheme development, and financial arrangements (including the restructuring of the parental contribution scales). In response to one of the key recommendations, we established last summer an advisory group for the music and ballet scheme to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the operation, monitoring and future development of the scheme.

Supported Employment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has commissioned into the future demand for supported employment involving the first or rehabilitated employment of persons disabled and out of work and of the unit cost of widening access to employment for those in these categories. [149754]

Ms Hodge: My Department has not commissioned recent studies into the likely future demand for supported employment, though such studies have been commissioned in the past. I announced radical improvements to the Supported Employment Programme on 8 December 2000 which will result in the programme being opened up, for the first time, to people who were formerly claiming incapacity benefits or were long-term unemployed. The programme will be known as Workstep from April 2001.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has commissioned into incentives to move into open employment from supported employment and the likely impact on those providers of supported employment who fail to qualify for those incentives. [149756]

Ms Hodge: My Department has not commissioned studies into incentives to move into open employment from supported employment, although my Department and the Employment Service receive regular feedback from providers and clients on this issue. We will continue to provide the training and support people need to progress from supported to mainstream employment. This is an important part of the modernised Supported Employment Programme (Workstep) which I announced on 8 December 2000. We expect that rates of progression from the programme will vary between providers and we will monitor the effects of incentives during the early years to see if there is a need to make any changes.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what studies he has commissioned into the nature of open employment taken by those leaving supported employment and into the skill grades and remuneration involved compared with those available under their previous supported employment. [149757]

Ms Hodge: My Department has not commissioned studies into the nature of open employment undertaken by people leaving supported employment because the numbers making such a move have been very small. One of my aims in modernising the Supported Employment Programme is to introduce improvements which will increase the numbers of people who move from the programme and into mainstream employment. The modernised programme, which will be known as Workstep from April 2001, will be subject to evaluation to provide information about what happens to people who leave it.

Royal Liverpool Children's Inquiry

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what monitoring he has carried out of the responses of the Council of the University of Liverpool to the Royal Liverpool Children's Inquiry; and what assessment he has made of the ability of the Council of the University of Liverpool to investigate the matter and take disciplinary action where appropriate. [149874]

Mr. Wicks: My right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Education and Employment in the Lords has asked the Council of the University of Liverpool to keep her informed of progress in the Council's consideration of disciplinary action of those employees of the University named in the Redfern report on the Royal Liverpool Children's Hospital. I understand that the president of the University Council has already established a panel of lay members of Council to take this work forward. I am confident the Council will properly discharge its duties.

New Deal Consultancies

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what payments have been made to *(a)* Wildcat Corporation and *(b)* other bodies for consultancy services given in relation to New Deal and the reform of New Deal; and if he will list the subject of each project, the consultancy provider and the fee paid in each case. [149891]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* All payments to the Wildcat Corporation have been made from private funds. Information on consultancies is not kept centrally, and could not be gathered in the form requested without incurring disproportionate costs.

Departmental Initiatives (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what initiatives embarked upon since May 1997 have benefited Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [149912]

Mr. Wills: The information has been placed in the Libraries.

School Funding (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what additional standard spending assessment for Leicestershire would be required were it funded at the average for English counties for *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary pupils based on the SSA for 2001–02. [149985]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the 2001–02 education SSA per primary and secondary pupil for Leicestershire and England.

£

SSA	*Leicestershire*	*England*
Primary per pupil	2,292	2,588
Secondary per pupil	2,960	3,313

If Leicestershire's SSA per pupil for primary and secondary schools were the same as the national average it is estimated that its 2001–02 education SSA would be £14.8 million higher. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01, funding per pupil in Leicestershire has increased by £310 in real terms. In addition to an increase of £14.7 million in education SSA, schools in Leicestershire will benefit from an estimated £6.7 million in Direct Grant in 2001–02. The authority will also receive £100,000 as its share of the extra £52 million made available to provide support to help some LEAs manage funding changes in 2001–02.

Education Business Links

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of the *(a)* £6 million additional funding announced in press notice 2001/0073 and *(b)* £23 million funding for Education Business Links will be ring-fenced for that purpose; and what proportion is discretionary expenditure for learning and skills councils. [150114]

Ms Estelle Morris: All of the £23 million for Education Business Links, of which the additional £6 million is a part, will be ring-fenced for that purpose.

London Weighting

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment in which local education authorities teaching staff are eligible for London weighting allowance. [150191]

Ms Estelle Morris: There are separate allowances for inner and outer London and the fringe. For these purposes:

1. "The Inner London Area" means the area comprising the areas of the inner London councils as defined in section 163(2) of the Education Reform Act 1988 and the areas of the London boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Brent, Ealing, Haringey, Merton and Newham;

2. "The Outer London Area" means Greater London, excluding the Inner London Area; and

3. "The Fringe Area" means:

in Berkshire: the districts of Bracknell Forest, Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead;

in Buckinghamshire: the districts of South Buckinghamshire and Chiltern;

in Essex: the districts of Basildon, Brentwood, Epping Forest, Harlow and Thurrock;

in Hertfordshire: the districts of Broxbourne, Dacorum, East Hertfordshire, Hertsmere, St. Albans, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn Hatfield;

in Kent: the districts of Dartford and Sevenoaks;

in Surrey: the whole county; and

in West Sussex: the district of Crawley.

Future of Education

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the future of education. [150204]

Mr. Wills: I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 12 February 2001, *Official Report,* columns 22–24.

Stagecoach Theatre Schools

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when a response will be made to the founder of the Stagecoach Theatre Schools, about whether the Stagecoach Schools will be required to register with Ofsted's Early Years Directorate and be subject to the relevant training criteria and staffing ratios. [150347]

Ms Hodge: It is not our intention that Ofsted should normally register activity-based settings such as drama, dance, or music schools where child care is incidental to the main purpose of the provision. We are exploring how that can be achieved effectively. I shall write to the founder of Stagecoach Theatre Schools shortly with a proposed way forward.

North Southwark Education Action Zone

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he expects to publish the North Southwark Education Action Zone account for 1999–2000. [150349]

Ms Estelle Morris: The 1999–2000 annual accounts for North Southwark Education Action Zone will be signed off and laid before Parliament by the Comptroller and Auditor General when the National Audit Office (NAO) has completed its work and is satisfied it can give a full opinion. The NAO will then publish the accounts.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet representatives of the Gloucestershire Fire and Rescue Service to discuss its funding. [150339]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Arrangements have already been made for a meeting with Home Office officials on 13 February. The above request will be considered in the light of the outcome of that meeting.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Putney (Mr. Colman), of 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 338W, if he will make it his policy to list applications from Tibetan asylum seekers separately. [150057]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* For statistical purposes, asylum claims from Tibetans are classed as applications received from the People's Republic of China. There are no plans to change this procedure.

Correspondence

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Putney will receive a reply to his letter of 14 November on behalf of his constituent Mr. Juricic (Ref. J252287). [148438]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 12 February 2001.

I am sorry for the delay in responding.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prison inmates in category (i) A, (ii) B , (iii) C and (iv) D, were being held in prisons in England and Wales on 1 January. [149620]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information showing how many sentenced adult male prisoners are in category A, B, C and D prisons is given in the table.

Remand prisoners are not usually categorised except for some remand prisoners held as category A prisoners. 7,857 male prisoners were being held on remand at the end of January. Of these, 241 were being held as category A prisoners.

Women and young offenders may be placed in category A establishments but are otherwise categorised as suitable for open or closed conditions. Provisional information shows that at the end of January 2001 there were three sentenced adult female prisoners and one remand female prisoner in category A prisons. Sixteen male young offenders were also held in category A prisons.

Number of sentenced adult males held in each category of Prison in England and Wales for the end of January 2001

Category of prison	*Number*[1]
Category A	703
Category B	7,701
Category C	26,817
Category D	4,030

[1] Excludes sentenced adult males recently arrived and awaiting categorisation

Life Sentences

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were serving a life prison sentence for murder in England and Wales on 1 January. [149619]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information for 31 December 2000 shows that there were 3,325 males and 124 females serving life sentences for murder in prisons in England and Wales at that time. Information on prison population is available in successive volumes of "Prison Statistics England and Wales" (Chapter 1 of the 1999 edition, CM 4805).

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the date of application of the earliest application for naturalisation which is awaiting determination by his Department. [147634]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 29 January 2001]:* The information in the form requested is not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, as at 31 December 2000, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate was starting consideration of applications for naturalisation made on 4 June 2000. There is a small number of cases older than this, where initial consideration is being given. Some cases received after 4 June have also been started. Applications for registration as a British citizen are started as they arrive.

Deportation Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women are being held in prisons in England and Wales awaiting deportation from the UK. [149621]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information for 31 December 2000 shows there were 101 males and no females being held in prisons in England and Wales awaiting deportation.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much additional funding in real terms has been allocated for employing Immigration and Nationality Directorate caseworkers in each of the last three years; what additional real terms funding is planned for the next three years; and if he will make a statement. [149546]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Overall expenditure on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) (excluding asylum support costs) over the last three years was:

£ million

	Cash	*Real*[1]
1998–99	209.0	218.2
1999–2000	260.0	265.2
2000–01	594.5	594.5

[1] At 2000–01 level

Since November 1999 IND has recruited about 500 extra asylum decision makers and recruitment is continuing. The costs of those decision makers are met from the overall IND budget and not allocated separately.

For the next three years the IND budget (excluding asylum support costs) is:

£ million

	Cash	*Real*[1]
2001–02	549.5	536.4
2002–03	555.9	529.1
2003–04	553.9	514.4

[1] At 2000–01 level

Spending on caseworkers for future years will continue to be met within overall budget levels and will be decided annually taking account of expected work load.

Race Equality

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the race equality employment strategy of his Department. [149837]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: On 28 July 1999 I published my race equality employment targets for the recruitment, retention and career progression of minority ethnic staff within the Home Office and its service areas, that is, the police, the fire, the prison and the probation services.

The first annual report was published on 27 October 2000 and showed that the Home Office and its services are making good progress towards putting in place systems to deliver the sought outcomes by the end of the programme period.

Police Recruitment

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide a breakdown, both nationally and for each individual police force area in England and Wales, by major category of expenditure, of the *(a)* cost to date and *(b)* planned cost of the national police recruitment campaign. [150043]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The first phase of the police recruitment campaign ran from September to November 2000. The second phase of the campaign is running now and will finish in mid-March 2001.

The costs by media are listed as follows. All costs are excluding VAT:

£

	Phase 1 (Expenditure)	*Phase 2 (Planned expenditure)*	*Total*
Television	2,230,759	1,623,696	3,854,455
Cinema	374,254	424,025	798,279
National Press	647,565	481,015	1,128,590
Women's Press	85,629	0	85,629
Ambient Media	56,000	6,950	62,950
Radio	40,000	109,870	149,870
Online	0	60,000	60,000
Total	3,434,207	2,705,566	6,139,773

In addition, approximately £840,000 has been spent on advertising production, bringing the total expected campaign spend to £6.98 million excluding VAT.

The costs of future phases in 2001 have not been finalised.

The costs cannot be broken down by individual police force as media for the campaign have been bought nationally.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he plans to take following the agreement made at the Leeds Castle meeting of the Central Local Partnership concerning the review of emergency planning. [150462]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister proposed that the arrangements for emergency planning in England and Wales be reviewed and I have set up a Steering Group to take forward this review. It will identify strengths and weaknesses in the current arrangements for emergency planning; suggest ways in which the community preparedness for emergencies can be enhanced; consult widely with stakeholders and provide advice to Ministers on the result of the consultation.

TREASURY

Census

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 565W, on Census 2001, what proportion of householders' questionnaire forms for the 1971 to 1991 census have been destroyed. [149785]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John M. Taylor, dated February 2001:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what proportion of householders questionnaire forms for the 1971 to 1991 censuses have been destroyed (149785).

The Census returns for the censuses from 1971 to 1991 are in my custody and none have been destroyed.

Sharman Review

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Government have received Lord Sharman's Review of Audit and Accountability in the 21st century. [150461]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have received Lord Sharman's Review. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Library of the House.

I am most grateful to Lord Sharman for reviewing this important and complex area, and for conducting his Review so speedily.

The twin principles of accountability of the Executive to Parliament and independent scrutiny by the Comptroller and Auditor General are enormously important to good government. Present arrangements have evolved gradually over the past century and it is valuable to have the benefit of Lord Sharman's views on how these arrangements should now be developed to best fit the 21st century.

The Government will consider Lord Sharman's recommendations very carefully with a view to improving the present system of accountability, and will issue a formal response in due course.

VAT

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the levels of value added tax charged on new build and work to existing buildings. [148455]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a range of representations about VAT on new build and work to existing buildings.

Aggregates Levy (Northern Ireland)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the percentage change in the price of aggregates in Northern Ireland following the imposition of the aggregates levy; and if he will make a statement. [149637]

Mr. Timms: Aggregates prices vary considerably according to mineral quality, local conditions, and the commercial decisions of individual firms. The flat rate aggregates levy will therefore have a variable percentage impact on aggregate prices.

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he estimates the volume of Northern Ireland aggregate production lost to quarries in the Republic of Ireland will be as a result of the aggregates levy; and if he will make a statement. [149636]

Mr. Timms: The international competitiveness of the Northern Irish aggregates industry will not be affected by the levy as imported aggregate will be subject to the levy when commercially exploited in the same way as UK produced aggregate, and UK aggregate which is exported will be relieved.

Ultra-low Sulphur Petrol

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment the Government have made of the availability of ULS diesel fuel in rural parts of Scotland, Wales and each of the English regions. [150333]

Dawn Primarolo: Ultra-low sulphur diesel now forms 100 per cent. of the road diesel market in the UK.

Listed Buildings

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will seek to extend the lower rate of VAT to include repairs to listed buildings in addition to historic places of worship; and if he will make a statement. [149763]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* One of the Government's key objectives is a decent home for everyone. We are pursuing this through the plans we announced in the pre-Budget report for a reduced VAT rate on conversion services and a zero rate for the sale of renovated homes that have been empty for over 10 years.

Capital Gains

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of estates that benefited from exemption of capital gains unrealised at death in the last year for which figures are available; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* median benefit was; [146262]

(2) what estimate he has made of the proportion of estates that benefited from exemption of capital gains unrealised at death; and what the *(a)* average and *(b)* median benefit was in each of the last three years. [146154]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 22 January 2001]:* The latest available information for 1998–99 to 2000–01 is as follows:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Proportion of estates with net CGT liability in absence of exemption for capital gains accrued but unrealised at death (Percentage)	8	9	9
Estates with net CGT liability			
Average net CGT liability (£)	20,600	21,900	21,500
Median net CGT liability (£)	6,700	7,070	7,010

Government Expenditure

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those items of the programmes run by the Ministry of Defence, Department for Education and Employment, Department of Health, Department of Trade and Industry, Department for Culture, Media and Sport,

and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, which are classified as *(a)* Government spending and *(b)* Government investment. [150185]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Government spending plans for 2001–02 through to 2003–04 were set out in Spending Review 2000, New Public Spending Plans 2001–04 (Cm 4807), showing resource and capital budgets.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the administrative costs of implementing the Working Families Tax Credit to *(a)* businesses and *(b)* the Treasury; [149859]

(2) what estimate was made of the costs of administering the working families tax credit within the Inland Revenue. [149860]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the costs to employers of operating the Working Families Tax Credit and the Disabled Persons' Tax Credit are given in paragraphs 40–46 of the regulatory impact assessment for the Tax Credits Bill 1999.

The cost to Inland Revenue of managing and paying these tax credits for the six months to 31 March 2000 are shown in note 3 to the trust account, on page 83 of Inland Revenue's annual report for the year ending 31 March 2000.

Both documents are available in the Library of the House.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* widows and *(b)* widowers with care of their children are in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit. [149856]

Dawn Primarolo: This information is not available. The application form for the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) does not ask whether the applicant is a widow or widower.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received regarding the Inland Revenue's guidance on software for administering the Working Families Tax Credit; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of these guidelines in dealing with circumstances where credits cease. [149370]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue produces specific guidance to payroll software developers which includes guidance on the Working Families Tax Credit. I am not aware of any representations on this matter.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies have reported *(a)* difficulties in operating the Working Families Tax Credit and *(b)* overpayment of tax and national insurance as a result of the Working Families Tax Credit. [149375]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue provides detailed guidance to employers and the majority of them are paying tax credits to their employees correctly.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to ensure that jobseekers in receipt of Working Families Tax Credits are not disadvantaged in jobseeking as a result of on-costs associated with their employment. [149372]

Dawn Primarolo: Payment of tax credits by employers reinforces the link between tax credits and the rewards of the work.

In the January 2001 "Employer's Bulletin", sent to all employers, employers were advised that they must not charge their employees for paying tax credits through the payroll.

Mr. Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the Working Families Tax Credit on recruiting intentions among small and medium-sized enterprises. [149373]

Dawn Primarolo: The Working Families Tax Credit is just one element in a comprehensive programme of tax and benefit reform to help make work pay and provide incentives to move up the earnings ladder. Other elements include reductions in income tax and reforms to national insurance contributions. These measures are underpinned by the national minimum wage which guarantees fair minimum standards of pay.

Combined with policies to move people closer to the labour market and make them more effective at competing for jobs, the Government's tax and benefit reforms will help increase the effective supply of labour.

Tax Rates

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional yield from levying a 50 per cent. income tax rate on *(a)* taxable incomes and *(b)* gross incomes above £100,000; and if he will estimate in each case the (i) income tax and (ii) capital gains tax. [148940]

Dawn Primarolo: The full-year effects in 2001–02 of making the changes are set out in the table.

Change in 2001–02[1]	*Income tax yield (£ billion)*[2]	*Capital gains tax yield (£ million)*[3]
(a) 50 per cent. rate for taxable incomes over £100,000	[4]—	130
(b) 50 per cent. rate for gross incomes over £100,000	3.4	130

[1] Estimates are consistent with the November 2000 pre-Budget report

[2] Income tax estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes

[3] Capital gains tax estimates take into account the likely effect on yield of changes in the volume of disposals in a full year caused by taxpayers' behaviour

[4] I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Mr. Alan Simpson) on 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 126W

National Insurance

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are owed outstanding national insurance contribution rebates for the 1999–2000 tax year, broken down into *(a)* those with personal pensions and *(b)* those in contracted-out money purchase pension schemes. [143508]

Dawn Primarolo: There are approximately 683,000 people awaiting a NIC rebate for the 1999–2000 tax year. This figure represents approximately 1.4 per cent. of the total end of year receipts received so far.

The outstanding total can be broken down as follows:

(a) 656,000 people with a personal pension;

(b) 27,000 people who are in a contracted-out money purchase scheme.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Housing Investment (North-West)

15. **Mr. Watts:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on housing investment in the north-west. [148456]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The north-west is, like all regions, benefiting from the substantial increases in resources already made available and the further increases planned for the next three years. The resources allocated to local authorities in the north-west for housing investment in 2001–02 amounts to around £350 million which is well over twice the amount allocated for 1997–98 by the last Government.

Regional Assemblies

16. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to enable the creation of regional assemblies in those regions where there is known to be support for their creation. [148458]

Ms Armstrong: We remain committed to move to directly elected regional government, where there is support as demonstrated in referendums. As steps in this direction, we have supported the development of a stronger role for the regions, through the work of the chambers, regional development agencies and Government offices, and we are encouraging the regions to take forward the debate on governance.

Sir George Young: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met the Prime Minister to discuss the introduction of regional assemblies. [148459]

Ms Armstrong: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has regular meetings with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, during which a number of issues are discussed.

North-West Development Agency

17. **Mr. Campbell-Savours:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he next intends to meet officials of the North-West development agency to discuss its activities in Cumbria. [148460]

Mr. Prescott: I met with the north west development agency on the 26 January to discuss the agency's activities in Cumbria and my hon. Friend's objections. Considerable time was spent in discussion of the location of the regional and sub-regional offices. The north-west development agency assured me that as well as having a sub-regional office (in Penrith), they will maintain a presence in West Cumbria.

Weymouth-Dorchester Relief Road

18. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the earliest date by which the Weymouth-Dorchester relief road could be built; and on the basis of that timetable, on what date central Government finance for this project will start. [148461]

Mr. Hill: The Weymouth relief road was provisionally accepted for funding in its current form subject to successful completion of planning and statutory procedures. The Government will be discussing with the promoters the suitability of the scheme for procurement under the private finance initiative.

Dorset county council's local transport plan specified the proposed date for the start of construction as April 2005.

Disadvantaged Communities

19. **Mr. Sedgemore:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the policies his Department has pursued to address the problems faced by disadvantaged communities. [148462]

Ms Armstrong: The Government's policies for tackling the problems faced by these communities are set out in "A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal" about which I made a Statement on 15 January, 2001 *Official Report*, columns 27 to 30 when it was published. This action plan, to be implemented by the whole of Whitehall, overseen by the new neighbourhood renewal unit, aims to narrow the gap between deprived areas and the rest of the country so that in 10–20 years no one should be seriously disadvantaged by where they live.

Renewable Energy

20. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he has taken to speed up planning decisions on proposed renewable energy installations. [148463]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have set in hand the preparation of regional renewable energy assessments and targets to provide the framework for more positive and strategic planning for renewable energy development at regional and local levels. This in turn will feed through to planning decisions on individual renewable energy projects.

London Underground

21. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he expects the public-private partnership for the modernisation of the London Underground to take effect. [148464]

Mr. Hill: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced earlier this month that he had reached agreement with the Commissioner of Transport for London, Bob Kiley, that we will work together and with London Underground on modifications to the public-private partnership. If we can agree mutually acceptable changes, the PPP bidders will be asked to submit revised proposals.

The Government have not, and will not, set an artificial timetable for completion of the PPP as this would weaken our ability to ensure that it delivers the best deal for London.

South East England Development Agency

22. **Mr. White:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what support the South East England development agency has given to the local economy of the south-east. [148465]

Ms Beverley Hughes: SEEDA has:

invested £63 million in community and physical regeneration

supported more than 160 rural development projects

attracted 34 new companies to the south-east

invested £4.2 million in projects to upskill people, supporting over 20,000 enterprises

developed initiatives to promote enterprise, innovation and cluster development.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (North-West)

23. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many areas in the north-west of England are benefiting from the neighbourhood renewal fund. [148466]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Government are providing £900 million over the next three years through the neighbourhood renewal fund to improve services in the most deprived areas. Twenty-one local authorities in the north-west of England will benefit from this fund.

Housing Policy

24. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the methods by which his Department develops housing policy. [148467]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government develop housing policy through consultation, research and analysis. In December we published "The Way Forward for Housing", which sets out our policies to meet our objective to give everyone the opportunity of a decent home. This followed up a successful consultation on the housing Green Paper, widely recognised as the most comprehensive review of housing policy in a generation.

33. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on housing policy in south-east England. [148477]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Government's aim is to ensure that everyone has a decent home. Last December, we published our "Housing Policy Statement: The Way Forward for Housing". This set out our plans for achieving this, including the introduction of the "Starter Home Initiative", designed to help key workers in areas of high housing cost such as the south-east. The recently published revised regional planning guidance for the south-east recognises the importance of affordable housing. These issues are highlighted in the regional housing statement, together with the role housing investment can play in regeneration and sustaining rural communities.

Air Services (Regional Airports)

25. **Mr. Tony Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to develop international air services to non-London airports. [148468]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Since June 1998, all bilateral partners with whom we did not already have liberal air services agreements have been offered unrestricted access to all UK regional airports, so long as UK airlines are also allowed to operate on the same routes. In addition, whenever possible we explain the opportunities available at regional airports during air services negotiations.

Rail Network (East Sussex)

26. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on planned investment in the rail network in East Sussex. [148469]

Mr. Hill: GoVia will invest up to £20 million over a period of up to 20 years as the preferred counterparty for the new replacement South Central franchise. East Sussex will benefit from electrification between Uckfield and Hurst Green and Ashford and Hastings, new rolling stock and station refurbishment including platform extensions.

Traffic Levels

27. **Mrs. Brinton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the effects of rising traffic levels on the Government's sustainable development strategy. [148470]

Mr. Meacher: In "Achieving a better quality of life" (January 2001), our first annual report on progress by the country as a whole towards sustainable development, we noted that road traffic levels continued on a rising trend. Road traffic has been rising steadily since the 1950s. In recent decades that growth has been closely associated with the underlying rate of economic growth.

A key objective of policy is to break that link, improving access for people and goods while reducing traffic growth and tackling the impacts of congestion and pollution. Our 10-year plan for transport includes a wide range of measures aimed at achieving these objectives.

The most recent provisional traffic figures, published last week, show that in 2000 road traffic grew by 0.7 per cent. (after adjustment for the effects of fuel shortages in the autumn). This was the lowest increase in traffic for many years, and occurred despite economic growth of 3.2 per cent. during the year.

Local Transport Plans

28. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on implementation of the local transport plans. [148472]

Mr. Hill: The local transport capital settlement announced on 14 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 202W, provided an £8.4 billion boost for local transport improvements over the next five years. Local authorities are responsible for delivering the proposals in their local transport plans. Authorities are required to submit annual progress reports on the delivery of their

plans. My Department will assess progress not only on the plans themselves but also progress towards the local transport outcomes envisaged in our 10-year plan for transport.

Industrial Development (Greenbelt Land)

29. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on industrial development on greenbelt land. [148473]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Construction of new buildings for industrial development is inappropriate development in designated green belts except where it involves infilling or redevelopment of a major developed site in an adopted development plan. There remains a presumption against inappropriate development in green belts, as set out in planning policy guidance note 2.

Integrated Transport

31. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met the British Chambers of Commerce to discuss progress towards achieving integrated transport in Britain. [148475]

Mr. Hill: The Secretary of State has not had the opportunity to meet the British Chambers of Commerce to discuss integrated transport in Britain, although meetings with individual chambers have taken place. Lord Macdonald will, however, be addressing the British Chambers of Commerce annual conference on 28 March, where I am sure the subject of transport policy will be raised.

Ports

32. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on modernising British ports. [148476]

Mr. Hill: The Government announced the publication of a ports policy paper, "Modern Ports", on 27 November. Ports have an important role in integrated transport policy. The paper identifies a number of specific initiatives we hope to pursue. We intend to promote better regulation of the industry, and agreed national standards and good practice for port management and port operations alike. The paper sets out a balanced policy on port development which aims to make the best use of existing and former operational land, secures high environmental standards, but supports sustainable projects for which there is a clear need.

Neighbourhood Wardens

34. **Mr. Ian Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the neighbourhood wardens programme. [148478]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We announced the first round of 50 successful bids for the neighbourhood wardens grant on 18 September 2000. A further announcement on the success of an additional 36 schemes is being made today. The successful schemes are of a good regional spread, tackling issues on improving the environment, quality of life and community safety.

Housing Investment

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on plans for investment in *(a)* social housing and *(b)* council housing. [148474]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The spending plans for 2001–02 to 2003–04 announced following last year's spending review provide for significant increases in housing investment by both local authorities and registered social landlords. These increases, which build on the substantial additional resources already made available through the capital receipts initiative and the 1998 spending review, reflect our commitment to bring all social housing in England up to a decent standard by 2010 and to provide additional social housing in areas where there is a need for it. Allocations for housing capital expenditure by local authorities have been increased from £750 million in 1997–98 to £2.6 billion in 2003–04, while allocations for investment in new housing by registered social landlords will increase from £0.7 billion to £1.2 billion over the same period.

EU Structural Funds (Merseyside)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last discussed with the European Commission matters relating to the Merseyside objective 1 programme that have been referred to the DTI state aid unit; and when he expects the project to be approved. [147848]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Those project proposals that require notification will be put to the European Commission for approval. None of the proposals for funding from the Merseyside objective 1 programme has as yet been put to the EC and the Secretary of State has not entered into discussion about them. Advice is being sought on a number of project proposals for this programme and it is likely that additional information will be required on some before notification can take place. Approval is a matter for the EC and notifications are dealt with as quickly as possible.

Transport Plan

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how many of the new light rail lines mentioned in paragraph 6.61 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will start to be built over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what the forecast public expenditure will be, including public resource and public investment, in the period on those lines; [149110]

(2) how much of the money mentioned in paragraph 6.61 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will be spent over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what will be the forecast public expenditure, including public resource and public investment, in that period on those schemes; [149106]

(3) how many of the strategic road network schemes mentioned in paragraph 6.73 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will start to be built over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what the forecast public expenditure will be, including public resource and public investment in the period on those schemes; [149107]

(4) how much of the support to urban and rural bus services mentioned in paragraph 6.61 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will be spent over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what will be the public expenditure, including public resource and public investment, in that period on those schemes; [149105]

(5) how many of the trunk road by-passes mentioned in paragraph 6.73 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will start to be built over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what the forecast public expenditure will be, including public resource and public investment, in the period on those schemes; [149108]

(6) how many of the schemes in the Highway Agency's targeted programme of improvement mentioned in paragraph 6.73 of the 10-year transport plan he forecasts will start to be built over the period 2001–02 to 2005–06; and what the forecast public expenditure will be, including public resource and public investment, in the period on those schemes. [149109]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* "Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan" assumes that public expenditure on local transport in England in the period 2001–02 to 2005–06 will total £30.7 billion. Of this, £12.4 billion is capital expenditure, of which £8.4 billion will be provided to local authorities outside London through local transport plans. Public resource expenditure is assumed to be £18.3 billion.

The plan assumes that £2.5 billion of public resource expenditure will be used to support urban and rural bus services in England between 2001–02 to 2005–06. This figure excludes expenditure that the plan assumes the Mayor will provide for bus services in London. In addition, local authorities outside London will be taking forward a number of major bus projects and will be using a significant proportion of the capital resources available to them for smaller-scale schemes on bus-related measures.

Of the £30 billion of public expenditure to eliminate the backlog in local road and bridge maintenance, complete the bridge strengthening programme and replace life-expired lighting on local roads over the 10-year plan period mentioned in paragraph 6.61 of the plan, the plan assumes that revenue spending on highways maintenance by local authorities will be £10.1 billion in the period 2001–02 to 2005–06. A further £3 billion of capital expenditure for local road maintenance will be provided in this period to local authorities outside London through local transport plans.

Paragraph 6.32 of the plan states that the specific schemes on the strategic road network to be progressed by the Highways Agency over the period of the plan will depend on the outcome of the multi-modal studies and decisions taken in the context of regional planning guidance. The only forecast that can be made about the number of schemes to be started in the period 2001–02 to 2005–06 is in respect of those committed trunk road schemes currently included in the targeted programme of improvements. Contracts for 13 of these schemes will be let in the current financial year (2000–01). The Agency expect contracts for a further 25 schemes, including nine by-passes, to be let in the period 2001–02 to 2005–06, subject to completion of statutory procedures for 13 of these schemes. The 10-year plan anticipates that public expenditure on the strategic road network will total £9.4 billion between 2001–02 and 2005–06. Of this, £5.7 billion will be capital expenditure and £3.7 billion will be resource expenditure.

The most advanced proposals for light rail schemes, which would deliver 13 new lines, are identified in paragraph 6.61 of the plan. The current position on each of these projects is set out in table 1. There are also a number of other proposals which are at a less advanced stage, including new systems in Merseyside and Hull and extensions to Midland Metro, Tyne and Wear Metro, Manchester Metrolink, South Yorkshire Supertram and Nottingham Express Transit. Work on these proposals is not yet at a sufficiently advanced stage to be able to forecast whether they could be under construction by 2005–06 or the level of public expenditure that might be involved. However, the plan assumes that public capital expenditure on light rail outside London between 2001–02 and 2005–06 will total £1 billion. The actual amounts will depend on progress with individual schemes and the funding packages agreed with promoters.

In London, it will be for the Mayor to decide priorities within the resources available to Transport for London.

Table 1: Progress on light rail lines

Scheme	*Capital cost*[1] *(£ million, cash)*	*Government support*[2] *(£ million, cash)*	*State of progress*
Nottingham Express Transit	[3]180	[3,4]180	Under construction
Tyne and Wear Metro: extension to Sunderland	100	50	Under construction
Manchester Metrolink extensions: three lines (Oldham-Rochdale, Ashton under Lyne, Manchester airport)	[5]513	[6]256	Construction to start in early 2002
Docklands Light Railway: extension to London City airport	98	[7]30	Construction could start in 2002 and be complete by the end of 2004, subject to the outcome of an application for Transport and Works Act 1992 (TWA) powers
Midland Metro extensions: two lines (Birmingham city centre, Wednesbury-Brierley Hill)	165	[8]—	Provisional view announced that scheme passes economic appraisal. Construction could start before 2005 subject to outcome of an application for TWA powers

Table 1: Progress on light rail lines

Scheme	*Capital cost*[1] *(£ million, cash)*	*Government support*[2] *(£ million, cash)*	*State of progress*
Leeds Supertram (three lines)	434	[8]—	Economic appraisal under consideration; announcement to be made as soon as possible. Construction could start before 2005
South Hampshire Rapid Transit System	190	[6]—	Economic appraisal under consideration; announcement to be made as soon as possible. Construction could start before 2005 subject to the outcome of an application for TWA powers
Bristol Light Rapid Transport	194	[8]—	Economic appraisal under consideration; announcement of provisional view to be made as soon as possible. TWA powers not sought yet. Construction could start before 2005 subject to the outcome of an application for TWA powers

[1] Capital cost figures are in some cases estimates
[2] Government support figures are for capital expenditure
[3] PFI
[4] Government provide resource expenditure to support payments made under PFI deals
[5] Total construction costs of the Metrolink extensions
[6] Government support may also include resource expenditure if a performance and availability payment regime is adopted
[7] Support for the DLR extension is being drawn from the Capital Modernisation Fund
[8] No decision yet

Spinnaker Tower, Portsmouth

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will reach a decision on the order under the Transport and Works Act 1992 that has been requested in respect of the Spinnaker Tower at the Millennium site in Portsmouth; for what reason there has been a delay in the processing of this application; and if he will make a statement. [149563]

Mr. Hill: We expect to reach a decision very soon. A principal cause of delay has been that on two occasions, in September 1999 and in May 2000, the applicants revised their proposals. We had to ensure that interested parties were given a proper opportunity to make representations on those revisions, and on some further material that was submitted last August about radar impact.

Transport and Works Act

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out the procedures his Department follows in making orders under the Transport and Works Act 1992; what his Department's target time-scale is for the process of granting an order; and if he will make a statement. [149562]

Mr. Hill: Where an application is made for an order under the Transport and Works Act 1992, and objections are received, the Secretary of State may choose either to hold a public local inquiry or to conduct exchanges of written representations between the parties. The choice of procedure will depend upon the nature and extent of the objections made. Either way, the aim is to ensure that the views of interested parties are given a proper airing in the interests of natural justice and informed decision taking. Following receipt of the inspector's report in an inquiry case, or the conclusion of the written exchanges, the Secretary of State carefully considers all the views expressed before coming to a decision.

The Department's target time-scales for determining TWA applications depend upon the procedure followed. Where an inquiry is held, the target is to issue a decision within six months of receipt of the inspector's report. For cases subject to the written representations procedure, the target is to reach a decision within four months of the conclusion of that procedure.

Transport Act

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidance he proposes to publish under section 268 of the Transport Act 2000; and on what date. [149561]

Mr. Hill: Later this year we intend to publish, for consultation, proposals for guidance under section 268(7) of the Act, and proposals for regulations under section 268(2), relating to use orders and speed orders, and 268(6), relating to procedures.

Planning

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require councils to require detailed plans to be made available at outline stage in respect of areas which have been offered protection by being made conservation or guideline areas, and for approval to be tied to the specific proposals. [149646]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to do so. Where an application is made for outline planning permission, the local planning authority may grant permission subject to a condition specifying reserved matters for the authority's subsequent approval. However, the Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 enables authorities to require within a month of receiving an outline planning application further details from applicants where they are of the opinion that the application ought not to be considered separately from all or any of the reserved matters.

It is for planning authorities to decide whether to accept changes to planning applications after they have been submitted, provided that they do not materially change the

character of the development, or to require a fresh planning application. Where changes are accepted, it is for authorities to decide whether further publicity is desirable.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will require identified objectors to be notified when post-application discussions between planning officers and applicants is to take place; [149648]

(2) if he will standardise the levels of confidentiality applied to pre and post-application discussions between applicants and planning officers in planning cases across local authorities; [149640]

(3) if he will require greater openness in post-application discussions between planning officers and applicants and their representatives; [149647]

(4) if he will codify the rules on pre and post-application discussions between planning officers and applicants or their representatives. [150025]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to do so. However, all discussions should be carried out within the guidelines set out in the Local Government Association's "Probity in Planning" and local authorities' own planning codes of practice.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will establish a planning ombudsman. [149642]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no plans to do so. The local government ombudsman is the independent and impartial body charged by Parliament with investigating complaints about local authorities.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what effect pre-application discussions between planning officers and applicants are designed to have on planning decisions. [149643]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We attach great importance to early consultation between developers and local planning authorities on development proposals. Pre-application discussions provide an opportunity for proposals to be revised and refined (for example, to reflect local planning policies) before planning applications are submitted and thus facilitate a speedier and more efficient processing of them.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require councils to make statements of planning authorities available to objectors at an earlier stage than at present, and before deadlines for submission of their statements. [149644]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Streamlined statutory procedures for handling planning appeals were introduced, following public consultation, in August last year. These require other parties to submit their comments or statements of case to the Secretary of State on the same time scale as local planning authorities and appellants submit their statements. The operation of the new procedures is being monitored, but we have no current plans to change them.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning appeals were lodged with his Department in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and how many appeals were dismissed by his Department in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [149810]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The following is information provided by the planning inspectorate about planning appeals to the Secretary of State under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

Year	*Appeals received in year*	*Appeals refused in year*
1990–91	26,692	17,522
1991–92	22,121	14,963
1992–93	17,959	11,853
1993–94	14,979	9,138
1994–95	14,651	8,098
1995–96	14,653	7,461
1996–97	13,767	7,819
1997–98	14,182	8,366
1998–99	14,381	8,354
1999–2000	14,772	8,046

School Transport

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to issue guidance to local education authorities on the age of vehicles used for the transportation of schoolchildren. [149807]

Mr. Hill: I have no plans to issue guidance to local education authorities about the age of vehicles used for the transportation of schoolchildren. All buses and coaches, irrespective of age, are required to meet the same maintenance and operational standards, which are enforced through the operators licensing scheme, annual testing and roadside spot checks.

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the requirement for all coaches and minibuses that carry groups of children on organised trips to have seatbelts available applies to all types of school journeys. [149806]

Mr. Hill: Regulations require that every child must be provided with a seatbelt when a group of three or more children are travelling in a coach or minibus on an organised trip. School journeys where the key element is the transport of children would fall into the category of organised trip. However, seatbelts for children are not required in coaches and minibuses which are providing a transport service for the general public or which are being used to provide a registered local bus service.

Powershift Programme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many people have received help from the Powershift programme to convert their vehicles to run on alternative fuels in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [149741]

Mr. Hill: In the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000, the Powershift programme offered grants towards the cost of converting 4,566 vehicles to run on alternative

fuels. Of those recipients, 208 grants were to private individuals and 615 were private companies or public organisations.

Television Reception

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to take measures to ensure housing agencies and associations are legally responsible for providing television reception to their tenants and residents. [149663]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: None. Responsibility for providing for television reception is a matter of contract between social landlords and their tenants and residents. Many tenants and residents of social housing are, in common with owner-occupiers, responsible for providing for their television reception. In situations where television reception depends upon shared aerial systems, social landlords may be responsible (as part of tenancy terms and conditions) for the supply and upkeep of those aerials.

Rural Bus Subsidy

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will make an announcement on the allocation of the rural bus subsidy grant to local authorities for 2001–02. [150328]

Mr. Hill: We expect to make the announcement of the local authority rural bus subsidy grant allocations for 2001–02 shortly.

Sub-regions (South-West)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his reply of 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 648W, what different underlying economic realities are reflected in the proposed sub-regions. [150341]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The sub-regional approach draws on the report of the independent panel who conducted the public examination of the draft regional planning guidance (RPG) in March 2000. Their report was published on 3 August 2000 and copies were placed in the House of Commons Library. Chapter 4 of the report sets out their reasoning, including economic issues, which informed the proposals in the published proposed changes to the draft RPG.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 648W, which parliamentary constituencies fall within each of the proposed sub-regions. [150340]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The proposed sub-regions are broad areas which each have key economic features in common and therefore offer a basis for spatial planning. The areas overlap and it is not therefore possible to be as specific as the question suggests. The proposals remain subject to public consultation and comment.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public expenditure is planned for *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 for the single regeneration budget. [150220]

Ms Beverley Hughes: £872.8 million for 2001–02. There are no figures for 2002–03 and 2003–04 because the single regeneration budget (SRB) will be combined with the regional development agencies, other programmes to form a single budget that will fund a wide range of activities.

Road Congestion

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he last met the CBI to discuss the problem of road congestion. [148445]

Mr. Hill: Ministers have extensive meetings with organisations both in the public and private sectors as part of their duties. Such meetings usually cover a range of topics. It would be impractical to maintain a central record of meetings with representatives of external bodies or the details of such meetings.

Local Democracy

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on initiatives to extend local democracy. [148442]

Ms Armstrong: We have put in place a wide range of initiatives to begin to reinvigorate local democracy. These include piloting new ways of voting, giving people real choice about how they are governed locally, and giving councils real powers to listen to and lead their local communities.

Rail Policy

Mr. McCabe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to ensure that there is common purpose in the planning, investment, strategies and operations of Railtrack and train operators. [148471]

Mr. Hill: The Transport Act 2000 created the Strategic Rail Authority, with the purposes of promoting the use of the railway network for the carriage of passengers and goods, securing the development of the railway network and contributing to the development of an integrated system of transport of passengers and goods. The authority will develop strategies for rail development in accordance with the 10-year plan. The authority, the Rail Regulator and the Health and Safety Commission are the three pillars of railway regulation.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Fishing Industry

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much funding from the EU was *(a)* available to and *(b)* received by the UK fishing industry in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [146230]

Mr. Morley: The EU made funds available to the UK from the Financial Instrument for Fisheries Guidance under 1994–99 programmes of structural aid for the fisheries sector. The programmes covered Objective 1, Objective 5a and the PESCA Community Initiative. The indicative sums set out in the programmes at the beginning of the programme period were as follows:

Objective 1 and 5a

Year	*m euros*	*£ million*[1]
1994	20.61	12.81
1995	20.60	12.81
1996	20.62	12.82
1997	20.61	12.81
1998	20.63	12.83
1999	20.63	12.83

[1] At end 1999 conversion rate 1 euro = £0.6217

PESCA

Year	*m euros*	*£ million*[1]
1995	1.132	0.7
1996	1.712	1.064
1997	1.937	1.204
1998	1.672	1.039
1999	1.899	1.181

[1] At end 1999 conversion rate 1 euro = £0.6217

A further 0.66 million euros (£410,000) was subsequently awarded to the UK towards the end of the PESCA Programme.

The funding received by the UK fishing industry for these years is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Objectives 1 and 5a*	*PESCA*
1995	7.26	—
1996	15.87	—
1997	10.61	0.094
1998	8.41	0.437
1999	12.52	1.225

The following amounts were paid in formation grants to producer organisations:

Year	*£ million*
1995	0.047
1996	0.183
1997	0.101
1998	0.025
1999	0.014

In addition the following amounts were paid by the Intervention Board Executive Agency under the fish withdrawal schemes:

Year	*£ million*
1995	1.51
1996	2.83
1997	2.22
1998	1.10
1999	0.57

BSE

Mr. Cox: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the European Union countries in which cattle have been discovered to have BSE, indicating the measures taken to prohibit the import into the United Kingdom of beef products in each case. [146576]

Ms Quin: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Lichtenstein, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have all reported indigenous cases of BSE.

In line with EU legislation the UK has prohibited the import of beef and beef products from Portugal but has not prohibited imports from any of the other countries listed above. UK consumers are protected regarding products that are imported from any of the other countries listed above by the EU-wide requirement to remove specified risk materials from the food chain.

Crop Protection Chemicals

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the joint industry submission, Minimising the Environmental Impacts of Crop Protection Chemicals, Revised proposals February 2001. [148864]

Ms Quin: The November 2000 pre-Budget report announced that, in the run-up to Budget 2001, the Government wished to see the Crop Protection Association (CPA) make further improvements to the package of voluntary measures that the industry has been developing over the past year. This latest submission from the CPA and from a number of other stakeholders involved in the supply and use of crop protection products, was received by the Government on 29 January. It is currently being evaluated.

Crop Loss (South Yorkshire)

Caroline Flint: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assistance his Department is providing for farmers who have lost crops through persistent wet weather in Don Valley; [149074]

(2) what estimate he has made of the value of crops lost due to adverse weather causing groundwater saturation in *(a)* Don Valley constituency and *(b)* South Yorkshire. [149075]

Ms Quin: The recent exceptionally wet weather in Don Valley and South Yorkshire has caused a number of difficulties for farmers, ranging from delay in normal seasonal cultivations to the actual loss of certain crops, in particular potatoes and sugar.

The Government have taken a number of steps to try to protect CAP payments to farmers and to provide £11.6 million in flood-related funding to the operating authorities to help defray exceptional emergency costs which would otherwise fall in part on farmers and the wider public.

In addition to the measures announced in reply to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) on 24 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 594–95W, my right hon. Friend the Minister informed the House on 1 February that the European Commission had confirmed a number of further changes to our national implementing

arrangements for the Arable Area Payments Scheme this year. These include the ability to pay aid on certain partially failed crops and to allow farmers to set-aside land after 15 January where they have been unable to re-sow crops or where existing crops have been so flood damaged as to be incapable of yielding a harvest. We will shortly be writing to all farmers to explain in full what can now be allowed.

Sea Defence Projects

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assistance he will give to the relevant authorities and agencies in Devon to secure EU funding towards sea defence projects in the county. [149514]

Mr. Morley: There are limited opportunities for EU funding towards sea defence projects. Relevant authorities and agencies are aware of these opportunities and can apply for funds. Of course the Government provide substantial funding for sea defences.

Prion Diseases

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what research has been undertaken to establish the means by which a normal prion becomes a rogue prion; and if he will make a statement. [149659]

Ms Quin: The generally accepted theory is that exposure to the rogue prion protein causes the normal protein to convert into the disease or rogue form. The mechanism by which this conversion occurs is not fully understood, but is the subject of research in a large number of laboratories throughout the world. Officials in MAFF keep updated on the progress of this research. They also monitor the progress on other, less widely accepted, theories for the conversion, such as exposure to organophosphates and manganese. Details of all the publicly funded work on prion diseases being undertaken in the UK can be found on the Medical Research Council's website at www.mrc.ac.uk.

French Beef Import Ban

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the progress of the European Commission case against France in relation to the French ban on the import of British beef. [R] [149687]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The progress of European Court of Justice cases is a matter for the Court. The French Rejoinder to the Commission Response and Observations on the UK Statement in Intervention were submitted by 22 December 2000. This concluded the written part of the procedure. There may be an oral hearing at the request of the French Government or the Commission. Judgment is not expected before the summer.

Set-aside (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what percentage of agricultural land in Leicestershire is subject to set-aside; and what the annual cost was to public funds of the set-aside in the most recent year for which figures are available. [149986]

Ms Quin: The area of set-aside in Leicestershire on claims made in 2000 under the Arable Area Payments Scheme (AAPS) was 12,694 hectares or 12 per cent. of the total area claimed for. But because not all agricultural land is either eligible or claimed for under AAPS, the proportion of set-aside in relation to agricultural land in the county as a whole is estimated at around 6.7 per cent.

At the 2000 payment rate, the payment for this area of set-aside would have been £2,712,000 from EU funds, to which the UK Exchequer contributes. In addition some £92,000 will be paid shortly as agrimonetary compensation of which half will be funded by the EU and half direct by the UK Exchequer.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual loss of income to commercial fishing resulting from the recreational angling industry's catch under the total allowable catch terms of the Common Fisheries Policy. [149543]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The economic effect of the quota reductions for 2001 will vary according to the extent to which the UK is able to catch its quota allocations. In some cases the quotas for 2001 are higher than the catches made in 2000.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what representations he has received calling for the removal of the recreational angling industry from the total allowable catch terms of the Common Fisheries Policy; and if he will make a statement; [149544]

(2) what representations he has received from the recreational angling industry on the Common Fisheries Policy; and if he will make a statement. [149550]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* On 16 January 2001, officials met with representatives of sea angling and vessel chartering interests. The discussion was constructive and covered a number of matters relating to the Common Fisheries Policy including the application of TACs and quotas to landings made by boat anglers. It was confirmed following consultation with the European Commission that account had to be taken of such activity in managing fisheries.

Animal Exports

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on the Government's policies to prevent cruelty to animals exported live from the United Kingdom. [150281]

Mr. Morley: The Government operate a twin-track policy to protect the welfare of animals exported from the UK. We ensure that the rules are met while animals are within our jurisdiction and urge the European Commission and other member states to give enforcement the same high priority. We will continue to promote improvements when the Commission's report on member states' implementation and enforcement of the EU rules is discussed in Brussels.

IACS Payments (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to make IACS payments to farmers in Gloucestershire. [150221]

Ms Quin: The Regional Service Centre at Worcester started to make payments on 16 November; the earliest date that payments could be made after the amendments agreed under the Agenda 2000 proposals. To date, the Regional Service Centre has 98.5 per cent. of Gloucestershire's applications processed for payment. This equates to over £18 million. The RSC expects to be able to pay those of the remaining claims that can be paid in the next few days.

Flood Defences (Tewkesbury)

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will discuss with the Environment Agency the introduction of a floodgate at Gloucester and a guillotine gate at Tewkesbury; and if he will make a statement. [150327]

Mr. Morley: The responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with local operating authorities, such as the Environment Agency. I am advised that the agency has no plans to promote such works at Gloucester or Tewkesbury since they would provide limited reduction in flood risk. Consequently the question of discussions does not arise.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Free Television Licences

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will make a statement about the accuracy of his Department's database submitted to television licensing for the purposes of adjudicating upon applicants for free TV licences; [150343]

(2) how many applicants for free television licences have been required to present proof of their date of birth at a post office as a pre-condition for their entitlement. [150344]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of the free TV licence scheme has been a considerable success, and some 2.8 million free licences have been issued with the help of the database supplied by this Department.

This administration of the scheme is not a matter for my Department. It is the statutory responsibility of the BBC.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many staff are employed by TV Licensing; and how many of them are engaged in reconciling applications for free licences from those aged 75 years and over with the Department of Social Security database. [150345]

Mr. Rooker: This is not a matter for my Department. It is the statutory responsibility of the BBC.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the number of people who are *(a)* eligible to receive (i) Housing Benefit and (ii) Council Tax Benefit, in (A) Scotland and (B) each local authority area in Scotland and *(b)* actually claim the relevant benefit in each case. [148128]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Number of households in receipt of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit for each local authority area in Scotland

	Housing benefit caseload	*Council tax benefit caseload*
Scotland	479,000	555,000
Orkney	890	1,240
Shetland	1,030	1,220
Western Isles	1,510	3,230
Scottish Borders	7,380	8,610
Clackmannanshire	4,950	5,560
Falkirk	13,740	15,580
Stirling	5,650	6,940
Dumfries and Galloway	10,770	12,670
Fife	31,970	35,980
Aberdeen	15,810	17,260
Aberdeenshire	9,320	10,260
Moray	5,520	6,860
Highland	14,480	18,460
Edinburgh	33,180	40,050
East Lothian	6,580	7,790
Midlothian	5,580	7,190
West Lothian	13,640	15,710
Argyll and Bute	6,320	8,230
East Dunbartonshire	4,290	6,330
West Dunbartonshire	12,520	14,520
South Lanarkshire	28,340	37,510
North Lanarkshire	34,460	43,050
East Ayrshire	10,510	12,360
North Ayrshire	14,010	16,310
East Renfrewshire	3,520	4,980
Glasgow	102,550	113,950
Inverclyde	9,540	10,850
South Ayrshire	8,500	10,600
Renfrewshire	19,500	20,780
Angus	7,770	9,260
Dundee	20,680	22,860
Perth and Kinross	7,720	8,960
Scottish Homes	7,020	n/a

Notes:

1. The data refer to households, which may be a single person, a couple or a family.
2. The figures for the whole of Scotland have been rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. The figures for individual local authorities have been rounded to the nearest ten.
4. Caseload figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
5. Housing Benefit figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
6. Council Tax Benefit totals exclude Second Adult Rebate cases.
7. Scottish Homes do not administer Council Tax Benefit.

Source:

Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System Quarterly 100 per cent. caseload stock-count taken in August 2000.

Departmental Policies (Morecambe and Lunesdale)

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect of his Department's policies and actions on the Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency since 2 May 1997. [149122]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to our overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Morecambe and Lunesdale since May 1997.

We are spending an additional £7 billion a year on support for families and children. This includes significant increases in child benefit, which will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from 9 April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Morecambe and Lunesdale 10,850 families benefit.

We have launched the New Deals to help lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since August 1998 the number of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,323,600 to 1,044,900; in Morecambe and Lunesdale the number has reduced from 2,300 to 1,900. The number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased over the same period from 955,000 to 909,200 nationally. In Morecambe and Lunesdale the number has increased from 1,400 to 1,500.

Next year we will be spending £4.5 billion a year extra in real terms on pensioners as a result of our policies. The Winter Fuel Payment has continued to tackle fuel poverty. Last winter, around 10 million pensioners, of whom 18,900 were in Morecambe and Lunesdale, benefited from the payment. We have now extended the scheme to include eligible people from age 60 so that even more older people will benefit. This winter, households that qualify will receive an increased payment of £200. The Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) targets the poorest 1.6 million pensioner families, 2,800 of whom live in Morecambe and Lunesdale. These pensioners will benefit from our alignment of all MIG rates from April 2001, giving single pensioners at least £92.15 each week—a real increase of £12.45 for the poorest pensioners.

Winter Fuel Payments

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claims had been made by people living in Copeland for the winter fuel allowance by 31 January; and how many people in Copeland are eligible to receive winter fuel allowance. [149175]

Mr. Rooker: Information regarding how many claims were made by 31 January is not available in constituency format and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, latest information shows that over 14,000 Winter Fuel Payments have been issued in the Copeland constituency for winter 2000–01.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what percentage of this season's Winter Fuel Payments were not issued by *(a)* Christmas 2000 and *(b)* February 2001. [149667]

Mr. Rooker: All automatic payments where entitlement was established were made before Christmas. Payments made in respect of successful claims determined by 9 November were also made before Christmas.

Benefit Applications (Medical Visits)

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many visits are made per day on average by visiting medical practitioners who assess benefit applications. [149744]

Mr. Bayley: On average, 767 visits have been made each day by visiting medical practitioners on behalf of Sema Medical Services between the period November 2000 to January 2001.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many claimants receive lifetime awards of Disability Living Allowance; and how many of them receive on-going assistance from Motability. [149836]

Mr. Bayley: Information linking provision of Motability assistance with a life (or, since January 2000, an "indefinite") award of Disability Living Allowance (DLA), as opposed to a fixed period award of appropriate length, is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people from Leicestershire have contacted the Minimum Income Guarantee helpline since the new advertising campaign began; and how many people are in receipt of the Minimum Income Guarantee for the first time as a result of returning a completed application form. [149995]

Mr. Rooker: The information requested regarding the number of people from Leicestershire who have contacted the MIG claimline is not available.

By the end of January, the take-up campaign had resulted in around 82,000 successful claims in total.

Correspondence

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of *(a)* 30 October 2000, *(b)* 22 November 2000, *(c)* 10 January and *(d)* 8 February relating to her constituent, Mrs. Sue Brown of Broxbourne. [150336]

Mr. Bayley: A reply to the hon. Member's letter of 30 October 2000 was sent on 6 December 2000. A reply to the hon. Member's letters of 22 November 2000, 10 January and 8 February 2001 was sent on Monday 12 February.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many CSA compensation claims have been made; how many and what percentage of these claims were instigated by *(a)* the CSA on behalf of their clients and *(b)* the clients directly; and what was the average amount of compensation paid in the cases brought by (i) the CSA on behalf of their client and (ii) the clients directly. [149792]

Angela Eagle: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated February 2001:

I am replying to your Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Social Security about the Child Support Agency.

The Agency will consider making a compensatory payment where a client has suffered an actual financial loss due to clear errors or delays on the part of the Agency. In addition, redress can be considered for inconvenience, embarrassment or severe distress caused by the actions of the Agency. These latter (consolatory) payments can be paid over and above any other payments to recognise that some impacts are other than financial. In 1999/2000 these made up 19% of the total compensation paid out.

I am sorry I am not able to give you the information in the format that you requested. The Agency does not differentiate between those payments instigated by the client and those by the Agency. However, Table One in the attached annex shows compensation payments made from 1995/1996 to 1999/2000. Table Two shows a breakdown of the payments for 1999/2000.

Although the Agency's caseload has continued to increase, in 1999/2000 the number of complaints reduced along with the number of compensation payments made.

Where the Agency considers compensation because of Deferred debt, or loss of use of the money paid as compensation for delay and error, it is not necessary for a client to make a claim. The Agency considers such payments automatically.

I hope this is helpful.

Table 1: Compensation payments made from 1995–96 to 1999–2000

Year	*Number*	*Value*
1995–96	186	114,000
1996–97	983	656,000
1997–98	2,136	1,101,000
1998–99	5,466	4,350,000
1999–2000	5,408	3,075,000

Table 2: Breakdown of compensation payments 1999–2000

Element	
Consolatory	580
Financial Loss	2,119
Delay	291
Other	85
Total	3,075

Table 3: Deferred debt payments 1999–2000

Payment type	*£000*
Deferred debt	2,024

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will issue guidance to staff working in the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service about mobility and job security; and if she will make a statement. [149558]

Jane Kennedy: Guidance has already been issued. Under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act, employees transferring to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service will do so on terms equivalent to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations. They will retain their current terms and conditions including those relating to mobility and to job security.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department where the workforce for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service will be accommodated after 1 April; and if she will make a statement. [149556]

Jane Kennedy: Nearly all staff transferring to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service will be accommodated in the same locations as they are working in before 1 April. Those few who have to move offices will be accommodated as close as possible to their current location. Self-employed staff and others who work at home will continue to be able to do so.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the anticipated *(a)* workforce at each grade and *(b)* caseload per officer is for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service from 1 April; and if she will make a statement. [149554]

Jane Kennedy: Staff who presently deliver these services are expected to transfer to the Children and Family Court Advice and Support Service and caseloads on transfer are expected to be similar to present caseloads.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment has been made of potential discrepancies relating to pay for persons in the Probation Service and the new Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; and if she will make a statement. [149559]

Jane Kennedy: My officials have reviewed the different pay scales of staff who will transfer from the Probation Service, and other employers, into the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). It is clear that there are many variations between different groups of staff. Under the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act, employees transferring to CAFCASS on 1 April will do so under terms equivalent to the Transfer of Undertakings and (Protection of Employment) Regulations. It will be a priority for CAFCASS to negotiate a harmonisation of terms and conditions.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service will issue guarantees in relation to detriment and continuity of service for transferring employees; if it will be possible

for members of staff to transfer back to the Probation Service at a future date; and if she will make a statement. [149557]

Jane Kennedy: Employees transferring to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) will keep their continuity of service. Staff will, of course, be free to apply for posts in the Probation Service in the future. I expect CAFCASS to act as a good employer in relation to conditions of service in the future.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what costs have been incurred to date in establishing the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; what is the planned budget for the next financial year; and if she will make a statement. [149553]

Jane Kennedy: The costs of establishing CAFCASS amount to a total of £11.6 million for start-up costs. These, together with the staffing costs, have been met from within the provision of the three sponsoring Departments: LCD, the Home Office and the Department of Health. The planned budget for next year is £72 million in running costs plus £9.1 million capital.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on progress in establishing the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; and on what date the service will be operational. [149552]

Jane Kennedy: The service will be established on Sunday 1 April 2001 and will be operational from Monday 2 April as planned. Staff and other main stakeholders are playing an invaluable role alongside my officials in shaping the unified service.

The chair, the board, and the chief executive of CAFCASS have been appointed. All the necessary transfer arrangements for children's cases, and for staff, accommodation, finance and IT, will be in place on 2 April.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has received on trade union recognition for staff at the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service; what response has been made to those representations; and if she will make a statement. [149555]

Jane Kennedy: Several representations have been received and the CAFCASS chairman-designate, Anthony Hewson OBE, announced on 12 February that the National Association of Probation Officers would be a recognised trade union within CAFCASS. Representations from other trade unions are being considered.

Public Records

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she proposes to take action to ensure that full details of this year's Schedules from Public Record Act Instruments of Extended Retention and Closure are accessible to *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* the public. [149635]

Mr. Lock: Copies of the retention and extended closure instruments will be supplied to the Libraries of both Houses after their signature by the Lord Chancellor.

Extended closure instruments are made available to the public on open shelves in the Public Record Office's reading rooms at Kew. Retention instruments are not on open shelves at Kew, but are available for public inspection on request.

CABINET OFFICE

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if the special advisers working for her will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149322]

Marjorie Mowlam: Schedule 1 (Part 2) of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers" sets out the rules for special advisers on their involvement in political activities, including their participation in election campaigns.

WALES

Corus

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the occasions on which he met representatives of the Corus Steel company between July 2000 and 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [150234]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I had a number of meetings and telephone conversations with senior executives of Corus, including both the Chairman, Sir Brian Moffatt, and the former Joint Chief Executive, John Bryant. In addition, on 8 December, I paid a visit to the company's Port Talbot plant.

During these exchanges, I took every opportunity to impress on the company the importance of steel making in Wales, and the need to take full account of the dramatic improvements that have been made in productivity, the continued strengthening of the euro, and other significant factors in reaching decisions about the future of their UK operations.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the occasions on which he met the First Secretary of the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the job losses at Corus in Wales, prior to the announcement on 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [150252]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I meet frequently with the First Secretary and, during the weeks of speculation about the future of Corus plants in Wales, that has been a regular topic for discussion between us.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what estimate he has made of the cost of clearing the site of the Corus Steelworks at Llanwern after production of steel ceases at the site; and if he will make a statement. [150230]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None. I am urging Corus to reconsider its plans. However, the cost of any site clearance is a matter for the company.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 14 February 2001

HEALTH

Variant CJD

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will make an announcement on compensation for victims of variant Creutzfeldt-Jacob disease. [150839]

Mr. Milburn: We are committed to constructing a compensation scheme that is effective and properly meets the needs of those affected. Discussions are under way with the legal representatives of the families affected. In the meantime we will be making interim payments of £25,000 when regulations have been put in place to ensure the payments are not taken into account in the calculation of income-related social security benefits and are exempted from the provisions of the Social Security (Recovery of Benefits) Act 1997. We intend to present this legislation to Parliament as soon as possible. Details of the full compensation package are still under consideration.

Communication Aids

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what response he plans to make to the recent Scope report, "Speak for Yourself", concerning communication aids. [150078]

Mr. Hutton: The report is a detailed and very valuable assessment of the importance of communication aids for disabled people and we are studying its recommendations carefully.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

North Korea

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will make a statement on UK aid to North Korea. [150311]

Mr. Mullin: The UK has provided humanitarian assistance in North Korea by channelling modest and well-targeted contributions through UN agencies and international non-governmental organisations—over £2.5 million since 1998. The programmes we support have primarily focused on agricultural rehabilitation and food security. In addition, the UK share of humanitarian assistance to North Korea through the EC was approximately £0.5 million in 1999–2000.

Our engagement with North Korea through provision of humanitarian assistance has been instrumental in opening the country up to external influences. It has allowed us to maintain a dialogue with the North Korean authorities on issues of concern such as human rights abuse, the misappropriation of aid, and the problems of access faced by agencies working in the country. We will continue to work through the EU and with the international community as a whole to encourage a process of transformation in North Korea.

Brahimi Report

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement about the Brahimi report. [149875]

Mr. Mullin: The Brahimi report makes a number of fundamental recommendations on improving the way the UN and the international community tackle peacekeeping, conflict prevention and peacebuilding, and on clarifying the mandates of UN agencies involved in tackling crises and conflict situations. The UK is very supportive of the Brahimi report and is working with the UN and other member states to take rapid and decision action on its speedy and effective implementation.

DEFENCE

Shipwrecks

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to place the consultation document on the protection of sunken military vessels in the Library. [150689]

Dr. Moonie: I have today placed a copy of the consultation paper in the Libraries of both Houses.

A copy of the consultation paper has been sent to those hon. Members who have shown an interest in the subject of the protection of military maritime graves.

Gulf War Syndrome

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of the armed forces who received multiple vaccines in preparation for deployment during the Gulf War, but were not deployed, are eligible to participate in the Gulf veterans medical assessment programme. [150260]

Mr. Spellar: Yes. The Gulf veterans medical assessment programme is open to all present and former Service personnel or Ministry of Defence civilians who believe that their health has suffered as a direct result of the Gulf conflict.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Television Reception

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he takes to ensure that publicly funded projects do not cause disruption of television reception for neighbouring households during building works and after completion. [149668]

Janet Anderson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions is responsible for the Planning Policy Guidance note 8 on telecommunications development in England. This includes advice on the potential in any development to

interfere with television reception. The Scottish Executive are responsible for such planning policy issues in Scotland.

BBC

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will ask the BBC to publish figures indicating the *(a)* funding of and *(b)* audience figures for (i) BBC Choice, (ii) BBC Knowledge and (iii) BBC 24 hours since their inception. [150213]

Janet Anderson: The BBC has published figures showing their spending on each of these channels in the Corporation's Annual Report and Accounts every year since they were launched. Audience figures are published independently by BARB, the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board Ltd.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what permission was sought by the BBC from his Department in launching *(a)* BBC Choice, *(b)* BBC Knowledge and *(c)* BBC 24 hours. [150212]

Janet Anderson: BBC Choice and BBC News 24 were approved in principle in March 1997 and BBC Knowledge in January 1998. Specific approvals were given for the carriage of these new services on digital terrestrial television, digital satellite and digital cable in February 1998, May 1998 and October 1999 respectively.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pension-earnings Link

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate the extra cost if state retirement pensions had been linked to earnings since 1997. [149082]

Mr. Rooker: If our policy had been only to link the basic pension to earnings we would have spent £5.2 billion less over a five-year period. Instead we will have spent an estimated £8.5 billion extra in the five years since 1997–98 as a result of our discretionary measures for pensioners. This is over £5 billion more than uprating the basic state pension by earnings since April 1998.

Further details are in the table.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Total*
Discretionary spending on Government measures	200	200	1,270	2,730	4,390	8,800
Net cost of earnings uprating	—	140	500	1,380	1,570	3,580
Extra spending above earnings uprating	200	60	770	1,360	2,830	5,220

Notes:

1. Our measures included the above-inflation increase in the basic State Pension, the Minimum Income Guarantee, Winter Fuel Payments and concessionary TV licences for those aged 75 and over.
2. It is assumed that the date at which uprating of basic State Pension by earnings begins is April 1998.
3. Costs are net of income-related benefits. Gross costs have been estimated by the Government Actuary's Department. Income-related benefit offsets are estimated using the Policy Simulation Model.
4. The cost of linked benefits, particularly widows'/bereavement benefits, is excluded.
5. The definition of earnings used for uprating is the average earnings index, seasonally adjusted, in the three months to July in the preceding year.
6. The costs are shown in 1999–2000 prices and are rounded to the nearest £10 million.

Maternity Grant

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many mothers in Yorkshire and Humberside received maternity grant in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000 to date; and what the value of the grant was in each of these years. [149438]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Maternity Payment (MP) and Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) awards for the Benefits Agency's Yorkshire area directorate

£

Financial year	*Application type*	*Number of awards*	*Amount awarded*
1996–97	MP	13,437	1,361,110.55
	SSMG	0	0.00
	Total	13,437	1,361,110.55
1997–98	MP	12,839	1,301,124.37
	SSMG	0	0.00
	Total	12,839	1,301,124.37
1998–99	MP	13,512	1,366,846.65
	SSMG	0	0.00
	Total	13,512	1,366,846.65

Maternity Payment (MP) and Sure Start Maternity Grant (SSMG) awards for the Benefits Agency's Yorkshire area directorate

£

Financial year	*Application type*	*Number of awards*	*Amount awarded*
1999–2000	MP	12,950	1,312,264.05
	SSMG	2	300.00
	Total	12,952	1,312,564.05
2000–2001	MP	1,415	144,100.00
	SSMG	9,038	2,071,767.00
	Total	10,453	2,215,867.00

Notes:

1. These figures are for the BA Yorkshire area directorate which comprises the following districts—South East Yorkshire, Rother and Dearne, Sheffield, Bradford and Keighley, Calderdale and Kirklees, Wakefield, East Yorkshire, Leeds and North Yorkshire.
2. Sure Start Maternity Grant replaced the Social Fund Maternity Payment from 27 March 2000 for confinements/adoptions on or after 11 June 2000. The Social Fund Maternity Payment was £100 per child and the Sure Start Maternity Grant was initially £200 per child. This was increased to £300 for babies due, born or adopted from 3 December 2000. The amount of the SFMP or SSMG is reduced on a pound for pound basis by any savings over £500 held by an applicant or partner (£1,000 for applicants aged 60 or over).
3. Figures for year 2000–2001 are for April to December 2000 only.

Disability Working Allowance

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people in Yorkshire and Humberside received the Disability Working Allowance during the last year of its existence. [149440]

Mr. Bayley: Disabled Persons Tax Credit replaced Disability Working Allowance on 5 October 1999.

In Yorkshire and Humberside there were 2,458 claimants in receipt of Disability Working Allowance at some time during the period 6 October 1998 to 4 October 1999. Of these, 2,130 were awards made during this period.

Note:

Figures show number of claimants rather than claims, as a person may have more than one award during the year.

Source:

100 per cent. count of Disability Working Allowance claims.

Fraud

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what progress he has made on his PSA target of reducing losses from fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance. [150793]

Mr. Rooker: In 1998 we set a PSA target to reduce fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance by 10 per cent. by March 2002. Provisional estimates show that the Department is likely to have met this target some 18 months earlier than anticipated. However, the Department has now set a more demanding target of reducing losses through fraud and error by 25 per cent. by March 2004 rising to 50 per cent. by March 2006.

State Pension

Mr. Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of increasing the basic state pension to £92 for a single person and £138 for a couple, taking into account *(a)* savings in regard to (i) the Minimum Income Guarantee and (ii) other benefits payable to pensioners and *(b)* the consequent increases in receipts of tax revenue. [147606]

Mr. Rooker *[pursuant to his reply, 8 February 2001, c. 700W]:* The information is in the table.

Cost of increasing the basic state pension to £92 for a single person and £138 for a couple

	£ billion
	2001–02
Gross total	8.4
Minimum Income Guarantee savings	1
Other income related benefit savings	0.8
Total income related benefit savings	1.8
Tax yield	0.8
Total net cost	5.8

Notes:

1. All costs are given in £ billion to the nearest £100 million.
2. Gross costs are estimated by the Government Actuary's Department.
3. Income related benefits savings are estimated using the Policy Simulation Model.
4. The tax effects are estimated by the Inland Revenue.
5. Costs are given excluding widows and bereavement benefits whose rates are linked by law to the rate of basic Retirement Pension. Including them adds £200 million to the net costs.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much in the form of export credit guarantees has been made available for each year since 1992 to *(a)* the Hinduja Group and *(b)* subsidiaries of the Hinduja Group. [149696]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* No export guarantees have been issued to the Hinduja Group nor, as far as ECGD is aware, to any of its subsidiaries.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which members of the Hinduja family he has met since 3 May 1997; where such meetings have taken place; and for what purpose. [149839]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W, to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and the Weald (Miss Widdecombe).

Sub-post Offices

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many modified sub-post offices there are and how many are run by interim sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses. [150259]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I understand from the Post Office that at the end of the third quarter of its current financial year, there were 655 modified sub-post offices. Of these, 33 were, at that date operated through temporary agents as a result of the resignation or termination of contract of the previous agent. In all such cases, the Post Office seeks to avoid any break in service and to ensure that standards of service are maintained until a new permanent agent can be appointed.

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many sub-post office closures there were in the third quarter of 2000 and how many closures there were in total up to the end of that quarter in 2000. [148213]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 1 February 2001]:* 135 sub-post offices closed in the third quarter of the financial year 2000–01. Between April and December 2000 closures totalled 434, of which four are permanent following consultations under the Code of Practice. The figures reflect a snapshot position on one single day and many of these closures will be of a temporary nature only. The Government recognise that this is a serious issue for the communities concerned and a range of measures will be implemented in the near future to address it. Recent research by the Post office into the reasons for sub-postmasters' resignations makes clear that personal circumstances, such as retirement and health, are the main reasons for resigning. Fewer than 10 per cent. cite financial reasons.

Science Funding (North-West)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will break down the funding allocated to the North West for science in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000, by each major project. [146684]

Dr. Howells: A detailed breakdown of funding allocated to the North West by the Research Councils cannot be provided without disproportionate cost as the information is not held centrally in the format requested.

Steel Imports

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much steel was imported into Britain in 2000; where it was imported from; where most of it was used; and if he will make a statement. [150249]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Imports of finished steel products in 1999 and the first 11 months of 2000 were as follows.

UK Imports of steel industry products

Tonnes

Region	*1999*	*2000 (January to November)*
European Union		
Austria	57,765	77,479
Belgium	632,005	598,770
Denmark	59,540	49,075
Finland	223,063	177,827
France	836,679	712,908
Germany	1,353,337	1,251,444
Greece	9,322	20,021
Irish Republic	89,958	89,381
Italy	301,440	281,359
Luxembourg	54,638	61,633
Netherlands	589,298	452,202
Portugal	2,428	2,837
Spain	374,353	385,020
Sweden	494,291	320,897
United Kingdom[1]	27,388	222,611
Total European Union	5,105,505	4,703,464
Other Western Europe (not EU)	601,234	471,458
Eastern Europe and CIS	454,725	829,004
North Africa	29,990	34,421
Central, East and South Africa	80,353	117,021
West Africa	15	1,569
North America	64,943	75,968
Central and South America	100,024	70,240
Near and Middle East	1,651	5,669
Other Asian countries	402,310	388,724
Australasia and other Oceania	36,841	35,499
Unallocated	7,093	—
Total	6,884,681	6,733,037

[1] Re-imports of steel that has been sent out of the UK for further processing.

Notes:

No statistical information is available on the subsequent use of these imports.

Source:

Iron and Steel Statistics Bureau.

Digital Television

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to introduce rules to require the inclusion of a digital tuner in new television sets; and if he will make a statement. [148270]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have no plans to introduce rules requiring the inclusion of a digital tuner in new television sets. EU competition rules could preclude such requirements being made on a unilateral national basis.

Annexe VI of the Directive on universal services and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks stipulates that all television sets sold in Europe should have at least one open interface socket permitting the connection of a digital receiver.

The Government have recently announced a White Paper on enterprise, skills and innovation entitled "Opportunity For All in a World of Change" which outlines its plans for digital television.

Family-friendly Employers

Ms Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of employers with a policy of allowing reduced working hours for fathers have *(a)* fewer than 20 employees, *(b)* 100 employees or less, *(c)* 200 employees or less and *(d)* more than 500 employees. [150109]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* A survey commissioned by the Department for Education and Employment in 2000 reports that 40 per cent. of fathers in workplaces employing between five and 24 staff said that their employer would allow them to reduce their hours for an agreed period of time at reduced salary. Corresponding figures were 30 per cent. for those employees in workplaces employing between 25 and 99 employees, 34 per cent. in workplaces between 100 and 499 employees and 35 per cent. in workplaces employing more than 500 employees.

Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many firms in the UK manufacture LPG cylinders for the automotive industry; and how many cylinders were made in each year since 1995. [150197]

Mr. Alan Johnson: No UK manufacturers of LPG cylinders for the automotive industry have been identified, no record of UK manufacture of LPG cylinders could be located since 1995.

Departmental Initiatives (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives embarked upon since May 1997 have benefited Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [149913]

Mr. Caborn: Pendle has benefited from the Department's employment rights policies, which include the national minimum wage, the working time directive, part-time working regulations and improved maternity leave.

In the North West region, the Department's policies have also contributed to a growth in employment by 107,000 and a fall in unemployment by 63,000, and to reductions in youth employment by 75 per cent. and long-term unemployment by 54 per cent.

Departmental Entertainment Costs

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent by his Department's Ministers on drinks and entertainment in 2000. [146371]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 22 January 2001]:* The total spent by Ministers' offices on drinks and entertainment in the financial year 1999–2000, including the costs of some official DTI functions, was £19,834.

Miners (Compensation)

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the accessibility of existing test centres for health compensation claims for former miners in the Leicestershire and South Derbyshire coalfields. [149616]

Mr. Hain: Claimants in the Leicestershire region are most likely to attend centres in Coventry, Nottingham or Cannock. For claimants in the South Derbyshire region, the centres at Nottingham, Mansfield and Chesterfield are usually suggested. To date, these centres have assessed through the full Medical Assessment Process, MAP, over 1,300 claimants, with a further 511 appointments made.

Claimants are usually asked to attend a test centre within a 25-mile radius of their residence. However, claimants are given the option to attend a different centre if a more suitable time is available. For those claimants who are not able to travel to a centre, and have a letter from their doctor, Healthcall carries out home visits.

Export Controls Bill

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by his Department on the publication of the draft Export Control Bill. [149904]

Dr. Howells: Work is continuing to prepare the draft Export Control Bill for publication and the Government will publish the Bill as soon as it is ready. It is not possible at this stage to give a precise date but we hope to be in a position to publish the Bill within the next few months.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list the agricultural shows this year *(a)* to which (i) he and (ii) other Ministers in his Department have received invitations and *(b)* which shows (i) he and (ii) each other Minister has attended. [144323]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The table details the agricultural shows for which invitations were received, and which were attended by MAFF Ministers during 2000.

Show	*Invitation received by*	*Attended by*
Beef 2000	Joyce Quin	—
Cereals 2000	Elliot Morley	Elliot Morley
Cheshire County Show	Nick Brown	Elliot Morley
CLA Game Fair	Nick Brown and Elliot Morley	Nick Brown and Elliot Morley
Devon Show	Joyce Quin	Joyce Quin
Driffield Show	Nick Brown	—
East of England Show	Nick Brown	—
Essex Show	Nick Brown	—
European Dairy Farming Event	Nick Brown	Joyce Quin
Great Yorkshire Show	Nick Brown	Elliot Morley
Kent Show	Joyce Quin	Joyce Quin
Lincolnshire Show	Nick Brown	Nick Brown
National Fruit Show	Nick Brown	—
Royal Bath and West Show	Nick Brown	Baroness Hayman
Royal Highland Show	Nick Brown	Nick Brown
Royal Norfolk Show	Nick Brown	Elliot Morley
Sheep 2000	Nick Brown	Elliot Morley
South of England Show	Baroness Hayman	Baroness Hayman
South West Dairy Show	Nick Brown	Joyce Quin
The Royal Show	Nick Brown, Joyce Quin, Baroness Hayman and Elliot Morley	Nick Brown, Joyce Quin, Baroness Hayman
The Royal Smithfield Show	Nick Brown	Nick Brown, Baroness Hayman and Elliot Morley
The Royal Welsh Show	Nick Brown	Nick Brown
Three Counties Show	Baroness Hayman	Baroness Hayman
Westmorland Show	Joyce Quin	—

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Breed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he last met his counterparts in *(a)* France and *(b)* the Czech Republic; and if he will make a statement. [145921]

Mr. Nick Brown: I meet Jean Glavany regularly at EU Agriculture Council. I last met him for a formal bilateral discussion, in London, on 26 June 2000. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State met Jan Fencl on my behalf on 5 July 2000.

GM Crops

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his answer of 10 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 562W, on GM crops, if the Government definition of GM agriculture is restricted to commercial agricultural activities. [147885]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* Any assessment of the impact of GM agriculture on farmland values, which was the subject of the hon. Member's previous question, would need to consider the impact of commercial cultivation. Only limited GM crop trials are currently taking place in the UK.

Agriculture (Employment and Production)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* assumptions and *(b)* projections of agricultural employment and production levels apply to the Government's long-term strategy for agriculture. [150245]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Government's long-term agriculture strategy takes account of the changing economic circumstances facing the sector, including trends in employment and production levels. The underlying economic analysis is summarised in a MAFF publication "Strategy for Agriculture: Current and Prospective Economic Situation", which is available in the Libraries of the House, and associated MAFF working papers produced in March 2000. The key policies underpinning the strategy will be subject to economic evaluation.

Agrimonetary Compensation Scheme

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if the Government have made representations at the EU level on the need for a replacement for the agrimonetary compensation system. [150247]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Council's agrimonetary regulations cover currency movements to the end of 2001 and provide for compensation which could extend over the next three years. No member state has pressed for a replacement at the present time.

England Rural Development Programme

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the impact on funding of the ERDP if the modulation of agriculture subsidies at the stated percentages yields significantly less than the amounts expected. [150248]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The funds raised through modulation of agriculture subsidies will be monitored closely throughout the life of the England Rural Development Programme.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if ERDP funding is subject to annual ring-fencing arrangements similar to those that apply to the money announced in March 2000 for pig farmers. [150329]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* No.

Small Business Service

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what an initial consultation visit by the Small Business Service consists of. [150332]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* An initial consultation visit under the Farm Business Advice Service, which is being delivered for MAFF by the Small Business Service, is conducted by a Farm Business Adviser (FBA) and lasts approximately half a day. The FBA will look round the farm and discuss with the farmer the way the business is run and managed, financial matters and the aspirations for the business of the farmer and his/her family. Information required to undertake a business health check and to prepare a current farm balance sheet will be collected, which the farmer will normally have been forewarned to have ready, to help the FBA prepare an action plan following the initial visit. The FBA may also collect data to benchmark business performance. During the visit or on a subsequent visit the FBA might use the specially developed Connect CD to illustrate the options open to the farmer.

In every case FBAs will tailor the service provided to meet the needs of the individual farmer.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the cost of the Small Business Service's agricultural activities have been to date; and how these costs have been met. [150331]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Expenditure to date on the Farm Business Advice Service which is being delivered for MAFF by the Small Business Service (SBS) through Business Link outlets is £1,053,092. Business Links will be submitting invoices to cover the costs they have incurred delivering the service, over the period since its launch, at the end of February. All costs will be met from moneys allocated to MAFF under the Action Plan for Farming. Any funds allocated to this service for this financial year and not spent will be carried over to next year.

Farmers do have access to the full range of other small business support services provided by the SBS, but the costs involved are not separately identified.

Krebs Report

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 519, if all 10 triplets are running as specified in the Krebs report. [150330]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* As I informed the House on 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 519, all 10 triplets are in place. Initial proactive culling has been carried out in seven of them. Surveying is in progress in the other three, which are due to be proactively culled later this year. This is in line with the timetable set by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB, which is overseeing the trial.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what was the level of payments made through the OTMS in each year of the scheme's existence. [150244]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The table shows actual OTMS expenditure for financial years 1996–97 to 1999–2000 and the forecast expenditure for 2000–01.

£ million

	Purchase costs	*Disposal costs*	*Total*
1996–97[1]	670	188	858
1997–98[1]	288	144	432
1998–99[1]	264	116	380
1999–2000[1]	265	129	394
2000–01[2]	265	136	401

[1] Outturn
[2] Forecast

Pesticides

Mr. Livsey: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will list *(a)* the national rules concerning data requirements in respect of applications for the approval of pesticides that were in place in 1990 and *(b)* amendments to the rules made since then, including the dates of such amendments; and if he will place copies of the rules and amendments in the Library. [149356]

Ms Quin: In 1990, the UK national rules on data requirements concerning applications for the approval of pesticides were set out in the "Data Requirements for Approval under the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986" issued in October 1986. Amendments to the rules made since then include: in June 1992 a major addition in the form of Part One of "The COPR Handbook"; in December 1996, this was incorporated into "The Registration Handbook"; and in April 1999 the issue of a Volume II (last updated in December 1999) to the Registration Handbook.

In June and December 2000, revised electronic versions of Part One, Part Two and Part Three of "The Registration Handbook" were placed on PSD's website www.pesticides.gov.uk as "The Application Handbook" and "The Data Requirements Handbook". Part Four of "The Registration Handbook" is under revision, but is currently available only as hard copy.

Copies of these documents (including printouts of those available electronically) have been placed in the House Libraries. "The Registration Handbook", "The Application Handbook" and "The Data Requirements Handbook" are in their most up to date form, incorporating all the amendments made to them. Copies of all of the original pages superseded by these amendments could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I will write to the hon. Member with further details and place copies of my letter in the Libraries of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Flags

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if it is the *(a)* policy and *(b)* practice of Her Majesty's Government to fly the flag of the country of a visiting Head of State (i) over and (ii) on a flag pole within, the precincts of a building which is being visited by a Head of State (1) officially, (2) privately and (3) who is temporarily resident in Northern Ireland. [150307]

Dr. Reid: The Government's policy and practice is to comply with the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000 which state that where a Government building is visited by a foreign Head of State during an official visit, the flag of that Head of State's country may be flown in addition to the Union flag, where a second flag pole makes this possible.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149312]

Dr. Reid: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01, (i) his Department's total spending on advertising campaigns, (ii) the cost of each individual advertising campaign and (iii) the criteria that were established to gauge the effectiveness of each campaign; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of each campaign based on these criteria. [142712]

Dr. Reid: The information requested is outlined as follows:

Year	*£*
1996–97	135,938.07
1997–98	477,726.16
1998–99	887,303.00
1999–2000	330,630.95
2000–01	44,804.71

Although these figures incorporate the total publicity/advertising budget, there was an on-going campaign during the period in question, the mood/referendum campaign, which culminated with the May 1998 Good Friday Agreement referendum.

The criterion used to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign was the response in voter turnout when compared to other recent votes.

For example, the average turnout in Northern Ireland constituencies at the May 1997 general election was 67.42 per cent. while the turnout for the referendum was 81 per cent., a 20 per cent. increase. An on-going assessment of the campaign, which was carried out by the advertising company, showed the general public to be very aware of the choices they faced, proving the effectiveness of the campaign itself.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions on which *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials received (i) formal and (ii) informal representations concerning Iran from (A) the Hinduja brothers and (B) their representatives and representatives of their companies since 2 May 1997. [148385]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions by officials with private individuals or companies. The Foreign Secretary, accompanied by an official, discussed India and Iran with GP Hinduja before and after the Foreign Secretary's visit to India in April 2000. The discussion focused on commercial opportunities for UK business in both countries. There was no mention of the question of nationality.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals he has to amend the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental expenditure limit/running cost limit for 2000–01. [150691]

Mr. Wilson: The information is as follows:

Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class VII Vote I, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office departmental expenditure limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £42,289,000 from £1,210,333,000 to £1,252,622,000 and the running cost limit has been increased by £1,797,000 from £531,982,000 to £533,779,000. This is the net effect of:

(i) a transfer of £16,000 to the Ministry of Defence (Class VI, Vote 2), in respect of our final contribution to the grant-in-aid to the Atlantic Council of the UK;

(ii) an increase of £5,441,000 in respect of an adjustment for Overseas price movements;

(iii) a transfer of £1,920,000 to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII, Vote 2) for drugs assistance programmes;

(iv) a transfer of £880,000 to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII, Vote 2) for revisions to charging regime;

(v) an increase in both running costs and appropriations in aid of £1,248,000 in respect of increased receipts from OGD's;

(iv) a transfer of £32,000 from BBC monitoring service to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII, Vote 2);

(vii) an increase in both running costs and appropriations in aid of £5,300,000 to reflect an increase in our VAT recovery forecast;

(viii) a decrease of £5,500,000 in both capital expenditure and A-in-A for FCO Estates Rationalisation;

(ix) a PES transfer of £1,500,000 to the MOD representing the FCO's contribution to the enhanced package for the Sierra Leone Army;

(x) a PES transfer of £168,000 from the War Pensions Agency to cover the costs of medical examinations for overseas pensioners;

(xi) additional provision of £39,808,000 on Section B for UK contributions to United Nations Missions in the former Yugoslavia (includes UN Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo) and the former Soviet Union, United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (Iraq), United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observer Mission, United Nations Mission for the Referendum on Western Sahara, United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor, United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, United Nations Observer Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo, United Nations Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea, the United Nations International Criminal Tribunals for Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the European Community Monitoring Mission and Western European Union Police Mission in Albania. This is partially offset by an increase of £344,000 in appropriations-in-aid in respect of non-baseline peacekeeping and by £10,761,000 from Section E, General VAT Refunds;

(xii) The supplementary estimate is also required to note an increase in Section C, to reflect PES transfers of £46,000 to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII, Vote 2) and £52,000 to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII, Vote 1);

(xiii) The supplementary estimate is also required to note an increase of £1,998,000 of Section D, in respect of an adjustment for Overseas Price Movement for the British Council.

Child Abuse

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what has been the average cost of suspension of *(a)* a case worker and *(b)* a teacher investigated for child abuse in the last three years. [149429]

Mr. Hutton: I have been asked to reply.

Decisions as to whether an employee is to be suspended, and consideration of the costs of suspension, are matters for employers to consider when faced with allegations of serious misconduct that may necessitate management inquiries. Employers are not required to provide the Government with analysis of the costs of any suspensions of employees. As such, there is no information held centrally about the average costs of suspensions involving social services caseworkers or teachers who are the subject of investigations following allegations of child abuse.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Fireworks

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on the subject of pollution from the use of fireworks over the last Christmas and New Year period; and if he will make a statement. [148168]

Mr. Hill: I am not aware of any such representations. I have had a letter from a Member concerning noise from fireworks over the holiday period.

Levels of air pollution measured by the national monitoring network remained low throughout this time in most parts of England. There were two occasions when levels of particles (PM_{10}) at roadsides were recorded as moderate—on 23 December in central London and on 30 December in Bury in Greater Manchester. These incidents are most likely to have been caused by motor vehicle emissions during stable atmospheric dispersion conditions. Any contribution to the levels of those pollutants from the ignition of fireworks are likely to have been small. The Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland sets objectives for the main air pollutants. The objective for particles allows for the 24-hour mean to be exceeded no more than 35 times a year. In part, this is to provide for annual

events such as bonfire night and other festivals where fire and fireworks form part of the celebration. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced that we shall consult on proposals for a new objective for particles later this year.

Crematoria

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to investigate flue gas emissions from crematoria to ensure they meet the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990; and if he will make a statement. [148304]

Mr. Hill: Emissions of various pollutants are already regulated and monitored by local authorities under Part I of the 1990 Act.

In addition, we have been working with the Federation of British Cremation Authorities since 1999 on the issue of mercury emissions from crematoria. We have commissioned monitoring of mercury in the vicinity of a crematorium in the West Midlands and we know that the federation has recently arranged for mercury monitoring to be undertaken at a number of crematoria. Once we have the necessary information on which to base a decision, we will decide whether to include a limit for mercury emissions from existing crematoria in statutory guidance on the Best Available Techniques Not Entailing Excessive Cost.

European Maritime Safety Agency

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his Department's policy is concerning the proposed establishment of a European Maritime Safety Agency, with specific reference to the issue of tanker traffic in the Minch; and if he will make a statement. [149428]

Mr. Hill: We support the stated aims of the EMSA to the extent that it could provide a source of technical expertise to review the operation of existing maritime safety directives and scrutinise the case for any additional regulation. We consider that, to the extent that it improves performance across the Community, it could contribute to enhancing safety and reducing pollution risks. However, we do have concerns about the risk of Commission centralism, and take the view that member states would have to have effective control of the Agency.

The EMSA would not replace members states' national maritime agencies, which would continue to exercise their existing responsibilities. For the UK, the relevant national agency is the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA).

There has been an internationally agreed recommendation on navigation in place for the Minch since November 1993, by which all laden tanks over 10,000 gross tonnage are requested not to pass east of the Outer Hebrides, through the Little Minch and North Minch, except because of stress of weather or any other case of "force majeure". Responsibility for implementing this recommendation rests with the MCA.

The current position in respect of traffic through the Minch is that although there has been apparent increase in the number of vessels, based upon the year-on-year increase in reports received by Stornoway Coastguard Station, Coastguard personnel believe that the actual number of vessels shows no significant change. The apparent increase continues to be attributed to vessels that have previously been unaware of the reporting scheme but are now actively participating.

However, the number of laden tankers over 10,000 gross tonnage using the Minch route remains low and only 18 were recorded during 2000. In the majority of these cases, the reason given by the vessel's master and accepted by the MCA was forecast adverse weather in the deep-water route to the west of the Outer Hebrides. Where there appears to be no justification for using the Minch, MCA contacts the vessel's operators for an explanation.

On occasions where large laden tankers do use the Minch, the Minch Emergency Towing Vessel (ETV) endeavours to escort such laden tankers to minimise any risk involved. At present, the ETV is on station in the Minch during the winter months only (October-March), but, with effect from October 2001, there will be ETV cover all year round.

With the phased introduction of automatic identification systems (AIS) under the revision of Chapter V of the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) Convention, all tankers on international voyages must have such equipment fitted not later than the first annual safety equipment survey after 1 July 2003, unless they are scheduled to be scrapped within two years of the implementation date. This requirement should further enhance the level of reporting in this particular area.

Park Homes Working Party

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the Government's response to the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party; and if he will make a statement. [149750]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: We have consulted on, and are considering, the recommendations of the Park Homes Working Party. We will give our response to the recommendations in due course.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the governmental inquiry into Mr. Douglas Andrew's role in the privatisation of New Zealand's steel industry in respect of the involvement of Mr. Andrew of the Civil Aviation Authority in advising the Government on the future of the National Air Traffic Services; [149597]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 382–83W, if he will publish the minutes and notes of any working groups run by his Department on the economic regulatory and licensing regime for the NATS public-private partnership in which Mr. Douglas Andrew has participated; [149599]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 382–83W, for what reasons Mr. Douglas Andrew has held meetings with the three potential partners during the bidding process; [149598]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 382–83W, what steps were taken by the Government to satisfy itself that Mr. Douglas Andrew was the most appropriate person for reappointment in 2000 as the head of the Civil Aviation Authority's economic regulation group. [149596]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Before reappointing Mr. Andrew in April 2000, the Government satisfied themselves as to his track record as a member of the Civil Aviation Authority. They saw, and continue to see, no reason to make further inquiries about Mr. Andrew's career prior to joining the CAA.

Mr. Andrew's meetings with the bidders for the role of strategic partner in the public-private partnership for National Air Traffic Services were to enable the bidders to discuss questions about the future economic regulatory process.

The working groups run by my Department, to which I referred in my earlier answer, were integral to the provision of advice to Ministers on the public-private partnership, and it would not be appropriate to publish the minutes.

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consideration he is giving to selecting a strategic partner for the PPP for NATS on the basis of not-for-commercial-profit. [149848]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Bids for the NATS PPP were received by the Government on 31 January 2001 from the three consortiums who were invited to submit offers in November 2000. These are NIMBUS, NOVARES and The Airline Group. These three bids are currently being assessed against the evaluation criteria provided to them in November 2000 and against the Government objectives for this PPP. The evaluation criteria and the Government objectives do not preclude any bid from being on the basis of not-for-commercial-profit.

Animal Waste Incineration

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if a Regulatory Impact Assessment will be undertaken before new standards and controls are introduced in respect of emissions from *(a)* incinerators of animal waste and *(b)* pet crematoria. [150010]

Mr. Hill: A Regulatory Impact Assessment was undertaken of the then proposed Waste Incineration Directive, and the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food has since commissioned a study by ADAS Consulting to assess more accurately how many small animal carcase incinerators are in operation. A preliminary Regulatory Impact Assessment was issued by MAFF last November for the draft EU Animal By-Products Regulation. In addition, AEA Technology has been commissioned by MAFF to measure emissions at a representative sample of small animal waste incinerators to provide a firm basis for determining proportionate standards. MAFF will be making available the two studies when they are completed, subject to commercial confidentiality considerations.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research he has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the environmental benefits and disbenefits of using different fuels to incinerate animal waste. [150007]

Mr. Hill: None to my knowledge. The AEA Technology study referred to in the previous answer will examine incinerators using different fuels.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what communications his Department has had with National Industrial Fuel Efficiency Services Ltd. concerning the development of UK standards for emissions from small incinerators of animal waste, in the context of the European Union Waste Incineration Directive and proposed animal waste directive; and if he will make a statement. [150008]

Mr. Hill: None to my knowledge.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to ensure that the pet crematoria industry is not economically damaged by EU measures. [150009]

Mr. Hill: Partly at the UK's behest, the adopted Waste Incineration Directive (2000/76/EC) excludes animal carcases from its scope.

As regards the current draft EU Animal By-Products Regulation, it is our aim in the negotiation of this regulation to secure requirements akin to those in the Waste Incineration Directive for animal carcase incinerators on premises where there is an incineration capacity of over 50kg/hr, and proportionate, less stringent, requirements where the incineration capacity is smaller. The Association of Private Pet Cemeteries and Crematoria will be among the interested organisations consulted during the negotiation of the regulation.

Leylandii Hedges

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on his plans to control leylandii hedges and the proposed timetable for their implementation. [150070]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: In August last year, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment announced our commitment to introduce legislation that would give local authorities powers to deal with complaints about problem hedges, including leylandii. Although it was not possible to make provision for such a Bill in the Queen's Speech, the issue is being taken forward as a private Member's Bill by the hon. Member for Solihull (Mr. Taylor). The High Hedges Bill was introduced on 17 January and is due to have its Second Reading on 9 March.

Strategic Planning Expenditure

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the levels of spending on strategic planning per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [150016]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Local authority expenditure on strategic planning is not separately identified in any of the returns made by local government to central Government, so we are unable to provide the information requested.

Powershift Programme

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 26 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 732W, on eligibility criteria for the Powershift programme, what meetings Ministers in his Department have had over the past 12 months with vehicle manufacturers to encourage them to manufacture production line gas vehicles; what other measures his Department has taken in pursuit of his objective; and what the response has been from the vehicle manufacturers. [150000]

Mr. Hill: I refer the hon. Member to my answer on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 535–36W.

Planning

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will codify the way in which the requirements for developments in guideline areas are brought to the attention of planning committees. [149645]

Ms Beverley Hughes: This is an operational matter for local planning authorities' own discretion. The Local Government Association's "Probity in Planning" includes guidelines for officer reports to planning committees. This advises that relevant points will include a clear exposition of the development plan, site-related history, and any other material considerations.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how breaches of codes of conduct on relationships between planning officers and *(a)* applicants and *(b)* planning consultants are recorded. [149641]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There is no centrally-prescribed method for recording breaches of codes of conduct. However, the Local Government Ombudsman's guidance note "Devising a Complaints System" gives advice to local authorities on conducting an internal investigation of a complaint, including the recording of its outcome. Breaches of codes of conduct may also be the subject of investigation and formal report by the Local Government Ombudsman.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what plans he has to *(a)* clarify and *(b)* amend the rules by which application dates are determined in planning cases; [150005]

(2) if he will make a statement on the rules by which an application date is determined following pre-application discussions in planning cases. [150006]

Ms Beverley Hughes: It is for applicants to decide when to make a formal planning application to the local planning authority. This may or may not follow pre-application discussions. All applications made to an authority are recorded in that authority's planning register. The Town and Country Planning (General Development Procedure) Order 1995 requires local planning authorities to give an applicant notice of their decision within eight weeks of receipt of a valid planning application. However, the applicant and the local planning authority may agree in writing an extended period for determining the application, unless the applicant has already given notice of appeal to the Secretary of State. We have no plans to amend the existing provisions.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the scope that planning officers have for interpreting the provisions relating to guideline areas without the permission of elected representatives. [150027]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Under section 54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, all planning applications must be determined in accordance with the development plan for the area unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 101 of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, provides for planning applications to be determined by an officer on behalf of the council, in accordance with clearly stated and published rules. Elected members decide the policies in the development plan and determine the framework of other policies, standards and guidance within which applications are considered. Elected members also set the terms of any delegation agreement, including the circumstances in which an officer's delegated power to make a decision may not be exercised. The Local Government Association's "Development Control: Delegation Arrangements" advises that common exceptions to delegated powers will be applications which are contrary to the policies in the development plan for the area and contrary to approved council policies.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to give objectors in planning cases non-judicial alternative forms of appeal. [149903]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no current plans to do so.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to reduce the number of signatures required for a petition in planning cases in low density areas. [150019]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There is no prescribed number of signatures that constitutes a petition for planning purposes. In determining planning applications, local planning authorities are required to take into account relevant representations made to them within the time limit specified. It is for authorities to decide what weight to give to such representations, having regard to the circumstances of the particular case.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will *(a)* allow objectors to apply for costs when participating in planning appeals and *(b)* increase and standardise the timescale for objections to be submitted in planning cases. [150029]

Ms Beverley Hughes: *(a)* Fundamental to the working of the planning system, including planning appeals, is the fact that each party meets its own expenses. Thus parties to planning appeals going to inquiry normally meet their own costs. However, the Secretary of State has the power

to order one party to pay another's costs where one party has behaved unreasonably and has caused another to incur unnecessary expense as a result.

(b) Streamlined statutory procedures for handling planning appeals were introduced in August last year following public consultation. These require other parties to submit their comments or statements of case to the Secretary of State in the same timescale within which local planning authorities and appellants submit their statements. The operation of the new procedures is being monitored but we have no current plans to change them.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will require local authorities to place a time limit on pre-application discussions between planning officers and applicants or their representatives. [150024]

Ms Beverley Hughes: This is an operational matter for local planning authorities' discretion.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to *(a)* prevent planning committees from being held in holiday periods and *(b)* permit objectors to make closing statements at planning appeals. [150020]

Ms Beverley Hughes: *(a)* We have no plans to do so. This is an operational matter for individual local authorities to determine.

(b) The statutory rules for handling planning appeals prescribe the arrangements for parties making statements at hearings or inquiries. The rules already make provision for closing statements by objectors in particular circumstances but inspectors have discretion to allow them in other circumstances. DETR Circular 5/2000 "Planning Appeals: Procedure (Including Inquiries into Called-in Planning Applications)" provides guidance on the procedure at hearings and inquiries.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out carbon dioxide emission projection figures for *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 2002, *(c)* 2003, *(d)* 2004, *(e)* 2005, *(f)* 2006, *(g)* 2007, *(h)* 2008 and *(i)* 2009 on the same basis as is used for the preparation of figures for Table 1 in Section 2, Chapter 1 of the final Climate Change Programme, Cm 4913. [149872]

Mr. Meacher: Data for 2005 are published in Table 1 in Section 2, Chapter 1 of the final Climate Change Programme. Data for intermediate years are not available because the UK energy model makes projections at five yearly intervals. Intermediate years may be constructed by interpolation, but this does not add additional information and can be misleading because emissions in individual years are affected by statistical factors, including the weather and the economic cycle.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason the figures relating to carbon dioxide emissions and carbon dioxide emission projections in Table 1 of Section 2, Chapter 1 of the final Climate Change Programme, Cm 4913, differ from those in Table 1 of Section 2, Chapter 1 of the draft Climate Change Programme. [149869]

Mr. Meacher: The carbon dioxide emission estimate for 1990 is from the UK emissions inventory and is given as 168 million tonnes of carbon in both the Climate Change Programme and the draft Climate Change Programme. The projections for years 2000, 2010 and 2020 compare as follows:

Million tonnes

Year	*Climate change programme*	*Draft climate change programme*
2000	154.3	152.2
2010	153.8	156.3
2020	160.7	164.7

Most of the differences reflect revisions to UK energy projections made following the consultation process described in Energy Paper 68 (see section 1.2, page 8). The main factor influencing the projection for 2000 is a lower expectation of nuclear output together with a higher coal burn. In subsequent years higher power station emissions are outweighed by lower emissions from industry and refineries. Industrial emissions are projected to be lower than previously estimated partly due to lower estimated emissions from offshore activity. Projected emissions from land use change have also been revised downward slightly because of methodological improvements and minor updates resulting from emissions data in the latest greenhouse gas inventory. Provisional data on actual emissions in 2000 will be available in March.

Air Liberalisation

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress he has made in the negotiations with the United States on air liberalisation. [149855]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Negotiations with the previous US Administration did not lead to an agreement. We will be pressing the new Administration to liberalise the market on terms which deliver a fair balance of opportunity to the airlines of the two sides, bringing the benefits of increased competition both to the consumer and to the wider UK economy.

A6 Bus Lane

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the A6 bus lane in Loughborough since its introduction. [150021]

Mr. Hill: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Andrew Reed, dated 14 February 2001:

The Transport Minister, Keith Hill, has asked me to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the bus lane on the A6 in Loughborough.

This was introduced on an experimental basis in March 1999. Our assessment of the scheme is very positive: there have been improvements in bus journey time reliability and car journey times at the height of the morning peak and a reduction in maximum queue lengths. Although the proposal was generally well received there were some objections. We are trying to resolve these before deciding whether or not we should make permanent arrangements for its operation and enforcement. We hope that will be around April.

If you require any further information in the meantime please contact David Smith, the Project Sponsor for this scheme. His telephone number is 0121 678 8054.

Central Railway (Freight Line)

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the Government's policy is on the proposals by Central Railway for a new direct freight line to Europe from the north-west; if he will publish the advice that he has received from the Strategic Rail Authority on this matter; and what discussions have taken place with Central Railway about the proposed line. [149840]

Mr. Hill: Central Railway has requested the Government's support for the approval of its scheme through a hybrid Bill but the company has not yet submitted details of its proposals.

The SRA is to undertake a review of Central Railway's proposals. This will examine the project in the context of our 10-Year Plan objectives and the SRA's own strategy for freight. I will follow the review with interest and make a further statement in due course, taking into account the SRA's findings.

A3, Hindhead

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the UVA consultants' report on the Hindhead A3 tunnel. [150305]

Mr. Hill: The consultant's report on the A3 Hindhead study is currently with the South East England Regional Assembly and was presented to its plenary meeting today. It will then be for the Assembly to make recommendations to Ministers, and decisions on the way forward will be taken in the light of these recommendations.

Biocidal and Cosmetic Products

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on the discussion paper produced by the Environment Directorate of the European Commission on the interface between the Biocidal Products and Cosmetic Products Directives; what timetable has been proposed for consultation on this paper; and if he will place a copy of the paper and the Government's response in the Library. [148713]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The European Commission is currently drafting a document in order to clarify the borderline between the Biocidal Products Directive and the Cosmetics Directive. An expert working group that includes experts from member states (including the UK) and industry has discussed it. The working document is being modified and a final version has yet to be put formally to member states for comment. It is anticipated that member states will discuss a final draft next month.

With regard to the scope of the Biocidal Products Directive, the UK policy is to encourage the European Commission to bring forward proposals concerning the interface with other Directives so that products are regulated under the most appropriate regime, and those required to comply with European legislation are clear about which legislation applies to their products.

Once the working document has been lodged with us it will be placed in the House Library.

Flood Plains

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what consideration his Department has given to the implications of construction on flood plains on the south coast; what his assessments are of the increased risk of flooding from such construction; what preconditions have been imposed to guarantee the satisfactory disposal of sewage, wastewater and groundwater resulting from the construction of new housing estates and service roads; and if he will make a statement. [150117]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Policy INF1 in the draft Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9) states that:

> "Development should be guided away from areas at risk or likely to be at risk in future from flooding, or where it would increase the risk of flood damage elsewhere".

The draft RPG advises that management proposals for the costal zone will also need to reflect strategies agreed between relevant bodies for flood defence. Shoreline management plans now exist for the whole of the south coast. These contribute towards the necessary understanding of coastal processes to inform the planning system in its assessment of flood risk and construction.

The revised draft of Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 25 "Development and flood risk", published on 6 February, states:

> "those proposing particular developments are responsible for: providing an assessment of whether any proposed development is likely to be affected by flooding, whether it will increase flood risk elsewhere and of the measures proposed to deal with these effects and risks. It is then for the local planning authority, advised as necessary by the Environment Agency, to determine an application for planning permission taking account of all material considerations".

The draft guidance also advises that, in reviewing sites at risk of flooding when preparing local plans, local planning authorities should review both existing and possible future allocations of land for development against the risk-based criteria set out in the sequential test in the draft PPG.

The disposal of sewage, wastewater and groundwater resulting from the construction of new houses and service roads can be material considerations in the determination of applications for planning permission and should also be taken into account in preparing development plans. The draft PPG 25 advises on the need for close liaison between local authorities, the Environment Agency, sewerage undertakers and prospective developers to encourage the use of sustainable drainage systems and minimise the impacts of their discharges on receiving watercourses. In addition, the Government consulted in 2000 on amendments to Part H of the Building Regulations, proposing a number of amendments related to sustainable drainage. There are also proposals to reduce the risk of

sewer flooding by the use of the anti-flood valves and pumps from basement connections and buildings in low-lying areas.

Tugs

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the level of UK emergency towing provision; and if he will make a statement. [150658]

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what recommendations he has received from the Maritime and Coastguard Agency on the all year round siting of an emergency towing vessel in the Pentland Firth; and if he will make a statement. [150401]

Mr. Hill: A review of UK emergency towing provision has now been completed by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and recommends that the current winter-only arrangements for UK provision in the South West Approaches, Dover Strait, Minch, and Fair Isle should be increased to all-year-round cover. I have accepted this recommendation.

The new arrangements will start from 1 October this year, with the exception of the Dover Strait, which will commence earlier on 1 April. The Dover Strait provision builds on the partnership arrangements introduced last year with our French maritime colleagues.

The report also considered emergency towing provision for the Irish Sea and St. George's Channel area. Although the report concludes that there is insufficient evidence to support an emergency towing vessel for the area on an all-year-round basis by the UK alone, it recommends that provision could be made in partnership with the Government of Ireland. I have accepted this recommendation, dependent upon the Irish Government providing an emergency towing vessel in which the UK Government can share. A dialogue will be maintained with the Irish Government.

These improvements to the UK emergency towing vessel provision are good news for the safety of the UK environment and the seagoing community, and demonstrate this Government's commitment to preventing maritime pollution.

Copies of the review report have been placed in the House Library.

Ports

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what *(a)* number and *(b)* percentages of UK ports are owned by (i) Associated British Ports and (ii) Hutchinson Whampoa Europe Ltd.; and what percentage of the UK port trade each of those companies carried out in each year from 1995. [150264]

Mr. Hill: There are more than 650 ports in the UK, of which about one fifth are commercially active. Associated British Ports (ABP) currently owns 23 ports and Hutchinson Whampoa (Hutchinson Ports (UK) Ltd.) owns three ports.

It is estimated that ABP ports accounted for about 21 per cent. of all UK port tonnage in 1999 and Hutchinson Whampoa about 7 per cent. It is not possible to provide accurate figures for earlier years.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the funding of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust. [150625]

Mr. Prescott: I am today announcing additional funding for the Coalfields Regeneration Trust in England of up to £45 million over the three years to March 2005. This reaffirms the Government's support for the coalfields communities and the excellent work of the Trust.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust is a key element of the Government's long-term programme to bring about the physical, social, economic and environmental regeneration of our coalfields.

The Trust provides supports for local community projects. It also sponsors projects, targeted on workers displaced from mining-related industries, who have been unemployed for a long time and who face particular disadvantages in getting back to work. It has an important role to play in community capacity building, providing a forum for good regeneration practice to be exchanged across the coalfield communities. The Trust is actively building partnerships with local, regional and national agencies and reaching out to the private sector.

With this additional funding the Trust will be able to maintain and develop further its key role in combating poverty, debt and social exclusion in the former coalfield areas.

Chester Street Insurance Holdings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost to the Policyholders Protection Board of the financial collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings; and if he will recompense those who believed they were covered under employers liability insurance by policies held by Chester Street Insurance. [148917]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the Policyholders Protection Board. I understand that it is working with the provisional liquidators and Chester Street Insurance Holdings, which is currently assessing the information available about existing and potential claims.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

New Deal for Disabled People

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of eligible applicants for the New Deal for Disabled People will be excluded in order to provide a control group for comparative purposes; on what basis they will be selected; and how long the period of exclusion would be before they became eligible for the programme. [147736]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* In pursuing a very innovative New Deal for Disabled People it is important to evaluate how effective the programme is in bringing people on incapacity benefit into work. The most robust methodology available is one based on random assignment and this will be used to evaluate the NDDP national extension. Once the programme is established one in five clients who register with job brokers will be allocated to a control group and have their eligibility deferred. The deferral period will last for 12 months, after which time members of the control group will be invited to take part in the NDDP extension.

The control group will be selected entirely at random. During the deferral period, individuals in the control group will continue to have access to Employment Service programmes, including specialist disability employment programmes, where they meet the eligibility criteria.

Exam Markers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the availability of exam markers for next summer's public examinations. [147861]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* All necessary steps are being taken to ensure a sufficient supply of examiners. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority is monitoring the awarding bodies closely to ensure that the system will deliver this summer's results on time. The awarding bodies' examiner recruitment exercise is well under way. The exact number of examiners needed will not be known until April, when entries have been made.

Student Loans and Debt

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment at what point of net income in tax year 2000–01 a graduate repays more in old-style mortgage loan than in new-style income-contingent loan. [149799]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Assuming a student loan debt of £5,000 and repayment of a mortgage-style loan over a five-year period, a graduate liable to repay a mortgage-style loan would repay more of that loan each year until annual gross pay of £21,111 was reached. Repayment thresholds for both types of loan are based on gross pay, not net.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average amount of student debt was in each of the last five years. [149454]

Mr. Wicks: Data from the Department's Student Income and Expenditure Surveys show that the average debt of full-time students in higher education in the UK was £840 in 1995–96 and £2,530 in 1998–99, after their savings had been taken into account. The debt figures include student loans, commercial loans and overdrafts as well as informal loans from family and friends. Data for the intervening and more recent years are not available from the survey.

Since 1998–99 students entering higher education have been eligible for income-contingent student loans. These are interest-free in real terms and repayment is linked to income so that graduates repay only when they can afford to do so.

Students (Social Background)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will provide a breakdown of the social backgrounds of *(a)* university applicants and *(b)* university students for each of the last five years. [149455]

Mr. Wicks: The available information on full-time students, as given in the following table, covers only those who apply for full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS); data on the family background of students applying for part-time courses are not held centrally.

UK domiciled applicants and accepted applicants via UCAS to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK

Thousand

	Year of entry				
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Applicants					
Professional	49.9	48.4	47.0	46.5	45.8
Intermediate	139.0	150.3	147.3	144.8	144.7
Skilled non-manual	43.0	49.6	47.1	47.1	48.1
Skilled manual	58.2	60.7	58.9	58.5	57.2
Partly skilled	28.3	32.2	31.0	30.8	31.7
Unskilled	7.0	7.9	7.3	7.5	7.3
Unknown	39.4	49.2	51.0	53.5	54.3
Total	364.9	398.3	389.6	388.7	389.1
Accepted applicants					
Professional	39.3	39.6	38.5	38.9	38.8
Intermediate	105.0	117.4	115.6	115.7	117.7
Skilled non-manual	31.3	37.3	35.6	36.3	37.8
Skilled manual	40.9	44.8	44.2	44.5	44.4
Partly skilled	19.9	23.5	22.7	23.1	24.2
Unskilled	4.9	5.6	5.3	5.5	5.5
Unknown	27.1	35.0	36.6	39.1	40.3
Total	268.3	303.3	298.2	303.1	308.7

Student Employment

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of students had term-time, part-time jobs during each of the last five years. [149458]

Mr. Wicks: Data from the Department's Student Income and Expenditure Survey show that about half of full-time higher education students had term-time jobs in 1995–96 and in 1998–99. Data for the intervening and more recent years are not available from the survey.

A Further Education Funding Council survey of students in further education colleges undertaken in the summer of 1998 found that 73 per cent. of young full-time students (aged 16 to 18) and 41 per cent. of older full-time students worked during term-time.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement

on his Department's decision to exclude positions occupied by supply teachers on a 12-month contract from the definition of teacher vacancies for the purposes of form 618G. [149819]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The definition is exactly the same as that used by the previous Administration. It allows sensible comparisons to be made over time—and gives an accurate picture of where schools have vacancies that are either unfilled or covered by short-term supply staff.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many of the additional 20,000 full-time equivalent classroom assistants which the Government have funded were recruited in 1999–2000; what his projection is for recruitment levels in 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [149880]

Ms Estelle Morris: An additional 24,000 education support staff have been recruited in schools since 1997, 11,000 in the last year. Against the target of 20,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants between 1999 and 2000, between January 1999 and January 2000 over 9,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants had been recruited. Schools have the funding to recruit more assistants and figures for January 2001 will be available later this year.

Aiding Communication in Education Centre

Mr. Woolas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he plans to announce funding proposals for the Aiding Communication in Education Centre (North). [149522]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The Department for Education and Employment funds both the Aiding Communication in Education (ACE) Centre (North) and the Aiding Communication in Education (ACE) Centre Advisory Trust through the British Education Communications and Technology Agency.

We are currently working with the ACE Centre (North) to support its transition to charitable status. We will continue to support the valuable work of these centres in providing services for children and young people who use communication aids.

Paid Educational Leave

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what take-up there has been of the entitlement to paid educational leave for 16 to 17-year-olds since it was introduced; what the estimated cost has been to *(a)* state and *(b)* private employers; and if he will make a statement. [149611]

Mr. Wicks: This information is not collected centrally. The right to time off for study or training is employment legislation which protects and encourages 16 and 17-year-old employees who have not already achieved level 2 qualifications as defined by the regulations. At the end of 1999, there were an estimated 100,000 16 and 17-year-olds in England in employment but not qualified to level 2, and not working towards a level 2 qualification.

Evidence from our initial evaluation (DfEE Research Report RR221 "Time Off for Study or Training: Preliminary Evaluation of the Implementation of the Employment Right") suggests that the right has stimulated activity to promote training to young people, and has had a positive effect on recruitment into modern apprenticeships, but this remains difficult to quantify.

Higher Education Staff

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the increase in the productivity of higher education teaching staff since 1997. [149922]

Mr. Wicks: The Quality Assurance Agency assesses the quality of teaching in higher education institutions; and the research assessment exercises of the Higher Education Funding Council for England look at both the volume and quality of research. However, there is no direct measure of the productivity of higher education teaching staff.

Select Committee Report

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what information *(a)* he and *(b)* Ministers in his Department received on the contents of the Education and Employment Select Committee's report on access to higher education, and the proceedings of the Committee prior to the publication of the report. [150055]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* In accordance with usual practice, Departments had access to the report from 11.00 am on 6 February 2001, under embargo until 00.01 on 8 February, when it was published. We received no prior information on the contents of the report.

Funding Allocations

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the proposed levels are of *(a)* core funding for education business consortiums in 2001–02, *(b)* funding for work experience and *(c)* funding for teacher placements; and what the level of funding of education business partnerships through TECs was in 2000–01. [150063]

Mr. Wicks: Core funding of £23 million has been allocated for education business link (EBL) activity in 2001–02. The funding will go via the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which will contract with consortiums in each of the local LSC areas for delivery of education business links. Of this £23 million, £9.8 million is for work experience placements for Key Stage 4 pupils; and £1.8 million is for professional development placements for teachers. In addition, the LSC will be able to make allocations from its discretionary local initiatives fund (£90.3 million in total) to support EBL activity.

It is estimated that in 2000–01 training and enterprise councils (TECs) provided discretionary support of £17 million in total to EBL organisations. In addition, DfEE provided core funding through TECs for Key Stage 4 work experience (£9.8 million) and teachers' professional development placements (£1.8 million).

Further Education

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how he plans to encourage and develop a sectoral response to issues in further education raised by the Further Education National Training Organisation's recent Skills Foresight report. [150079]

Mr. Wicks: My Department will discuss the Skills Foresight report with representatives of the further education sector.

We have already announced extra funding of £50 million in 2001–02 and £100 million in 2002–03 for further education teachers' pay. Proposals for using the money are expected to include improved pay and career structures for high calibre teaching staff. We have also announced our plans to require all new entrants to the FE teaching profession to gain an appropriate qualification, to boost continuing professional development for all staff, and to support increased training for prospective and serving college principals. This will be supported by up to £80 million from the FE standards fund for 2001–02.

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students in further education colleges in *(a)* Halton, *(b)* Cheshire and *(c)* England and Wales failed to complete their courses in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000. [150293]

Mr. Wicks: Data for further education colleges are only readily available for 1997–98 and 1998–99 for FEFC-funded students in England and are contained in the following table.

FEFC-funded students in FE sector colleges in England 1997–98 and 1998–99

	1997–98		*1998–99*	
	Withdrawn students[1]	*Total students*	*Withdrawn students*	*Total students*
Halton District[2]	4,744	22,647	4,327	21,894
Cheshire[3]	6,143	41,233	5,925	41,826
England	367,817	2,578,272	350,063	2,342,671

[1] Those students who do not continue to attend at the end of the qualification or the end of the teaching year (31 July), whichever is sooner (includes all programmes of at least 12 weeks in length).

[2] Halton District includes Widnes Sixth Form College and Halton College.

[3] Cheshire includes West Cheshire College, Warrington Collegiate Institute, Macclesfield College, Mid Cheshire College of FE, Priestley College, Reaseheath College, Sir John Deane's College, South Cheshire College.

Source:

Individualised student record (ISR) 31 December 1998 (1997–98, ISR13); 31 December 1999 (1998–99, ISR16).

Unique Pupil Numbers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 579W, what arrangements will be made to allocate unique pupil numbers to pupils in England who *(a)* commence their education in the non-maintained sector and *(b)* move between maintained and non-maintained sectors during their school career. [150086]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department is discussing with the Independent Schools Council the possibility of the unique pupil number (UPN) system being extended to pupils in independent schools, although no decisions have yet been taken. For as long as it remains the case that UPNs are allocated only to pupils in the maintained sector: *(a)* pupils who commence their education in the non-maintained sector will not during that period have a UPN, but will be allocated one by the first maintained school they enter;

(b) pupils who move between maintained and non-maintained sectors during their school career should be allocated a UPN at the beginning of their first spell in the maintained sector and retain that for each subsequent spell, even though the UPN will be inactive during intervening periods in the non-maintained sector. There is inevitably a risk in these cases of the thread being lost, and new UPNs being allocated to pupils who already have one. However, the central pupil database described in my earlier answer, 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 579W, (ref. 148383) will, once established, be able to provide LEAs and schools with a "tracing service" for lost UPNs.

Teaching Standards (Leeds)

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of teaching was identified as being *(a)* satisfactory or better, *(b)* good or better, *(c)* very good or better and *(d)* excellent in Ofsted reports published on (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in Leeds LEA in each of the last four years. [150106]

Ms Estelle Morris: This is a matter for Ofsted and I have therefore asked HM Chief Inspector of Schools, Mike Tomlinson, to write to my hon. Friend and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

New Deal for Schools (Great Yarmouth)

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the schools in the Great Yarmouth constituency which have received funding under the New Deal for Schools since May 1997, indicating the sums involved in each case. [150188]

Jacqui Smith: The following table shows those schools in the Great Yarmouth constituency which have benefited from investment through the New Deal for Schools programme, which commenced in 1997–98. These allocations formed part of the £16.793 million investment made in schools in the Norfolk local education authority under the New Deal for Schools programme. In total, since 1997, Norfolk local education authority has received some £55.559 million of funding for capital investment in school buildings.

New Deal for Schools—allocations for schools in the Great Yarmouth constituency

Year/school	*Project*	*Grant awarded (£)*
1997–98		
Included within an LEA wide package: Greenacre First and Middle Herman First	Science and technology facilities	[1]1,482,000
Included within an LEA wide package: Alderman Swindell First Herman First	Toilet improvements	
1998–99		
LEA wide package involving 72 schools	Replace deficient heating systems	[2]2,398,880
1999–2000		
Stradbroke Community First	Replacement of school	1,249,138
2000–01		
Included within a 60 school package: Caister-on-Sea Middle	Asbestos removal	[2]968,405
Included within a 14 school package: Peterhouse First Peterhouse Middle	Structural repairs	[2]769,455
Included within a 128 school package: Great Yarmouth VA High Greenacre First and Middle Hopton CE First Oriel High Peterhouse First Waveney CE First	Renewal of mechanical plant	[2]3,467,642
Included within a 113 school package: Caister-on-Sea First Edward Worlledge Middle Great Yarmouth High Greenacre First and Middle Hillside First John Grant School North Denes Middle St. George's First and Nursery	Electrical works	[2]1,169,185

[1] Local education authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the Norfolk LEA. Norfolk local education authority holds project level information.
[2] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. Norfolk local education authority will be able to provide detailed information as to the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

Staffing Costs

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what was the total cost of, and proportion of, total education budget spent, on employing *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching staff in each local education authority in England in the last financial year. [150192]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is set out in the table for 1998–99, the latest year for which data are currently available.

1998–99

	Education authority	*Teaching staff £000*	*Teaching staff as a percentage of net current expenditure*	*Non teaching staff[1] £000*	*Non teaching staff[1] as a percentage of net current expenditure*
201	City of London	521	20.9	588	23.6
202	Camden	38,667	43.2	19,862	22.2
203	Greenwich	62,356	48.9	17,242	13.5
204	Hackney	48,935	43.2	18,875	16.7
205	Hammersmith and Fulham	29,162	42.6	12,303	18.0
206	Islington	43,787	43.4	21,354	21.1
207	Kensington and Chelsea	19,513	38.7	9,247	18.3
208	Lambeth	37,506	37.8	22,982	23.1
209	Lewisham	66,820	51.1	18,631	14.2
210	Southwark	52,665	42.8	29,350	23.9
211	Tower Hamlets	73,289	50.3	29,112	20.0
212	Wandsworth	31,854	36.6	18,607	21.4
213	Westminster	38,347	45.3	14,525	17.2
301	Barking and Dagenham	46,216	52.0	15,063	17.0
302	Barnet	60,794	48.5	19,868	15.8

1998–99

	Education authority	Teaching staff £000	Teaching staff as a percentage of net current expenditure	Non teaching staff £000	Non teaching staff as a percentage of net current expenditure
303	Bexley	49,961	54.9	13,484	14.8
304	Brent	38,715	40.8	15,240	16.1
305	Bromley	34,807	44.2	12,719	16.1
306	Croydon	62,614	49.7	24,294	19.3
307	Ealing	52,795	45.9	18,828	16.4
308	Enfield	63,506	49.8	20,010	15.7
309	Haringey	60,287	48.6	22,337	18.0
310	Harrow	45,014	48.5	15,279	16.5
311	Havering	49,745	57.2	16,154	18.6
312	Hillingdon	31,756	44.7	12,988	18.3
313	Hounslow	56,696	53.9	18,468	17.6
314	Kingston upon Thames	23,472	48.2	8,210	16.9
315	Merton	36,014	50.6	10,764	15.1
316	Newham	75,152	49.9	19,237	12.8
317	Redbridge	63,739	54.7	16,225	13.9
318	Richmond upon Thames	32,002	51.3	9,029	14.5
319	Sutton	31,650	51.1	13,008	21.0
320	Waltham Forest	52,795	48.3	18,417	16.8
330	Birmingham	256,467	50.6	90,494	17.9
331	Coventry	82,641	53.2	27,026	17.4
332	Dudley	66,751	54.0	16,540	13.4
333	Sandwell	71,757	51.1	23,006	16.4
334	Solihull	52,121	55.9	14,618	15.7
335	Walsall	58,638	52.2	15,255	13.6
336	Wolverhampton	61,517	52.7	18,600	15.9
340	Knowsley	40,286	49.8	12,346	15.3
341	Liverpool	110,061	49.2	34,026	15.2
342	St. Helens	44,193	52.6	11,084	13.2
343	Sefton	70,789	52.8	19,200	14.3
344	Wirral	78,411	53.7	21,263	14.6
350	Bolton	65,238	54.0	17,333	14.3
351	Bury	41,151	54.5	11,457	15.2
352	Manchester	108,357	50.4	34,988	16.3
353	Oldham	63,476	55.1	16,805	14.6
354	Rochdale	49,108	53.1	13,259	14.3
355	Salford	55,811	54.0	14,594	14.1
356	Stockport	62,776	53.4	15,233	13.0
357	Tameside	49,345	54.3	11,634	12.8
358	Trafford	38,509	49.8	9,162	11.8
359	Wigan	76,651	55.9	15,720	11.5
370	Barnsley	46,598	53.4	12,044	13.8
371	Doncaster	71,604	53.3	19,188	14.3
372	Rotherham	67,135	55.5	16,814	13.9
373	Sheffield	106,203	54.2	33,031	16.9
380	Bradford	126,557	56.6	43,134	19.3
381	Calderdale	32,317	48.3	10,803	16.1
382	Kirklees	88,973	51.5	26,808	15.5
383	Leeds	165,032	52.1	55,686	17.6
384	Wakefield	73,559	55.4	21,124	15.9
390	Gateshead	45,955	52.6	11,352	13.0
391	Newcastle upon Tyne	61,954	49.4	16,936	13.5
392	North Tyneside	45,254	53.9	10,794	12.9
393	South Tyneside	38,429	53.8	9,112	12.8
394	Sunderland	73,890	57.0	16,571	12.8
420	Isles of Scilly	711	54.0	139	10.6
800	Bath and North East Somerset	35,434	51.6	9,706	14.1
801	City of Bristol	79,044	50.8	28,447	18.3
802	North Somerset	39,996	51.1	11,686	14.9
803	South Gloucestershire	56,342	53.7	15,508	14.8
805	Hartlepool	22,307	51.6	6,273	14.5
806	Middlesbrough	38,115	58.2	11,381	17.4
807	Redcar and Cleveland	34,942	50.8	9,393	13.7
808	Stockton-on-Tees	45,387	53.4	12,484	14.7
810	City of Kingston-upon-Hull	59,508	51.3	18,517	16.0
811	East Riding of Yorkshire	68,761	53.0	17,125	13.2
812	North East Lincolnshire	38,658	51.5	11,566	15.4
813	North Lincolnshire	36,703	51.8	10,309	14.6
815	North Yorkshire	133,155	56.3	25,966	11.0
816	York	35,863	53.4	8,330	12.4
820	Bedfordshire	82,767	54.0	27,112	17.7

1998–99

	Education authority	Teaching staff £000	Teaching staff as a percentage of net current expenditure	Non teaching staff[1] £000	Non teaching staff[1] as a percentage of net current expenditure
821	Luton	40,015	48.9	12,591	15.4
825	Buckinghamshire	93,240	49.8	28,543	15.2
826	Milton Keynes	35,219	46.6	14,156	18.7
830	Derbyshire	134,593	52.8	38,475	15.1
831	Derby	41,776	48.5	13,518	15.7
835	Dorset	70,401	49.7	21,538	15.2
836	Poole	19,628	48.2	5,529	13.6
837	Bournemouth	20,170	43.4	7,824	16.8
840	Durham	116,644	52.9	31,488	14.3
841	Darlington	22,012	53.3	5,716	13.8
845	East Sussex	94,547	51.8	26,522	14.5
846	Brighton and Hove	45,622	50.6	14,058	15.6
850	Hampshire	222,757	51.3	72,733	16.7
851	Portsmouth	33,169	47.8	12,376	17.8
852	Southampton	43,913	51.4	15,060	17.6
855	Leicestershire	136,701	55.2	37,083	15.0
856	Leicester	77,201	54.4	22,184	15.6
857	Rutland	3,092	33.8	1,290	14.1
860	Staffordshire	181,975	55.9	45,205	13.9
861	Stoke on Trent	52,023	50.6	15,360	14.9
865	Wiltshire	59,413	46.2	18,361	14.3
866	Swindon	31,257	51.1	8,587	14.0
867	Bracknell Forest	21,960	51.8	6,002	14.1
868	Windsor and Maidenhead	27,402	52.9	7,824	15.1
869	Newbury	29,222	56 1	6,365	12.2
870	Reading	19,754	44.5	6,584	14.8
871	Slough	20,306	46.4	7,037	16.1
872	Wokingham	34,137	56.9	7,939	13.2
873	Cambridgeshire	91,793	48.0	31,063	16.3
874	Peterborough	31,040	49.5	11,038	17.6
875	Cheshire	147,665	51.6	38,717	13.5
876	Halton	30,699	52.4	7,895	13.5
877	Warrington	44,400	58.2	10,084	13.2
878	Devon	130,551	51.9	35,651	14.2
879	Plymouth	57,701	54.1	15,011	14.1
880	Torbay	24,844	51.7	6,341	13.2
881	Essex	166,308	45.9	56,764	15.7
882	Southend	18,765	46.8	7,022	17.5
883	Thurrock	22,195	50.7	6,672	15.2
884	Herefordshire	34,364	53.3	8,064	12.5
885	Worcestershire	109,779	54.1	26,185	12.9
886	Kent	207,349	47.1	75,331	17.1
887	Rochester and Gillingham	49,860	52.0	16,091	16.8
888	Lancashire	262,922	51.8	70,032	13.8
889	Blackburn	37,585	52.9	11,589	16.3
890	Blackpool	28,397	53.5	7,392	13.9
891	Nottinghamshire	167,345	52.8	48,445	15.3
892	Nottingham City	56,939	47.9	19,672	16.5
893	Shropshire	58,051	53.3	14,430	13.2
894	The Wrekin	28,827	49.1	9,043	15.4
908	Cornwall	102,228	51.0	25,683	12.8
909	Cumbria	87,797	48.9	27,457	15.3
916	Gloucestershire	74,728	47.1	24,557	15.5
919	Hertfordshire	212,267	53.8	61,002	15.5
921	Isle of Wight Council	29,058	51.6	8,598	15.3
925	Lincolnshire	94,990	48.1	26,522	13.4
926	Norfolk	153,116	56.4	39,740	14.6
928	Northamptonshire	124,693	53.0	31,027	13.2
929	Northumberland	72,714	53.6	17,360	12.8
931	Oxfordshire	120,747	52.1	33,759	14.6
933	Somerset	98,827	52.4	31,455	16.7
935	Suffolk	155,685	57.7	32,794	12.2
936	Surrey	163,754	49.9	54,842	16.7
937	Warwickshire	100,014	52.9	28,911	15.3
938	West Sussex	156,561	54.2	39,873	13.8
All local education authorities		10,249,066	51.4	3,069,342	15.4

[1] Non teaching staff expenditure covers education support staff, premises-related staff, administration and clerical staff

Professional Footballers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what representations he has received regarding the evasion of work permit regulations by overseas footballers wishing to play professionally in the UK. [150257]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Department has received no representations regarding the evasion of work permit regulations by overseas footballers wishing to play professionally in the UK.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions his Department has had with other Departments relating to the evasion of work permit regulations by overseas footballers wishing to play professionally in the UK. [150258]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Department has had no discussions with other Departments relating to the evasion of work permit regulations by overseas footballers wishing to play professionally in the UK. The Home Office is responsible for deciding whether overseas nationals may enter the country to work based on the passport they hold or whether they require a work permit.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

House of Lords Appointments Commission

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council how many people are employed by the House of Lords Appointments Commission; how many are on fixed-term contracts; and what the annual running costs of the Commission is. [146277]

Mrs. Beckett: I understand that the Appointments Commission employs no one directly. It is supported by a small team of civil servants, none of whom is on a fixed-term contract. Its budget for running costs for 2000–01 is about £300,000.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

House Stationery

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chairman of the Administration Committee how many hon. Members have been requested to make payments for prepaid House of Commons envelopes which have not been used in accordance with the rules of the House; and how many hon. Members have been ordered to make such payments following complaints since May 1997. [150348]

Mrs. Roe: Supervision and enforcement of the regulations for the use of House stationery and post-paid envelopes are a matter for the Serjeant at Arms. I have asked him to write to my hon. Friend.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Levy

Mrs. Gillian: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the business interests that Lord Levy would be required to register were he a Minister. [145326]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 15 January 2001]:* Lord Levy is not a Minister.

Council Housing (London)

Q13. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Prime Minister what plans the Government have to increase the supply of council housing in London. [148807]

The Prime Minister: We are almost doubling the budget for development of new social housing in London over the next three years with total planned expenditure of £1 billion. We are also helping key workers to purchase homes in London and other high house price areas through our new Starter Homes Initiative.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will amend the Ministerial Code of Conduct in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [148660]

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will amend the Ministerial Code of Conduct in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [148780]

Mr. Green: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will amend the Ministerial Code of Conduct in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [148782]

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will amend the Ministerial Code of Conduct in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [148779]

Mr. Gray: To ask the Prime Minister if the Government will amend the Ministerial Code of Conduct in line with the recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. [148788]

The Prime Minister: The Government's response to the sixth report from the Committee on Standards in Public Life, published in July 2000 (Cm 4817), set out my position on amendment to the Ministerial Code.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister if the special advisers working *(a)* in his Private Office, *(b)* in the Policy Unit, *(c)* in the Strategic Communications Unit, *(d)* in the Research and Information Unit, *(e)* in the Social Office and *(f)* under a dispensation granted by an Order in Council in May 1997 will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149276]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Official Histories

Dr. Desmond Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if any further official histories have been commissioned. [150690]

The Prime Minister: I have appointed Dr. Terence R. Gourvish, Director of the Business History Unit of the London School of Economics and Political Science, as an official historian to write the official history of the Channel Tunnel.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Education

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the Government's plans to improve prison education and training. [150463]

Mr. Boateng: I have today made a joint announcement with my right hon. and noble Friend the Minister for Education and Employment, establishing a new partnership between the Department for Education and Employment and the Prison Service. From 1 April this new partnership will be responsible for securing improvements in the education, training and resettlement of prisoners.

Our plans for the partnership are outlined in "Improving Prisoners' Learning and Skills", published today, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Overseas Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to ensure that employers are aware of the provisions enabling overseas students to work while studying in the United Kingdom, with particular reference to overcoming difficulties where such students apply for work before they have been issued with a national insurance number; and if he will make a statement. [150077]

Mrs. Roche: Information about the eligibility of overseas students to take employment is available on the Home Office and Department for Education and Employment websites, and in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate information leaflet on overseas students.

Essex Constabulary

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on *(a)* total number of new recruits who have joined Essex police and *(b)* total number of police officers who have retired from the Essex constabulary between 1 April 2000 and the latest date for which figures are available. [148700]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* Between 1 April 2000 and 30 September 2000, 103 officers joined Essex police; 97 of these were in the rank of constable. During the same period 53 officers retired from the force. The force's total wastage for this period amounted to 80 officers.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149315]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Staffordshire Constabulary

Mr. Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* uniformed police constables, *(b)* uniformed police sergeants, *(c)* uniformed police officers above the rank of sergeant, *(d)* police detective constables, *(e)* police detective sergeants and *(f)* police detectives above the rank of sergeant, there were in the Staffordshire constabulary (i) in May 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures are available. [148154]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* Information on police service personnel numbers is collected twice a year in March and September. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary collects information annually on 31 March about the number of officers deployed to different functions.

The information on detective numbers has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate. The inspectorate made changes to its classification system for different police functions in 1999–2000. It is not therefore possible to identify from the new classification the number of officers that would have been classified as Criminal Investigation Department (CID) under the old rules and who are now recorded under other classifications. The change in classification accounts for some of the reduction in CID strength. The information in the tables has therefore been provided on the basis of non-CID officer numbers and CID officer numbers for March 1997 and March 2000.

Staffordshire police (i) Non-CID officers (full-time equivalent)

	31 March 1997	*31 March 2000*
Constables	1,415.5	1,518.7
Sergeants	285.2	289.2
Other ranks	157	131

Staffordshire police (ii) CID officers (full-time equivalent)

	31 March 1997	*31 March 2000*
Constables	268.4	153.6
Sergeants	59	45.8
Other ranks	26	19

Mobile Police Stations

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what specific role mobile police stations will play in reducing crime; if they will replace *(a)* officers on the beat and *(b)* high-speed police cars; and if he will make a statement. [149452]

Mr. Charles Clarke: A number of forces are using mobile police stations for increased visibility and accessibility, to reduce fear of crime, to enhance policing in rural areas, and as mobile custody units.

I strongly support this, and other, imaginative initiatives taking their place alongside beat officers and police vehicles as part of an overall approach to meeting local policing needs.

North Yorkshire Police

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement reconciling the figures for numbers of North Yorkshire police in *(a)* the answer of the Minister of State, Home Office, the hon. Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke), of 18 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 352W, and *(b)* the recent press statement made by North Yorkshire Police Authority. [148953]

Mr. Charles Clarke: At 30 September 2000 North Yorkshire police had 1,293 officers.

The Chief Constable of North Yorkshire police has advised me that for March 2002 the force projects that it will have increased its numbers to 1,420 police officers. This figure was announced by the force in its press statement of 9 January.

This increase includes 43 officers to be recruited through the Crime Fighting Fund, 60 officers to be recruited through the Rural Policing Fund, the remainder being part of normal planned force recruitment.

Police Expenditure

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the levels of spending on police services in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [148296]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information is set out in the table.

Police force net expenditure in England 1997–98 to 2000–01

£000

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Avon and Somerset	152,673	162,726	174,336	181,210
Bedfordshire	58,570	61,778	63,611	66,426
Cambridgeshire	68,681	73,432	75,052	79,244
Cheshire	104,005	107,093	113,280	114,576
City of London	57,893	60,350	57,852	58,947
Cleveland	75,426	81,295	85,256	85,600
Cumbria	61,709	62,532	64,786	67,400
Derbyshire	95,641	100,064	105,590	110,819
Devon and Cornwall	155,435	166,330	175,055	182,873
Dorset	69,727	73,117	76,957	80,996
Durham	75,166	74,673	79,662	85,775
Essex	157,487	156,822	167,969	184,485
Gloucestershire	58,633	62,862	65,755	68,695
Greater Manchester	353,319	354,171	374,804	400,004
Hampshire	180,791	186,661	197,483	202,527
Hertfordshire	93,011	95,068	104,448	120,945
Humberside	106,220	112,571	113,944	119,900
Kent	174,211	175,577	186,261	193,127
Lancashire	169,275	177,310	182,004	190,181
Leicestershire	98,789	102,790	107,262	110,150
Lincolnshire	66,184	66,664	69,378	75,725
Merseyside	224,327	240,267	248,414	257,114
Metropolitan	1,676,617	1,716,425	1,838,888	1,837,571
Norfolk	80,222	80,543	87,182	91,514
Northamptonshire	64,605	67,057	69,148	73,076
Northumbria	195,092	205,270	212,704	218,387
North Yorkshire	71,840	75,344	78,178	83,750
Nottinghamshire	120,556	127,018	129,465	134,302
South Yorkshire	166,027	167,159	176,007	181,054
Staffordshire	110,264	116,231	127,000	126,964
Suffolk	63,676	66,096	70,506	74,061
Surrey	90,976	91,425	100,094	120,130
Sussex	157,631	161,847	165,564	172,513
Thames Valley	210,333	209,675	227,020	236,952
Warwickshire	51,003	52,015	55,164	59,011
West Mercia	107,788	113,755	111,446	125,700
West Midlands	360,129	368,608	381,484	395,102
West Yorkshire	281,745	277,994	286,088	304,125
Wiltshire	58,535	68,811	69,823	71,981
England total	6,524,212	6,719,426	7,074,920	7,339,912

Source:
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Statistics Actuals for 1997–98 to 1999–2000 and Estimates for 2000–01

Prison Governors

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list those prison establishments in which there have been changes at governor level, including changes involving those acting as governor for one month or more, over the last five years, the date upon which each such change took place, the name of the governor leaving and the name of his or her replacement in each case. [147561]

Mr. Boateng: I will write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the Library.

Police Officers (Hertsmere)

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers have been available for duty in the Hertsmere police division in each year since 1992. [150048]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that before the boundary changes with the Hertfordshire constabulary on 1 April 2000 Hertsmere was part of the Barnet division. It is not possible to identify separately the number of police officers who policed Hertsmere.

I am told by the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire that for the financial year 2000–01 the Hertsmere division has an establishment of 139 police officers. On 31 January 2001 the actual number of officers available to police Hertsmere was 131 officers.

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if it is his policy for a record note to be kept of representations made by Ministers about an individual application for naturalisation; [149579]

(2) if it is his policy that a note recording the interest of *(a)* a Minister and *(b)* an hon. Member in an individual application for naturalisation should be placed on the relevant case file. [149573]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Correspondence from any source about individual applications for naturalisation would be recorded on the relevant case file or on an associated file.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department at what level within his Department an application for naturalisation is normally determined. [149578]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The level at which naturalisation applications are determined varies according to the nature and complexity of the case. The majority, however, are decided by administrative officer caseworkers.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria govern whether an application for naturalisation is referred for personal determination by *(a)* the Secretary of State and *(b)* a Minister. [149574]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Applications are referred to Ministers if they are likely to be controversial or sensitive or if they raise complex issues or questions of security. Whether the Secretary of State will decide an application will depend on the circumstances of the individual case, although he will see referrals where the key issue is one concerning security.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the systematic detention of asylum seekers coming directly from their country of origin or an unsafe third country with the 1951 UN convention on refugees and the 1999 UNHCR guidelines on applicable criteria and standards relating to the detention of asylum seekers; and if he will make a statement. [149548]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Detention of asylum seekers is used as a last resort and no one is detained simply because he or she has claimed asylum. However, detention may be appropriate in the following circumstances; in order to establish identity or basis of claim; where there are reasonable grounds for believing that the subject will fail to comply with the terms of temporary admission or release; or where removal is imminent.

Unaccompanied children are detained only in the most exceptional circumstances. We are therefore satisfied that our detention policy is consistent with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees criteria.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) by what criteria the applications of asylum seekers are judged by the Government; and if he will list them; [149919]

(2) on what basis an individual asylum seeker is judged to be *(a)* an economic migrant and *(b)* a refugee. [149917]

Mrs. Roche: All asylum applications, regardless of the applicant's nationality, are considered in accordance with the criteria set out in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees. To qualify for asylum a person must be outside his/her country of nationality and have a well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion. Those who meet these criteria are granted asylum; those who do not meet the requirements of the 1951 convention may nevertheless be granted exceptional leave to remain in the United Kingdom if there are exceptional compelling humanitarian reasons why they should not be required to leave.

Those who do not qualify for asylum or exceptional leave to remain and have no other basis on which to remain are required to leave the United Kingdom. The process for considering an asylum claim does not involve us taking a view on whether an applicant is an "economic migrant".

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means the United Kingdom Government ensures the welfare of asylum seekers who are not permanently admitted into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [149918]

Mrs. Roche: The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 introduced new support arrangements for asylum seekers. Under these new arrangements all new eligible destitute asylum seekers may be supported by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS). This support is mainly in kind and includes accommodation where requested. Asylum seekers whose claims have been finally determined as unfounded are not eligible for NASS support. However, families with children under the age of 18 will be supported by NASS until they leave the country.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the process by which decisions are made on the applications of asylum-seekers in the United Kingdom, including the reference to the officials who are responsible for the decisions. [149920]

Mrs. Roche: All applications for asylum are considered by specially trained officers in the Immigration and Nationality Directorate of the Home Office.

The officers consider applications against the criteria set out in the 1951 United Nations convention relating to the status of refugees; each claim is examined individually on its merits. The caseworking officers have access to detailed country assessments to support them when considering asylum claims.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to send the result of the decisions on asylum for *(a)* Mr. M. (HO Ref: RV181199167) and *(b)* Mr. A. (HO Ref: A522615). [149758]

Mrs. Roche: *(a)* Mr. M. will shortly be invited to attend an interview in Liverpool during the week commencing 5 March. A decision will be made as soon as is practicable thereafter.

(b) Mr. A. was granted indefinite leave to remain on 12 February and will shortly be notified of this decision.

I am sorry for the delay in informing my hon. Friend's constituents of the progress of their cases.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of asylum applicants who have been refused refugee status or exceptional leave to remain sought to appeal against that decision in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [150047]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The information is not available in the form requested. In the year 2000, there were 78,180 initial decisions to refuse asylum and exceptional leave to remain. Also in the year 2000, there were 46,190 appeals lodged with the Home Office. However, these appeals will not all necessarily relate to decisions made in the same year. These figures are subject to revision.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken for asylum applicants to receive an initial decision on their asylum application is; and if he will make a statement. [150046]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Although 2000 statistics are not yet available, the average time taken to reach an initial decision in December 2000 is estimated to have been 13 months.

Graffiti

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to issue new guidelines to spray-paint manufacturers and retailers to encourage them to minimise sales to minors who intend to use the spray for graffiti. [149603]

Mr. Charles Clarke: We have no plans to issue guidelines on this issue.

Leicestershire Police Authority

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in post in Leicestershire police authority in each year between 1996–97 and the last year for which figures are available. [150023]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is set out in the table. The latest figures available are those for 30 September 2000.

Leicestershire Constabulary

Year[1]	*Number of police officers*
1996–97	1,949
1997–98	1,983
1998–99	1,993
1999–2000	1,993
2000–01[2]	2,010

[1] As at 31 March
[2] As at 30 September 2000

Crime Statistics (Cheshire)

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the level of *(a)* violent crime, *(b)* theft of vehicles, *(c)* thefts from vehicles, *(d)* house burglaries and *(e)* vandalism was in Cheshire in each year from 1997 to 2000. [149662]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The details covering this period are given in the table. Owing to the change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, direct comparisons cannot be made between the data for before and after this date. However, for England and Wales as a whole, it has been estimated that the change in counting rules increased the number violent of crimes counted by 83 per cent., thefts of and from vehicles by 1 per cent., all burglaries by 0.1 per cent. and criminal damage by 5 per cent.

Recorded crime Cheshire

Offences	*Years ending*				
	March 1997	*March 1998*	*March 1999*	*March 2000*	*September 2000*
Total violent crime[1]	4,496	4,733	7,623	6,645	6,400
Burglary in a dwelling	7,423	6,248	5,925	5,379	5,518
Theft from vehicle	8,667	8,076	7,492	7,582	7,667
Theft or unauthorised taking of motor vehicle	6,095	5,311	4,955	4,594	4,776
Criminal damage (including arson)	11,755	11,219	11,596	12,627	13,050

[1] Includes violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery

Police Expenditure

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 22 January, *Official Report*, column 490W, on police expenditure, what the change in central Government expenditure on policing was in total and in real terms in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [148583]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* The information is set out in the table.

In my previous reply of 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 490W, the percentage change in real terms for net expenditure by police authorities in 1995–96 compared with the previous year should read "–0.3 per cent", not 0.3 per cent.

Government provision 1990–91 to 2003–04

	Police SSA £ million	*Home Office provision £ million*	*Total £ million*	*Percentage change in real terms*

Government provision 1990–91 to 2003–04

	Police SSA £ million	*Home Office provision £ million*	*Total £ million*	*Percentage change in real terms*
1990–91	[1]2,125	2,483	[1]4,608	—
1991–92	[1]2,342	2,901	[1]5,243	[1]7.2
1992–93	[1]2,671	3,088	[1]5,759	[1]6.4
1993–94	[1]2,788	3,279	[1]6,067	[1]2.6
1994–95	[1]2,909	3,389	[1]6,298	[1]2.4
1995–96	3,081	3,586	6,667	c. 0.5
1996–97	3,167	3,654	6,821	–0.9
1997–98	3,259	2,765	7,024	0.1
1998–99	3,310	3,923	7,233	0.1
1999–2000	3,447	3,992	7,439	0.5
2000–01	3,533	4,185	7,718	1/7
2001–02	3,842	4,653	8,495	7.4
2002–03	4,041	4,969	9,010	3.5

Government provision 1990–91 to 2003–04

	Police SSA £ million	*Home Office provision £ million*	*Total £ million*	*Percentage change in real terms*
2003–04	4,205	5,088	9,293	0.6

[1] Before 1995–96 Welsh SSAs were unhypothecated at county level and payments to police authorities in Wales were agreed by constituent counties. SSAs for Welsh police authorities are included in the table only from 1995–96, in which year they were £160 million.

Notes:

1. Home Office provision is grant/special grant, capital grant, credit approvals and central Home Office spending.
2. Real terms figures are shown at 1999–2000 prices using GDP deflator at December 2000.

Police Vehicles (Black Boxes)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police forces fit black boxes to their vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [148939]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on police forces fitting black box recorders to their vehicles is not held centrally.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judges' Lodgings

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will *(a)* make a statement on progress of her review of judges' lodgings and *(b)* publish the report when it is completed. [150001]

Jane Kennedy: Consultation between the Lord Chancellor and the Judiciary on the review continues.

The Lord Chancellor intends to publish his decisions along with the report when the review is completed.

TREASURY

Budget

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he intends to deliver his Budget Statement. [150794]

Mr. Gordon Brown: On Wednesday 7 March.

Chester Street Insurance Holdings

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what steps his Department can take to safeguard payouts to sufferers from asbestos-related diseases following the collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited; [147296]

(2) if he will make a statement on his Department's policy following the collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited in respect of protecting the interests of sufferers from asbestos-related diseases; [147310]

(3) what discussions he is having with *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* the financial services industry following the collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited; [147297]

(4) what action he is taking to ensure that those *(a)* who worked for publicly owned enterprises and have an asbestos-related disease and *(b)* with asbestos-related diseases relating to pre-1972 exposure, do not suffer adversely from the collapse of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited. [148916]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answers 29 January 2001]:* The Government understand the concern of those suffering from asbestos-related disease as a consequence of employment in firms whose employees' liability insurance is provided by Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited.

As a consequence of the insolvency of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited, provisional liquidators were appointed on 10 January 2001. At a meeting on 5 February a scheme of arrangement was agreed by creditors.

The Government expect the Policyholders Protection Board to work closely with the provisional liquidators and others to ensure claims are processed promptly; and that the PPB will ensure the provisions of the Policyholders Protection Act 1975 are implemented fully.

HM Treasury is monitoring the position by keeping in close touch with other Departments, the Policyholders Protection Board, the FSA and relevant parts of the financial services industry.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what role his Department played in the restructuring of the Iron Trades Employers Association and the transfer of asbestos-related risks to Chester Street Insurance Holdings in 1989; [148914]

(2) if he will name the regulatory bodies that have been responsible for monitoring the affairs of the Iron Trades Employers Insurance Association Limited and Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited since 1989; and what *(a)* actions they have taken and *(b)* reports they have made to him in that time. [149363]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The prudential supervision of insurance companies was the responsibility of the Department of Trade and Industry until 4 January 1998. On 5 January 1998, these functions transferred to the Treasury. On 1 January 1999, the Financial Services Authority became the prudential supervisor under a contracting-out order.

HM Treasury had no responsibility for the re-organisation of the Iron Trades Insurance Group in 1989 and, as far as I am aware, did not play any part in this.

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer who will represent the Government at the creditors' meeting of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited on 5 February to safeguard interests of sufferers from asbestos-related diseases. [148703]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* The Government are not creditors and hence were not present at the meeting on 5 February. A representative of the FSA, as prudential supervisor of Chester Street Insurance Holdings Limited, had observer status at the meeting.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the revenue yield of *(a)* reducing the value below which inheritance tax is not levied by (i) £10,000 and (ii) £20,000 and *(b)* restricting the value of the personal allowance to (1) the basic rate and (2) 10 per cent. [146250]

Dawn Primarolo: The revenue yield from reducing the value above which inheritance tax would otherwise be levied can be estimated, for increases or decreases of this order of magnitude, from Table 5 of the Tax Ready Reckoner. The Tax Ready Reckoner, November 2000, is in the House of Commons Library.

There is no personal allowance for inheritance tax but the cost of the threshold, below which no tax is paid, is given in Table 7 of the Tax Ready Reckoner.

All-employee Share Ownership Scheme

Helen Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many companies have taken up the new all-employee share ownership scheme; and if he will make a statement. [150095]

Mr. Timms: The all-employee share ownership plan was introduced last year when Royal Assent was given to the Finance Bill 2000. Companies have been going live with their plans since September 2000.

In the first six months, 262 companies have sent in plans to the Inland Revenue.

Government Expenditure

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 681W, if items described as Government spending can simultaneously be described as Government investment. [150186]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government's main measure of public expenditure is Total Managed Expenditure (TME). TME is described in chapters 1 and 4 of Public Expenditure Statistical Analysis 2000–01 (Cm 4601).

Opposition Policies (Costings)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 24 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 647–48W, on opposition policies, (1) on what occasions the Treasury has initiated such costings; and if he will make a statement; [147952]

(2) on what occasions since January 2000 the Treasury has been consulted by other departments on the costings of opposition party policies. [147953]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 24 January. The Treasury and other Departments have from time to time costed Opposition policies, and this will have involved discussions between the Treasury and other Departments. The procedure followed is consistent with the principles and practice established by previous Administrations.

CABINET OFFICE

Correspondence

3. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress her office has made in encouraging Ministers to reply to letters from hon. Members more quickly. [148767]

Mr. Stringer: All Departments are working hard to improve their handling of hon. Members' correspondence. We are currently collating information on the performance of Departments during the 2000 calendar year and will report back to the House in due course.

Drugs (Young People)

10. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on her Department's response to recent developments in drugs misuse among young people. [148774]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government's Anti-Drugs Strategy has set a challenging target of halving the numbers of young people using illegal drugs by 2008, and we will back this by increasing spending in this area to £120 million by 2003–04.

In south Cheshire, research from John Moores University on young people's drug use in the area is under way, which will provide a local baseline and identify gaps in provision.

Public Sector Team

11. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the work of the public sector team. [148775]

Mr. Stringer: The public sector team was set up within the Cabinet Offices's Regulatory Impact Unit in November 1999. Its broad remit is to reduce bureaucracy and red tape in the public sector.

In little over a year the team has, in partnership with relevant Government Departments and other stakeholders, taken action to reduce the paperwork burden on the police and head teachers. The estimated savings are 187,000 hours of police time every year, which is equivalent to 100 police officers' standard working hours—employing that many additional officers would cost around £5.5 million; and 4.5 million hours per year across the whole schools system. This equates to over 200 hours every year for a typical school.

The team will shortly be publishing the interim outcomes of its project on reducing GP paperwork.

Drugs Trade

13. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she has met Government Ministers from south American countries to co-ordinate international anti-drug policies. [148778]

Marjorie Mowlam: The United Kingdom is active throughout Latin America in supporting the efforts that countries there are making to combat drugs and poverty.

Last year I visited Colombia and Brazil where I discussed with the Presidents of both countries how we can help in addressing the problems of illicit drug production and trafficking in these countries.

The UK also plays an active role in the EU/Latin America/Caribbean Action Plan on Drugs and Co-ordination and Co-operation Mechanism.

17. **Helen Jones:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress is being made in international efforts to combat the drugs trade. [148785]

Marjorie Mowlam: The UK is active in international forums, including the UN, G8 and EU, to strengthen the global framework for tackling illicit drugs trafficking. In the year 2000 we were the third largest donor to the United Nations International Drug Control Programme. Ministers and the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator have also been active in supporting anti-drugs efforts in some of the countries which have the most serious problems with the production or transit of illegal drugs.

Progress is being seen in increased seizures of heroin and cocaine en-route to the UK/EU, and increased disruption of criminal groups involved in trafficking.

Drug Use

14. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what new steps are under consideration in the Government's campaign to combat drug misuse. [148781]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government's future proposals for tackling drug misuse are outlined in the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator's second national plan, published last year.

Measures include:

Internationally:

to support international partners by disrupting production and trafficking of illegal drugs to reduce the availability of controlled drugs entering the UK

Nationally:

to establish the National Treatment Agency from 1 April 2001 to ensure delivery of high quality treatment services across the country

from spring 2001 to pilot three sites for extending drug testing across the criminal justice system to complement the existing Arrest Referral Schemes and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders.

Locally:

we are reorganising the Drug Action Teams (DATs) in England to align with local authority boundaries.

The drugs strategy is underpinned by forward expenditure of up to £1 billion by 2003–04 as part of the Spending Review 2000.

16. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the progress of the Government's anti-drugs policy. [148784]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator published his annual report for 1999–2000 on 7 November 2000.

The report shows that we are making progress towards meeting the challenging targets we have set as part of our 10-year anti-drugs strategy. Most of our annual targets were met in full and we are on track to deliver published targets for 2002.

On the Wirral there have been considerable improvements in the treatment services available to drug users, including a significant reduction in waiting lists for treatment. In recent months a needs assessment of the need of young people has been completed and a plan of action is being developed to meet the gaps in provision identified in the report. People needing advice and other assistance because of their drug use are likely to approach the Response Service based in Birkenhead, Wirral Drug Services, which includes a specialist service for young people and/or the Wirral Solvent Misuse Project.

23. **Shona McIsaac:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the progress of the Government's anti-drugs policy. [148792]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator published his annual report for 1999–2000 on 7 November 2000.

The report shows that we are making progress towards meeting the challenging targets we have set as part our 10-year anti-drugs strategy. Most of our annual targets were met in full and we are on track to deliver published targets for 2002.

Within the Cleethorpes area, a number of initiatives are in place which address the needs of young people and drug misuse. These include training programmes for professionals working with young people; advice and information offered as part of a 'Nightclub' project; and a young people's conference to address drugs issues.

24. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the impact of the Government's national drugs strategy has been in *(a)* Slough and *(b)* other towns on the periphery of London. [148793]

Mr. Ian McCartney: We are making good progress nationwide in all areas of the Government's anti-drugs strategy as reported in the UK Anti-Drugs Co-ordinator's annual report for 1999–2000, published on 7 November 2000. Effective delivery of the straegy at local level is essential if we are to succeed. In support of this, we are realigning Drug Action Teams along local authority boundaries. This means that Slough now has its own DAT. This should help address local priorities such as outreach services for young misuses; and develop better links with other outer-London Boroughs, which are far more similar in terms of drug and social exclusion issues, than the majority of Berkshire.

Commonwealth Games

15. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Mnister for the Cabinet Office if she will make a statement on the progress on the non-sport programme for the Commonwealth games in 2002. [148783]

Mr. Ian McCartney: There are two key non-sporting initiatives associated with the Manchester 2002 Games—the Volunteer Programme and the nationwide Spirit of Friendship Festival. Good progress is being made on both.

The Spirit of Friendship Festival has appointed a national director, Jo Hartley, to work with all relevant agencies to deliver a successful nationwide festival of education, sport and culture.

The Festival will embrace the modern Commonwealth's values of fairness and inclusivity and engage the nation from its start on Commonwealth Day, 11 March 2002, until 10 August 2002.

The volunteer programme is also well under way with plans for the recruitment of 15,000 volunteers in place and recruitment generally beginning in May.

Drug Rehabilitation Programmes

25. **Mr. Paul Clark:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much has been allocated for anti-drug treatment services in each of the next three years. [148794]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Government recognise that treatment services can have a vital role in reducing the damaging effects of drug abuse on a person's health as well as reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

Through the spending review we have allocated an additional £167 million for drug treatment services over three years from 2001–02. The table gives the breakdown of spending in each of the next three years.

	Drug treatment (£ million)
2000–01	234
2001–02	328
2002–03	377
2003–04	401

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what assessment she has made of the impact on South Ribble of her Department's policy to improve access to drug rehabilitation programmes. [148773]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The Arrest Referral Programme for South Ribble has been implemented since August 2000. Between August 2000 and January 2001 a total of 230 individuals have been referred to local services under the Programme.

Chorley and South Ribble District Drug Service offer access to rehabilitation, and the South Ribble Drug Action Group is now in the process of implementing a treatment programme. The money made available from the last spending review will increase service capacity, GP shared care and child-specific services within the area.

People's Panel

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what policy initiatives of her Department have been tested on the people's panel; and with what result. [148786]

Mr. Stringer: The People's Panel is directed towards service delivery more than policy questions. But research has been used to inform various policy initiatives. Within the Cabinet Office it has contributed to the following:

Consumer Focus for Public Services

The fifth wave of research, published in September 2000, was carried out to support the consumer focus for public services initiative by establishing a baseline for public satisfaction and expectations of public services in different sectors.

Policy in Deprived Areas

The Social Exclusion Unit in the Cabinet Office commissioned a re-analysis of data from the first wave of research to examine responses from people living in deprived areas, to determine how they differed from those living in other areas. The results were also published in September 2000.

Public service provision and ethnic minority communities:

In June 2000, the results of a first wave of research with the recruitment of an ethnic minority booster to the Panel were published. These show what people from ethnic minority communities think of the services they receive and how their opinions differ across and between different ethnic minority groups. Future research will be used by Government to help improve services.

Extended Hours Provision of Public Services

Research carried out in 1999 asked which out-of-hours services people wanted access to; what sort of business they would use them for; when they would want to be able to make contact; and how. The results were published in April 2000. "Making it happen: public services at your convenience" was published in September 2000 showing how the five key services (non-emergency services in NHS hospitals, GP surgeries, social services, the Passport Agency, and local government services) identified in the research were making service hours more convenient for their customers.

Notifying Change of Address On-line

In January 1999, the Panel was used to assess reactions to a proposal for enabling electronic notification of change of address details to be passed to Government Departments in one transaction. Panel members joined workshops testing out the technology. The results were published in April 2000. In November 2000, a pilot change of address service was developed on the UK online citizen portal www.ukonline.gov.uk which allows people to send new address details to participating Government Departments, as well as those utility and other commercial organisations offered by the change of address providers.

Listening to Women

During January and February 1999, the People's Panel was used as part of the Listening to Women exercise which, among other things, has been used to inform and influence Government Departments on the needs of women as decisions have been taken to modernise public services.

Modernising Government

In February 1999, the People's Panel was used to find out about the experiences of citizens using public services to evaluate how well Departments and agencies work together to deliver a joined-up service, and identify suggestions for improvement. The work was commissioned as part of the research for the Modernising Government White Paper.

Access Pages

Research was carried out in August 1999 to help the Cabinet Office prepare a new directory that brings together information for the main Government helplines and websites. The directory was published in October 1999.

Internet

19. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what her policy is regarding the provision of Government internet services in languages other than English. [148787]

Mr. Stringer: My policy is that Departments must fulfil their obligations under the Welsh Language Act 1993, and our "Guidelines for Government Websites" make that very clear.

I have always made it clear to Departments that I expect them to publish, where effective, in other languages spoken in the UK.

I am pleased to confirm that the newly revised "Guidelines to Government Websites" is clarifying this policy.

Special Advisers

20. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance she has issued to Government Departments relating to the duties of special advisers and press officers. [148789]

Marjorie Mowlam: The duties of special advisers are set out in the "Model Contract for Special Advisers". The duties of Government press officers are set out in "Guidance on the work of the Government Information Service" and "The GICS Handbook".

Copies of these documents are in the Library of the House.

22. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what criteria determine the number of special advisers Government Departments may appoint. [148791]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Government's response to the Sixth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, published in July 2000 (Cm 4807), sets out the Government's policy on the appointment of special advisers.

Policy Presentation

21. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent initiatives her Department has introduced to co-ordinate the presentation of Government policy. [148790]

Marjorie Mowlam: My Department has several initiatives in place to co-ordinate the presentation of Government policy.

The first is the appointment of communications advisers who work alongside policy officials on the development of cross-government initiatives. They ensure that the communication of Government policy is considered from the outset and that clear information and explanations are provided for the public.

My Department is also responsible for the News Co-ordination Centre. The NCC has two functions. The first is to co-ordinate the Government's media handling during major crises such as last year's floods.

It also has a role in ensuring that for major announcements proper attention is given to the regional media. This is done by means of regional announcements and ministerial visits.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 15 February 2001

DEFENCE

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000 and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149261]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 June 2000, *Official Report*, column 135W, to the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Mr. Loughton) on a similar subject. The information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, excluding recruitment costs, the table gives details of expenditure against areas identified.

£ million

	Financial year				
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
PR Marketing and business support service	0.733	0.502	0.844	1.114	2.834
Central PR Services	2.243	2.267	2.328	2.741	2.183
National Employers Liaison Committee (Tri-Service Reserve Forces)	1.098	1.089	1.055	0.877	1.000
Scholarships	10.730	4.720	4.371	0.751	0.700
Sales Promotion (DESO)	1.408	3.299	1.064	1.819	1.600

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals there are to amend his Department's Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01. [151190]

Mr. Hoon: The Government have decided that, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class VI Vote 1 Defence for 2000–01, the following change should apply:

the Ministry of Defence Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £781.341 million from £22,820.341 million to £23,601.683 million.

This will cover additional expenditure incurred by UK forces on operations in Kosovo and Bosnia during the current financial year of £220 million and £100 million respectively and Sierra Leone at just under £8 million. The figure also includes full take-up of the Ministry of Defence's entitlement to end year flexibility of £241 million plus additional funding from the 2000 spending review (£200 million) and for capital and civil service modernisation (£10 million). There are also a number of transfers between MOD, DETR, DfEE, FCO and Cabinet Office.

The Supplementary Estimates will also provide for changes in the general pattern of expenditure, including adjustments between the Defence Procurement Agency's equipment programme and operating costs programmes.

As the increase in the defence expenditure limit will be met from the reserve, it will not add to the planned total of public expenditure in the current year.

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many serving medical officers in each specialty are not fully fit for deployment; for what reasons; and if he will make a statement. [149892]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The medical downgrading categorisation system with the armed forces covers a wide range of different levels of medical downgrading. Personnel recorded as medically downgraded may still, therefore, be capable of undertaking their full duties, albeit with restrictions, for example to their geographical location. To give an indication of this, of the 42 Army personnel included in the totals, only seven are assessed to be undeployable. Against this background, the number of medical officers, including trainees, who are medically precluded from unlimited deployment is shown by speciality. The particular nature of medical downgrading could not be provided without disproportionate effort.

Number of medical officers medically precluded from unlimited deployment

Specialty	*Number*
Anaesthetics	7
General Medicine	5
Orthodontics	1
Paediatrics	1
Psychiatry	7
Occupational Medicine	10
General Duties Medical Officers	2
General Practice	29
Genito-Urinary Medicine	1
General Surgery	3
Rheumatology and Rehabilitation	1
Public Health Medicine	1
Pathology	1
House Officers	7

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military medical posts in each of the specialties in defence of secondary care are filled by civilian doctors; what percentage of the establishment figure for each specialty this represents; and if he will make a statement. [149893]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* I will write to the right hon. and learned Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Chinook Crash

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many helicopters, broken down by type, other than Chinooks, were stationed in Northern Ireland in May and June 1994; and where they were based; [150405]

(2) what other helicopters were available at the base in Northern Ireland from which Chinook DZ 576 departed on its last flight on 2 June 1994; how many of each type there were; and how many passengers each type could have transported from RAF Aldergrove to the destination of ZD 576. [150407]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Figures for the number of helicopters stationed in Northern Ireland in May and June 1994 are no longer held. However, details of the notional number of helicopters available for tasking in December 1994 are shown. Notional numbers of helicopters available for tasking in May and June 1994 would have been very similar. Figures for the number of passengers which each aircraft can transport are also shown.

11 Gazelle (2 passengers)

7 Lynx (9 passengers)

2 Sea Kings (17 passengers)

7 Wessex (6 passengers)

7 Puma (12 passengers).

Gazelle and Wessex helicopters would need to refuel during a sortie from RAF Aldergrove to Fort George.

All of these aircraft were based at RAF Aldergrove except for the following:

Armagh—2 Lynx

Belfast—1 Gazelle

Bessbrook—2 Lynx, 1 Puma, 1 Sea King

Dungannon—1 Wessex

Omagh—1 Gazelle, 1 Puma, 1 Wessex

Portadown—1 Gazelle.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assistance was given to his Department by the Boeing company in investigating the crash of helicopter ZD 576. [150408]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The air frame manufacturers, Boeing Helicopters, provided on site assistance to the Air Accidents Investigation Branch Inspector. Subsequently, between June and December 1994 Boeing also provided extensive assistance with the investigation of the wreckage while it was laid out at DRA Farnborough and further specific assistance was provided on items returned to Boeing Helicopters Philadelphia for examination and testing.

The RAF Board of Inquiry into the accident consulted Boeing and obtained computer simulations of possible flight paths and associated data concerning flight control parameters.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the sound levels in decibels are inside the passenger area of a Chinook helicopter. [150402]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The noise in the passenger cabin of a Chinook Mk1 aircraft was measured over a series of 25 sorties during August 1993 and the mean levels were 103.5 decibels and 87.8 decibels. Such measurements are not available for the Chinook Mk2 aircraft, but would not be significantly different.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the passengers who were killed in the Chinook helicopter crash on the Mull of Kintyre travelled by aircraft to the base from which they departed in Chinook ZD 576; [150404]

(2) on how many occasions Flight Lieutenants *(a)* Cook and *(b)* Tapper had flown helicopters and of what types over or adjacent to the Mull of Kintyre between 1 June 1993 and 2 June 1994. [150406]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The details requested in these two questions are not known.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Chinook helicopters were flown *(a)* into and *(b)* out of Northern Ireland on 2 June 1994; and what their flight times and routes were. [150410]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* No Chinook helicopters flew into Northern Ireland on 2 June 1994. One flew out, that being Chinook ZD 576 which left RAF Aldergrove at 17.42 hours, en route to Fort George.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) *(a)* when, *(b)* where and *(c)* by whom helicopter ZD 576 was fitted with FADEC; and when the aircraft (i) entered service with the armed forces and (ii) was built; [150414]

(2) if he will list the way points of the flight of Chinook helicopter ZD 576 on 2 June 1994, indicating the altitude which the aircraft was supposed to maintain between each way point. [150412]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how long tasking records of helicopter flights are normally retained; in what form they are stored; how long they are retained in the case of an accident; and if the tasking records of the last flight of helicopter ZD 576 have been retained. [150409]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Tasking forms recording helicopter flights in Northern Ireland are retained for six years. However in the case of an accident the relevant tasking record for the day it occurred will normally be held as part of the Board of Inquiry papers, for as long as it is necessary to retain the latter. The 2 June 1994 tasking record for Chinook ZD 576 is still retained with the RAF Board of Inquiry report.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and which Chinook helicopters were stationed in Northern Ireland in the months of May and June 1994; and from which bases they operated. [150403]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* At that time two Chinook helicopters were detached to Northern Ireland. In May 1994 these were Mk1s until

31 May when ZD 576, the first Chinook Mk2 to operate in Northern Ireland, was delivered to RAF Aldergrove, and one of the Mk1s was flown back to RAF Odiham. All the Chinook aircraft in Northern Ireland operate out of RAF Aldergrove and return there at the end of the day's tasking.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when it was decided, and by whom, that Chinook helicopter ZD 576 would be used on the flight on which it crashed on 2 June 1994. [150411]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The flight was tasked by the Joint Air Tasking Operations Centre (JATOC) in Northern Ireland on 1 June 1994.

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), of 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 358W, what steps have been taken to recover the depleted uranium munitions test-fired into the Adriatic Sea. [149649]

Mr. Spellar: The Royal Navy uses depleted uranium (DU) in its Phalanx close-in weapon systems fitted to some ships for anti-missile and aircraft defence. Each round contains only a small quantity of DU. We know from our monitoring of substantial quantities of DU fired into the Solway Firth over many years that this has no detectable impact on uranium levels in sediment or marine life. There are significant amounts of natural uranium in seawater, and the firing of a few Phalanx rounds containing small quantities of DU will have minimal impact on the marine environment of the Adriatic.

Malaria

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what medical advice was given to members of the armed forces deployed on Operation Palliser prior to deployment regarding the risks of malaria; what anti-malarial protection precautions were taken with regard to armed forces kit and equipment for Operation Palliser *(a)* before deployment and *(b)* in theatre; and if he will make a statement. [149178]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department maintains sufficient supplies of anti-malarial and other drugs to provide maximum protection for members of the armed forces who might be deployed at short notice. [149889]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The Medical Supplies Agency (MSA) has arrangements in place for the provision of medical supplies in support of operations, across a wide range of contingencies. These arrangements include stock held by the MSA and stock held by private vendor contractors that can be made available at short notice (within 24 hours). There have been occasional problems with some vaccines that have a limited shelf life. Last year, for example, there was a national shortage of Yellow Fever vaccine. Despite this, MSA procurement staff were able to put in place arrangements to meet operational requirements.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make it his policy not to send UK forces into tropical areas if they are not adequately protected against malaria and other tropical diseases. [150214]

Dr. Moonie: Medical issues are taken into account during the process of planning for any deployment of UK forces. It is our policy to provide all reasonable protective measures to prevent malaria and other infectious diseases, which troops might be exposed to during an overseas deployment to the tropics.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press releases were issued by his Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what his estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149252]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The number of press releases issued by the Ministry of Defence between the financial years 1996 to 2000 are indicated in the table:

Ministry of Defence press releases

	Number issued
April 1996-March 1997	239
April 1998-March 1998	384
April 1998-March 1999	315
April 1999-March 2000	362

Between April 2000 to January 2001 the MOD issued a total of 266 press releases. The current rate of issue is expected to continue to the end of the current financial year.

Far East Prisoners of War

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for children of far east internees to receive compensation in cases where neither parent is alive. [150099]

Dr. Moonie: The ex gratia payment scheme, which I announced in the House on 7 November 2000, *Official Report*, columns 159–70, is for the surviving members of the British groups who were held prisoner by the Japanese during the Second World War. Where a person who would have been eligible for the scheme has died, his or her surviving spouse is entitled to receive it instead. The children of former prisoners are not eligible for the scheme unless they were themselves interned by the Japanese.

RAF Fylingdales

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many US military personnel have been stationed at RAF Fylingdales for each of the last three years. [150474]

Mr. Hoon: One.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the costs to the United Kingdom of installing National Missile Defence facilities at RAF Fylingdales. [150478]

Mr. Hoon: None. Any estimate would be made in light of a request from the United States to install facilities at RAF Fylingdales. No such request has been received.

Warcop Common

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions on access to Warcop will result from his Department's plan to buy out the commoners. [150267]

Dr. Moonie: The proposals will lead to some restrictions but greater certainty of access. Mondays would be lost, but there would be guaranteed access on 12 non-firing weekends programmed across the year, linked where possible to public holidays. Furthermore, access will be available each Sunday from 13.00 hours. It is also intended to create new routes in the locality. The proposals are still being developed in discussion with English Nature, the Countryside Agency and local representatives of user groups such as the Rambler's Association.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for how many days a year his Department closes its land at Warcop for grouse shooting. [150268]

Dr. Moonie: None. Grouse shooting takes place only when the ranges are closed for maintenance.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how often grouse shooting at Warcop prevents MOD training. [150269]

Dr. Moonie: Grouse shooting at Warcop does not, and never has, prevented the Army from training there.

Royal Fleet Auxiliary Vessels (Rosyth)

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed refit and repair work for Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, with particular reference to the share of this work, that will be allocated to Rosyth dockyard. [150120]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Warwick University

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what discussions *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have had with the University of Warwick regarding the university's requirement that students own or lease a computer as a condition of entrance; and what assessment he has made of the implications for the take up of courses of this policy. [150534]

Mr. Wicks: No discussions have taken place with the University of Warwick about this matter. The Department has, however, received a copy of the University's consultation document on their proposed e-strategy and has been invited to comment. The Government have made it clear, in regulations and guidance issued to higher education institutions in August 1999, what charges may be levied without breaching the proscription on top-up fees.

Cheshire and Halton LEAs

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what has been the average expenditure per pupil in (i) primary and (ii) secondary schools in *(a)* Halton and *(b)* Cheshire local education authorities in (1) 1997–98, (2) 1998–99 and (3) 1999–2000; and what the amount is for 2000–01. [148847]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The following table sets out the overall resources per pupil made available to Halton and Cheshire local education authorities for compulsory primary and secondary education, in both cash and real terms.

Standard spending assessment and special/specific grants[1]

£ per pupil

	Primary (5–10) (cash)	*Secondary (11–15) (cash)*	*Primary (5–10) (real terms)*	*Secondary (11–15) (real terms)*
Halton				
1997–98[2]	2,160	2,840	2,320	3,050
1998–99	2,280	2,980	2,380	3,110
1999–2000	2,480	3,130	2,530	3,200
2000–01	2,780	3,430	2,780	3,430
Cheshire				
1997–98[2]	1,990	2,570	2,140	2,760
1998–99	2,100	2,700	2,190	2,810
1999–2000	2,280	2,840	2,330	2,890
2000–01	2,480	3,050	2,480	3,050

[1] Rounded to nearest £10

[2] Notional figures assuming an apportionment, in accordance with post April 1998 local government re-organisation

Under this Government, funding per pupil has already increased by over £300 nationally in real terms, and it will increase by a further £150 per pupil for 2001–02. Under the last Government, funding per pupil fell by £60 in real terms between 1994–95 and 1997–98. There will be further increases in funding following the year 2000 spending review, a further £370 per pupil over the three-year period, taking the total increase to nearly £700 between 1997–98 and 2003–04. The following table shows the average net institutional expenditure per pupil in pre-primary/primary and secondary schools in Halton and Cheshire, for the financial years 1997–98 and 1998–99, the latest year for which this information is currently available. These figures are not comparable with the funding figures above. They cover school based outturn expenditure, but not the cost of meals, or of centrally run activities such as home to school transport and certain special educational needs services.

Halton local education authority became a local education authority from April 1998. The figures shown here for 1997–98 are for Cheshire prior to the reorganisation.

£ (cash)

	1997–98[1]	*1998–99*[1]
Halton		
Pre-primary/primary	—	1,870
Secondary	—	2,490
Cheshire		
Pre-primary/primary	1,710	1,770
Secondary	2,320	2,360

[1] Rounded to the nearest £10

North Southwark Education Action Zone

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what reasons underlay the delay in presenting the North Southwark Education Action Zone account for 1998–99 to Parliament. [150350]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Zone accounts are laid before Parliament by the National Audit Office (NAO) once they are satisfied that they can give a full opinion. The NAO found that North Southwark EAZ had difficulty in providing evidence to support some zone transactions and needed to strengthen financial controls. Once these issues had been successfully resolved the accounts were laid before Parliament.

Student Debt

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average value is of the debt owed by a student leaving university. [150422]

Mr. Wicks: The average debt of a borrower with a mortgage-style student loan entering repayment at the start of the financial year 1999–2000, the latest date for which data are available, was £3,210.

Information on private sector debt such as overdrafts and other commercial loans is not available centrally.

New Deal (Over-50s)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people aged over 50 years in *(a)* Yorkshire and Humberside and *(b)* the city of York are eligible to apply for the New Deal for the over 50s. [149448]

Ms Jowell: At December 2000, 7,565 JSA recipients in the Employment Service region of Yorkshire and the Humber, and 105 people in the unitary authority area of York, were eligible for New Deal 50 plus. It is not possible to provide figures for eligible people in receipt of non-JSA benefits.

School Funding (Copeland)

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) if he will list the additional resources he has made available to schools in Copeland; under which *(a)* schemes and *(b)* funds they are provided; and if he will make a statement; [149173]

(2) if he will estimate the cash resources to be paid directly to Copeland schools in 2001–02 on the basis of his proposals in the pre-Budget report; and if he will list the schools to benefit, giving the sum in each case. [149296]

Ms Estelle Morris: Most funding for schools is distributed via local education authorities. Many funding allocations can be given only at local education authority level, not constituency level. Listed are the Department's funding allocations for education in Cumbria for each year since 1996–97. The figures for 2000–01 are the total grants currently estimated to be paid.

Funding allocations to Cumbria

£000

Programme	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Education Standard Spending Assessment	170,602	170,400	186,100	195,500	205,834
Schools Capital	6,175	4,920	7,680	10,254	19,764
Standards Fund	1,550	1,985	2,884	5,309	11,316
School Standards Grant	—	—	—	—	3,399
School Budget Support Grant	—	—	—	—	571
Nursery Education Grant	—	1,951	557	601	804
Schedule 32 Grant	—	—	—	107	73
Insurance Grant for former GM Schools	—	—	—	28	24
Transitional Grant for former GM Schools	—	—	—	—	199
Teachers Pay Reform Special Grant: Threshold	—	—	—	—	2,604

Schools in the Copeland constituency received £462,000 School Standards Grant (SSG) in 2000–01, with an estimated SSG of £860,000 for Copeland schools in 2001–02. Final allocations for 2001–02 will depend on pupil numbers as reported in the Annual Schools Census.

The table shows the schools in the Copeland constituency which have benefited from investment through the New Deal for Schools programme which commenced in 1997–98. This is the only constituency level information for capital expenditure which is readily available. These allocations formed part of the £10.877 million investment made so far in schools in Cumbria under the New Deal for Schools programme, and are included in the total schools capital funding allocations for Cumbria already listed.

New Deal for schools—allocations to schools in the Copeland constituency

£

School	*Project details*	*Grant awarded*
1997–98		
St. Bridget's Primary	Replacement of temporary classrooms	
Millom Schools	ICT Room	
All county and voluntary controlled primary schools which have no fire alarm system	Provision of fire alarm systems	598,000
Whitehaven School	Upgrade laboratories	

New Deal for schools—allocations to schools in the Copeland constituency

£

School	Project details	Grant awarded
1998–99		
St. Benedict's RC High School	Refurbishment of six science laboratories	204,336
1999–2000		
Captain Shaw's CofE School	Repair and remodelling of school building	256,205
St. Benedict's RC High School	Fire precautions	22,248
Ehenside School	Fire precautions	20,000
Brookwell Primary School	Replacement of temporary classroom	103,110
Millom School	Remodelling of science laboratories	123,852
2000–01		
St. Benedict's RC High School	Drainage, levelling and resurfacing school playing fields	146,575
	Refurbishment of food technology areas	49,890
Ehenside School	Refurbishment of labs	27,588
	Window replacement	146,300
	Gym and changing area refurbishment	60,610
	Replacement of hall floor and associated walkway	24,200
	Remodelling of CDT and art facilities	200,000
Whitehaven School	Refurbishment of labs	90,134
Ennerdale and Kinniside CofE Primary School	Millennium extension project	50,500
Wyndham School	Library block refurbishment	68,200
	Remodelling/upgrading of laboratories	75,000
Thornhill Primary School	Re-roofing	104,500
Distington Infant School	Renewal of defective flat roofs	17,875

[1] Denotes total allocation made to all projects

Under this Government, funding per pupil has already increased by over £3,000 in real terms, and it will increase by a further £150 per pupil for 2001–02. Under the last Government, funding per pupil fell by £60 in real terms between 1994–95 and 1997–98. There will be further increases in funding following the year 2000 spending review: a further £370 per pupil over the three year period, taking the total increase to nearly £700 between 1997–98 and 2003–04.

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many students he has appointed to Learning and Skills Councils. [148982]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* The information requested is not available as applicants for positions with the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) and the local LSCs were not asked to declare whether they are currently or have been students.

However, we recognise that to be successful, the LSC must be fully responsive to the needs of learners and potential learners. Learning Partnerships are already charged with ensuring that consultative mechanisms are in place to capture and articulate the views and opinions of young and adult learners, and feed these back to the LSC.

The LSC itself is also considering what further mechanisms it needs to put in place at national and local levels to ensure that young people are effectively engaged in the new arrangements, and to advise on young people's learning needs and expectations.

Newly Qualified Teachers

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many newly qualified teachers employed in *(a)* the primary and *(b)* the secondary sector, have left their posts within (i) one year, (ii) two years and (ii) three years in each of the past five years, broken down in the case of secondary school teachers by the subject of their qualification. [147636]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 29 January 2001]:* The number of leavers in each year as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants has remained reasonably constant throughout the five year period and the proportion of leavers from the overall number of teachers in service fell in 1998–99.

New full-time and part-time qualified teachers from the nursery, primary and secondary schools sector in England who left the maintained schools sector in their first three years, and all leavers, are as follows.

Leavers 1994–95

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	One but less than 2 years[2]	Two but less than 3 years[2]	All leavers[3]
Nursery and primary	610	610	600	15,500 (8 per cent.)
Secondary				
Mathematics	80	80	70	n/a
English	80	90	80	n/a
Science	80	120	100	n/a
Languages	80	100	100	n/a
Technology and Art	110	130	70	n/a
History	30	30	30	n/a
Geography	10	30	30	n/a

Leavers 1994–95

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Music	20	30	30	n/a
Religious education	20	20	20	n/a
Physical education	30	30	50	n/a
Other subject or subject not known	90	90	100	n/a
Total secondary	620	750	660	15,600 (8 per cent.)
Total nursery, primary and secondary	1,230	1,360	1,260	31,100 (8 per cent.)
Leavers as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants (per cent.)	6.9	8.4	8.2	

Leavers 1995–96

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Nursery and primary	680	640	620	15,800 (8 per cent.)
Secondary				
Mathematics	80	120	70	n/a
English	70	120	90	n/a
Science	120	160	130	n/a
Languages	80	130	110	n/a
Technology and Art	130	150	110	n/a
History	40	40	30	n/a
Geography	20	40	30	n/a
Music	20	30	20	n/a
Religious education	20	30	30	n/a
Physical education	60	40	50	n/a
Other subject or subject not known	90	90	80	n/a
Total secondary	720	920	730	16,600 (8 per cent.)
Total nursery, primary and secondary	1,400	1,560	1,340	32,400 (8 per cent.)
Leavers as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants (per cent.)	7.3	8.8	8.3	

Leavers 1996–97

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Nursery and primary	650	650	620	16,400 (9 per cent.)
Secondary				
Mathematics	80	100	80	n/a
English	80	100	100	n/a
Science	120	130	130	n/a
Languages	90	100	100	n/a
Technology and Art	120	120	140	n/a
History	40	30	30	n/a
Geography	20	40	40	n/a
Music	20	30	20	n/a
Religious education	20	20	20	n/a
Physical education	50	40	60	n/a
Other subject or subject not known	70	50	60	n/a
Total secondary	700	760	790	15,900 (8 per cent.)
Total nursery, primary and secondary	1,350	1,410	1,400	32,400 (8 per cent.)
Leavers as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants (per cent.)	7.0	7.3	7.9	

Leavers 1997–98

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Nursery and primary	730	730	690	17,700 (9 per cent.)
Secondary				
Mathematics	70	100	80	n/a
English	100	120	100	n/a
Science	110	140	130	n/a
Languages	80	110	120	n/a
Technology and Art	100	130	120	n/a
History	40	40	30	n/a
Geography	30	30	40	n/a
Music	20	30	30	n/a
Religious education	20	30	30	n/a

Leavers 1997–98

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Physical education	70	50	40	n/a
Other subject or subject not known	60	50	50	n/a
Total secondary	710	820	760	17,700 (9 per cent.)
Total nursery, primary and secondary	1,440	1,550	1,460	35,100 (9 per cent.)
Leavers as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants (per cent.)	7.2	8.0	7.6	

Leavers 1998–99

	Less than 1 year[1,2]	*One but less than 2 years*[2]	*Two but less than 3 years*[2]	*All leavers*[3]
Nursery and primary	580	760	770	13,500 (7 per cent.)
Secondary				
Mathematics	80	100	100	n/a
English	120	130	120	n/a
Science	130	170	140	n/a
Languages	90	130	130	n/a
Technology and Art	130	150	120	n/a
History	40	40	40	n/a
Geography	40	60	30	n/a
Music	20	40	30	n/a
Religious education	30	40	20	n/a
Physical education	70	70	50	n/a
Other subject or subject not known	50	50	40	n/a
Total secondary	790	970	820	14,000 (7 per cent.)
Total nursery, primary and secondary	1,380	1,730	1,580	27,500 (7 per cent.)
Leavers as a proportion of the appropriate cohort of new entrants (per cent.)	6.4	8.6	8.2	

[1] Includes those who entered and left within a year.
[2] Excludes those who left but returned to service within the same financial year.
[3] All full-time and part-time qualified teachers from the nursery, primary and secondary schools sector in England who have left teaching or left the maintained schools sector. The figure in brackets is all leavers as a percentage of full and part-time teachers in service at the start of the financial year. Subject of qualification is not available for leavers who qualified before 1985.

The full-time equivalent number of regular teachers in the maintained sector has increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000.There was a growth of 2,000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

From April 2001 new graduate recruits can expect to earn £17,000 a year (up from 6 per cent. from the previous year) and starting salaries in inner London will rise to £20,000 (up 9 per cent. from the previous year).

Employment Service Overheads (New Deal)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment which overheads incurred by the Employment Service are attributable to the implementation of the New Deal. [141694]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 11 December 2000]:* The Employment Service funding for all New Deals is determined on a marginal cost basis on the assumption that these programmes will be delivered through the existing ES infrastructure of offices and IT. The Employment Service overheads which are attributable to the implementation of the New Deals are therefore those specific costs related to project design; implementation; marketing and publicity and limited refurbishment in some offices for the individual New Deals.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what changes will be made to the Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for her Department in 2000–01. [151103]

Clare Short: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, for Class VIII, Vote 1: Department for International Development, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2000–01 will be increased by £68,000,000 from £2,121,732,000 to £2,189,732,000 for voted expenditure giving a total of voted and non-voted expenditure of £2,827,768,000. The increase is the net effect of:

an increase of £59,000,000 End Year Flexibility from an underspend against the 1998 EC Attributed Aid;

an increase of £9,000,000 from the Reserve in respect of humanitarian assistance in response to the earthquake in India.

The increase will be met by a claim on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Housing Investment Programme (Wandsworth)

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much the Government Office for London allocated to Wandsworth Council's housing investment programme for *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and if he will make a statement; [148139]

(2) how much the Government Office for London has allocated to Wandsworth council for major repairs *(a)* through the major repairs allowance for 2001–02 and *(b)* through the housing investment programme for 2000—01; and if he will make a statement. [148124]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The allocations made to Wandsworth to support the authority's housing capital programmes in 2000–01 and 2001–02 are as follows:

£ million

	2000–01	*2001–02*
Housing annual capital guidelines	20.592	11.386
Private sector renewal	[1]—	1.500
Disabled facilities grants	0.240	0.237
Total housing investment programmes allocations	20.832	13.123
Major repairs allowance (MRA)	[1]—	14.773
Total	20.832	27.896

[1] Not applicable

The MRA, which was introduced for 2001–02, is ring-fenced for works on council housing. The resources allocated through housing annual capital guidelines provide unhypothecated support for authorities' housing capital programmes which cover expenditure on private sector renewal and support for new provision by housing associations as well as work on council housing.

Allocations made to Wandsworth doubled between 1997–98 and 2001–02.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts on the dissolution of Parliament. [149318]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning appeals were lodged with his Department against decisions of *(a)* Brentwood council and *(b)* planning authorities in Essex in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and how many such appeals were dismissed by his Department in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [149811]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The provision of information on planning appeals is the responsibility of the planning inspectorate. I have asked the Inspectorate's chief executive, Mr. Chris Shepley, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from C. J. Shepley to Mr. Eric Pickles, dated 12 February 2001:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your Question about planning appeals in Brentwood and other local authorities in Essex.

Statistics at this level are only available from 1994. The table attached gives the number of appeals received in each year from then and, of those, the number dismissed for Brentwood Council and other planning authorities in Essex.

Year/ Local planning authority	*Appeals received*	*Appeals determined*	*Appeals dismissed*
Brentwood			
1994	54	47	23
1995	40	38	23
1996	52	46	34
1997	69	63	44
1998	85	75	46
1999	77	72	40
2000	55	38	25
Basildon			
1994	58	53	37
1995	54	48	31
1996	51	42	31
1997	40	33	24
1998	58	58	44
1999	46	41	28
2000	51	33	25
Braintree			
1994	29	26	17
1995	35	22	20
1996	34	32	26
1997	35	30	21
1998	33	31	23
1999	30	30	25
2000	46	26	16
Castle Point			
1994	45	41	24
1995	41	42	24
1996	49	43	20
1997	51	46	24
1998	51	49	22
1999	61	57	35
2000	35	22	12
Chelmsford			
1994	68	60	43
1995	82	70	49
1996	103	90	58
1997	81	70	40
1998	95	86	53
1999	105	95	58
2000	107	68	43
Colchester			
1994	59	42	36
1995	66	52	30
1996	67	52	35
1997	59	55	30
1998	69	56	30
1999	53	45	25
2000	51	26	14

Year/ Local planning authority	Appeals received	Appeals determined	Appeals dismissed
Epping Forest			
1994	107	90	58
1995	91	80	51
1996	89	68	44
1997	88	77	56
1998	88	78	52
1999	105	89	55
2000	110	76	54
Essex			
1994	5	3	2
1995	5	3	2
1996	8	3	2
1997	2	0	0
1998	1	1	1
1999	0	0	0
2000	4	1	0
Harlow			
1994	13	10	6
1995	5	5	3
1996	10	6	3
1997	4	3	2
1998	10	10	8
1999	5	5	3
2000	2	2	1
Maldon			
1994	45	36	27
1995	43	37	23
1996	33	31	18
1997	37	31	12
1998	26	22	14
1999	51	40	27
2000	56	44	28
Rochford			
1994	29	26	14
1995	34	28	16
1996	51	45	31
1997	39	31	16
1998	40	33	23
1999	28	21	13
2000	38	32	20
Southend			
1994	0	—	0
1995	0	—	0
1996	2	2	0
1997	1	1	1
1998	29	27	16
1999	29	28	16
2000	41	26	16
Southend-on-Sea			
1994	45	41	25
1995	29	25	16
1996	36	33	17
1997	36	30	18
1998	2	2	2
1999	0	0	0
2000	0	0	0
Tendring			
1994	64	56	39
1995	45	39	26
1996	24	39	26
1997	55	47	35
1998	47	43	28
1999	46	43	29
2000	56	37	23
Thurrock			
1994	24	22	16
1995	40	35	23
1996	38	26	19
1997	26	21	12
1998	37	27	15
1999	43	39	23
2000	43	32	19
Uttlesford			
1994	39	35	31
1995	54	54	39
1996	43	40	30
1997	42	40	26
1998	58	54	30
1999	64	59	33
2000	54	36	29

Planning

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make it his policy to provide a bias in favour of conservation in future planning legislation. [150026]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Our planning policy guidance note 1 "General Policy and Principles" reflects the Government's commitment to the principles of sustainable development. It advises that a sustainable planning framework should include provision for the nation's economic and social needs while conserving the cultural and natural heritage. Other planning policy guidance notes advise planning authorities on the extent to which they should take conservation issues into account in preparing development plans and in reaching decisions on planning applications. The weight that should be given to conservation issues relative to other material considerations in deciding a planning application is for the planning authority to determine in the first instance and will depend on the circumstances of the particular case.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 528W, if he will review the operation of planning legislation with particular reference to the rights of objectors. [150129]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We have no immediate plans to change planning laws that would affect the current rights of objectors.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will issue guidance to local authorities on making public pre-application discussions between planning officers and applicants or their representatives. [150128]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to his previous questions on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 115W.

Arlesey Flood Plain

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what

representations he has received concerning his Department's decision to permit building on the flood plain at Arlesey, Bedfordshire. [149879]

Mr. Raynsford: The original decision to grant outline planning permission was made by a planning inspector. I have therefore asked the planning inspectorate's chief executive to write to the right hon. and learned Member. A copy of his reply will be placed in the Library.

Highways Agency (Hindhead)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many properties are owned by the Highways Agency in the Hindhead area. [150303]

Mr. Hill: The Highways Agency currently owns 16 residential properties and one commercial property in the Hindhead area.

Aircraft Noise

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to reduce disturbance from aircraft noise in the Waverley area; what representations he has received from the Quieter Skies Campaign with regard to the situation at Gatwick; and if he will make a statement. [150310]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Secretary of State regulates noise from operations at Gatwick under section 78 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982. These regulations include night restrictions, noise preferential routes, departures noise limits and operational procedures. They are reviewed as necessary, and we consult widely on any proposals for major change.

My officials have responded to a number of letters and calls from members and supporters of the Quieter Skies Campaign. My predecessor, the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), responded to points the right hon. lady raised on behalf of QSC in the Adjournment debate on 11 January last year, and in correspondence. More recently, on 1 February, officials attended a noise and track seminar organised by Gatwick Airport, at which Mr. John Burgess of QSC gave a presentation on the campaign's concerns, and I understand that a constructive discussion ensued.

Traffic

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many lorries used major roads in *(a)* north-west England and *(b)* Merseyside on the most recent date for which figures are suitable. [150181]

Mr. Hill: The average daily flow of heavy goods vehicles on major roads in the north-west region in 1999 was about 1,700. The equivalent figure for the Merseyside region was 1,430.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the change in traffic speed on the trunk road network in the north-west of England over the last 12 months. [150092]

Mr. Hill: No systematic survey of trunk road speeds has been carried out over the past 12 months and it is not therefore possible to provide the information requested.

A national survey of trunk road speeds was last carried out in 1998. The DETR publication, "Traffic Speeds on English Trunk Road: 1998", reported an overall reduction in speeds on the network, including the north-west, since a previous survey in 1995.

The next survey is due to be undertaken this summer 2001 and results will become available in winter 2001. This will allow comparison of average speed in 2001 with those previously observed in 1998. It should be noted that the survey allows comparison of average speeds across the region. Due to the way the speeds are collected, however, the survey does not allow statistically reliable comparison at the detailed level of individual junctions on the network.

Car Ownership

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the percentage of householders on Merseyside who own and use *(a)* a car and *(b)* more than one car. [150132]

Mr. Hill: Averaged over the period 1997–98 to 1999–2000, *(a)* 71 per cent. of households in the north-west have access to one or more cars, and *(b)* 27 per cent. have access to more than one car.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the average expenditure on cars by households in Merseyside was in *(a)* 1999 and *(b)* 2000. [150094]

Mr. Hill: The average expenditure on motoring per car per week for people living in the north-west region was £51.10, averaged over the period 1979–98 to 1999–2000. Data are not available for Merseyside, or for single years, because of small sample sizes.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what is the value of the area cost adjustment, in calculating the education Standard Spending Assessment, for each local education authority in England; [150189]

(2) pursuant to the answers of 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 646–47W, how many and what proportion of *(a)* children of lone parents and *(b)* children of Income Support and income based Job Seeker's Allowance claimants are used in the education SSA calculation for local authorities in England; [150299]

(3) pursuant to the answers of 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 646–47W, what ethnicity indicator was used in the education SSA calculation, for local authorities in England. [150298]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information has been placed in the library.

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answers of 8 February 2001, *Official*

Report, columns 646–47W, which service provision costs are higher in London and the south-east than in Worcestershire. [150300]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The higher cost of service provision in London and the south-east are reflected in the area cost adjustment, which takes into account the higher employment costs and rate costs there compared to the rest of the country, including Worcestershire.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the SSA per head of population for Cambridgeshire, expressed in real terms, for each year since 1990–91. [150802]

Ms Beverley Hughes: SSA per head figures for the old county council, the new county council and the unitary authority of Peterborough, in real terms, are as follows:

SSA per head (in real terms)

	Cambridgeshire		
Year	*(Old)*	*(New)*	*Peterborough*
1990–91	639.66	—	—
1991–92	705.04	—	—
1992–93	724.13	—	—
1993–94	662.30	—	—
1994–95	677.27	—	—
1995–96	623.54	—	—
1996–97	634.57	—	—
1997–98	619.26	—	—
1998–99	—	586.50	874.07
1999–2000	—	594.58	893.25
2000–01	—	601.27	918.87
2001–02	—	608.21	939.64

There are a number of discontinuities in the figures. The most important changes are the transfer of funding of colleges of further education and sixth-form colleges from local authorities to the Further Education Funding Council on 1 April 1993, the transfer of policing responsibilities from county councils to the new police authorities on 1 April 1995 and the establishment of the Peterborough unitary authority on 1 April 1998. The figures for Peterborough cover both lower and upper tier services; in the remainder of Cambridgeshire lower tier services are provided by the district councils.

Higher Education (Access)

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information he received on the contents of the Education and Employment Committee's report on access to higher education, and the proceedings of the Committee prior to the publication of the report. [150053]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks), on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 162W.

Road Safety and Cycling

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the Government's policies to promote *(a)* cycling and *(b)* road safety. [150317]

Mr. Hill: The Government are committed to tripling the number of cycling trips from a 2,000 base by 2010 and quadrupling them from a 1996 base by 2012. £8.4 billion of Government funding has been provided to local authorities in the recent local transport settlement. This will help to promote sustainable transport measures, including cycling. The cycling strategies included in the authorities' local transport plans (LTPs) should identify gaps in the local cycle network and improvements to the cycling infrastructure. Initial monitoring suggests that the strategies will result in considerable additional provision for cycling.

We have taken the initiative in marketing the main messages of the national cycling strategy. Early outcomes are the launch of an NCS website, development of a promotional video and, during spring 2001, a number of cycling seminars throughout England aimed at local authorities, major employers and health and education practitioners.

We set out our policies for pursuing the Government's road safety strategy in "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone", which was launched on 1 March last year. It sets a new target to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads by 40 per cent. by the year 2010, a separate target of 50 per cent. for children, and a 10 per cent. reduction in the slight casualty rate.

Special measures for cyclists are detailed in chapters two and nine of the strategy, but measures described elsewhere, particularly on driver training, will be to their benefit.

Copies of "Tomorrow's Roads—Safer for Everyone" are in the Library and the Vote Office.

Greenbelt Land

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many planning applications for developments involving the loss of green belt land were *(a)* notified to him and *(b)* called in for his own decision in each year since 1992. [150198]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mobile Phone Base Stations

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the revised guidelines governing the planning process for mobile phone base stations will be published. [150180]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to mobile phone masts and associated guidance ended on 31 October 2000. The Department is currently analysing the responses. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations have been received in response to his Department's consultation on the scope of possible changes to the planning process for mobile phone base stations. [150179]

Ms Beverley Hughes: In response to the recent consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to telecommunications masts and associated guidance my Department received 365 responses from hon. Members, members of the public, local authorities, mobile phone companies and associated businesses, and other interested organisations.

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his policy strategy integration division was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150363]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The policy strategy integration division was established in September 1998. It presently has a full-time staff of seven, including one secondee from a local authority and one agency secretary. No special advisers participate in its work. The aim of the division is to facilitate a cross-cutting approach to issues which span policy areas, both within DETR and between DETR and others, rather than to produce reports. It has, however, led a review of the organisation of transport safety, and an account of the consultation and of the review group's analysis was placed in the House Libraries and made available on request. Also in the Libraries is a report which the division prepared on transport links between the UK and Ireland for the British-Irish inter-parliamentary body. A memorandum on DETR's role in relation to public health was co-ordinated by the division and sent to the Health Committee in January this year.

Farm Accidents (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many accidents occurred on farms in Lancashire involving the *(a)* death and *(b)* injury of a (i) farm worker and (ii) member of the public in each year since 1995. [150200]

Mr. Meacher: Injuries on farms in Lancashire as reported to HSE and local authorities:

Employment status	*Fatality*	*Major/non fatal injury*	*Over 3 day injury*	*Total*
1996–97				
Workers	2	21	22	45
Members of the public	0	1	[4]—	1
1997–98				
Workers	1	18	22	41
Members of the public	0	0	[4]—	0
1998–99				
Workers	0	14	27	41
Members of the public	1	0	[4]—	1
1999–2000[1]				
Workers	0	17	18	35
Members of the public	1	3	[4]—	4
2000–01[2]				
Workers	2	[3]—	[3]—	2
Members of the public	0	[3]—	[4]—	0
Grand total	7	74	89	170

[1] Provisional
[2] To 31 December 2000—highly provisional
[3] Not available
[4] Not applicable

Petrol

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what research his Department has commissioned into the factors considered by consumers when choosing whether to buy standard unleaded petrol or low sulphur petrol. [150111]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* My Department has not commissioned any specific research into consumer purchasing decisions concerning cleaner specifications of petrol. However, market research by oil companies and consumer organisations—confirmed by the experience of introducing ultra-low sulphur diesel—indicates that most road users will not choose a cleaner specification of fuel if it has a higher retail price then the conventional specification.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what incentives the Government have provided to consumers to buy low sulphur petrol in preference to standard unleaded petrol. [150112]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* A 1 p/l fuel duty differential for ultra-low sulphur diesel (ULSP) relative to conventional unleaded petrol was introduced in October 2000. The Chancellor announced in the November 2000 pre-Budget report that this duty differential would be increased to 3 p/l in the 2001 Budget, subject to oil companies ensuring nationwide availability.

Air Transport Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had in the EU about proposals for new taxes on *(a)* aviation fuel, *(b)* airport departures and landings and *(c)* air traffic movements. [150399]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Possible measures to encourage the reduction of emissions from aircraft, including the possibility of a fuel tax, have been discussed in the EU within the last two years. No proposals have been tabled on this, nor have new taxes been proposed on the other aviation activities cited.

Urban Regeneration

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what criteria he will use in determining the selection of urban regeneration companies; and what timetable has been adopted. [150395]

Ms Beverley Hughes: New criteria are being drafted to set out the principles guiding the effective structure and operation of urban regeneration companies (URCs). These criteria have been issued in draft to the regional development agencies (RDAs) and others and will be finalised shortly taking into account comments received. The criteria are based on the lessons identified from the monitoring and evaluation of the three pilot URCs in Liverpool, Manchester and Sheffield. RDAs and their partners will use the criteria and accompanying guidance to consider whether a URC might be appropriate for key regeneration areas within their regions. Proposals for new URCs will be considered by the Department against these criteria. The urban White Paper announced a rolling programme of around 12 new URCs over the next two to three years.

Road Crash Victims

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he will list the organisations to which he gave grants for the support of those killed as a result of road crashes, and the amount per organisation, for each of the last three years for which figures are available; [150560]

(2) if he will list the organisations he gave grants for the support of those injured in road crashes, and the amount per organisation, for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [150561]

Mr. Hill: Section 40 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 gives the Secretary of State for Transport powers to grant-aid bodies, other than local authorities, to promote road safety. The legislation does not provide powers for the Secretary of State to give grants to support those affected by deaths or injuries as a result of road traffic accidents.

Home Energy Efficiency

Paddy Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the extent is of delays for the installation of new central heating systems under the home energy efficiency scheme; what the reasons are for such delays; and if he will make a statement. [150416]

Mr. Meacher: The new home energy efficiency scheme (HEES) for England was launched on 1 June 2000. It is managed by two regional scheme managers who are responsible for marketing the scheme and surveying homes to identify the improvements required. Once these are agreed with the householder, a works order is placed with local contractors. The time taken between the date of survey and the actual installation of gas central heating systems varies across the country, although in most parts it is less than three months.

The reason for the delay is the national shortage of qualified heating engineers which has severely affected the rate at which central heating systems are being installed under HEES. To address the problem, scheme managers both continue to seek additional qualified heating installers and to encourage existing installers to increase the number of installation teams dedicated to HEES.

While these efforts have cut waiting times, the referral-based nature of the scheme means that this period can change rapidly. For example a large number of applications from a locality can substantially increase waiting times in the area. Both scheme managers continue to advise local groups of the period of delay in each area, and to display this information on their websites.

The longer-term solution to the problem is to increase the number of trained gas engineers. In conjunction with Transco plc and the gas industry national training organisation, we have introduced training programmes to provide an additional 400 gas engineers each six months to work under HEES. As these engineers become available, so the present delays should be reduced substantially and the scheme be better able to cope with short-term fluctuations in demand.

Capital Debt (London Boroughs)

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list, for each London borough, the level of capital debt held for housing purposes. [150548]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Local authorities generally pool their debt across services but are required to calculate a notional credit ceiling for housing for the purposes of maintaining a separate housing revenue account (HRA). The table shows the provisional HRA figures for 2000–01.

£

Authority	*Mid-Year HRA Credit Ceiling*
2000–01	
Barking and Dagenham	0
Barnet	49,400,000
Bexley	0
Brent	277,886,205
Bromley	68,895,835
Camden	503,204,837
City of London	13,274,131
Croydon	94,300,000
Ealing	158,924,209
Enfield	78,870,754
Greenwich	403,379,530
Hackney	637,640,950
Hammersmith and Fulham	220,335,811
Haringey	392,220,652
Harrow	41,398,133
Havering	16,500,114
Hillingdon	39,943,958
Hounslow	161,259,467
Islington	710,121,313
Kensington and Chelsea	130,004,049
Kingston upon Thames	16,844,159
Lambeth	623,053,791
Lewisham	407,284,864
Merton	21,200,414
Newham	433,684,444
Redbridge	16,081,636
Richmond upon Thames	0
Southwark	732,105,357
Sutton	20,256,848
Tower Hamlets	533,646,000
Waltham Forest	181,085,745
Wandsworth	116,373,024
Westminster	171,500,000

Road Accidents

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* injuries have been caused by road accidents in the United Kingdom as a result of drivers being under the influence of illegal substances, broken down by each illegal substance used. [150454]

Mr. Hill: There are no reliable statistics available that show the number of fatalities and injuries caused by road accidents as a result of drivers being under the influence of illegal substances. However, we will shortly publish the findings of a 3-year survey into the incidence of drugs in road accident fatalities, which will provide data on this subject.

Wafic Said Business School

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations were received by *(a)* him and *(b)* his officials from (i) other Government Ministers and (ii) their officials over (A) his decision and (B) the time scale of his decision, on whether to call in the proposal to build the Wafic Said business school in Oxford. [150360]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Our records include no representations from other Government Ministers or officials about the Wafic Said business school in Oxford.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has received from the Economic Regulation Group of the Civil Aviation Authority on the economic regulatory regime for the services which will be provided in the Oceanic sector by the National Air Traffic Services Ltd. public-private partnership; and if he will make a statement. [151110]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Air traffic services in Oceanic airspace are provided on a monopoly basis. When the National Air Traffic Services Ltd. public-private partnership is established, charges for these services will be subject to price regulation by the RPI-X method, which is the standard model for monopoly regulation in the United Kingdom. The charge cap, or "X" factor, will be set for a period of five years and will, for the first five year-period only, be set by the Government.

We received advice from the CAA in August, which set out how they proposed to approach the economic regulation of NATS and recommended that the "X" factor for NATS' Oceanic services be set at 10 per cent. for the first year and 2 per cent. for each of the next four years. We have considered the CAA's advice carefully, alongside representations from air users who will pay these charges and from NATS, who have also provided revised estimates of traffic levels and system costs which have a significant effect on the first year of the quinquennium. We have consequently decided to set a cap of 2 per cent. for each of the five years, and that there should be no delay penalty term for the present.

The Government regard investment in the Oceanic sector as important and believe that the approach to charge control should reflect this. We have therefore agreed with the CAA that they should be receptive to any proposals, made with the support of air users, to revisit the price cap when investment is made with a view to significant improvements in the service.

Bus Subsidies

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the outcome of the latest round of the rural bus challenge competition and on allocations to local authorities of rural bus subsidy grant for the coming year. [151108]

Mr. Hill: My right hon. Friend will be making an announcement on these matters next week. Copies of the announcement will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Local Authority Publicity

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to lay before Parliament proposed alterations to the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. [151192]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Following consultation with the Local Government Association, we have today laid before the House a draft of the proposed alterations to the code of recommended practice on local authority publicity. These proposed alterations reflect the new council constitutions and the introduction of referendums and petitions under the Local Government Act 2000.

We also intend in the future to review further the code, having regard to councils' experiences of operating their new constitutions over a reasonable period of time. This further review will also cover the code's application to those authorities—such as police authorities—which are not adopting new constitutions.

Ordnance Survey

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when a quinquennial review of Ordnance Survey will be conducted. [151233]

Ms Beverley Hughes: All executive agencies and non-departmental government bodies are subject to a review of their organisation every five years to examine and recommend the most appropriate organisation for delivering the functions and services currently carried out by the Department.

The last such review of Ordnance Survey reported in 1994 and recommended that Ordnance Survey should continue to deliver its functions and services as an executive agency and Government Department in its own right.

A Quinquennial Review of Ordnance Survey was due to take place in 1999. However, the Secretary of State at that time agreed that the review should be postponed until now to allow for Ordnance Survey's new trading fund status to bed in.

The review of Ordnance Survey commences today and is expected to last for three months. The review team, CMG Admiral, has been appointed following a competitive tendering process. A steering group, chaired

by the principal finance officer of my Department, will oversee the review and recommendations will be made to me in due course. I will report back to the House on its findings before the summer recess.

The review process will provide extensive opportunities for consultation with internal and external stakeholders and will follow the procedures recommended in the guidance for the review of executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies published by the Cabinet Office.

Millennium Dome

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he has reached a decision on the continuation of the preferred bidder status of Legacy plc. [151234]

Ms Armstrong: Legacy's preferred bidder status gave them exclusive negotiating rights up to 14 February. While their bid has made progress towards meeting the preferred bidder terms, they have not met them. Legacy's exclusivity has therefore expired and the Government have decided to terminate the existing competition.

During the period of Legacy's preferred bidder status, the Government have not sought any alternative proposals for the dome. The Government would now like openly to test the market and will therefore ask English Partnerships to invite any interested parties to lodge with them expressions of interest for the dome and the regeneration of the peninsula. The Government, like the Mayor of London and the London borough of Greenwich, believe the dome should be retained as part of the regenerated peninsula, and offers will be invited on this basis. There have been considerable expressions of interest from other parties, which have been logged by English Partnerships.

Within this framework, Legacy will of course be able to put forward their proposals, which will be fully considered on merit alongside others.

Expressions of interest will be assessed by an advisory team, which will report to English Partnerships. They will shortly publish details of the arrangements and rules for this process.

Railway Bridges

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding has been made available to Railtrack to repair unsafe railway bridge structures in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [150107]

Mr. Hill: In the past five years, the only grant paid direct to Railtrack was £34 million towards the cost of maintaining level crossings, paid in 1995–96 when the company was still in the public sector. Since its privatisation in 1996, the company has recovered that cost, and other costs including the cost of repairing unsafe railway bridge structures, through access charges paid by passenger train operating companies and freight operating companies. So, although no grant has been paid direct to the company since 1996, its profitability is contingent on public money. Some 90 per cent. of its income is paid to it in access charges, a substantial proportion of which are supported by public money.

Hinduja Brothers

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contacts *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials had with the Hinduja family and their business associates during his visits to India in March and December 1999. [148509]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend's visits to India in March and December 1999 promoted Indo-British bilateral relations, business and trade co-operation, and the sharing of experience on environment and urban issues. On both visits my right hon. Friend met the Indian Prime Minister, other Indian Ministers and a number of British and Indian business men and women. This included a courtesy meeting between my right hon. Friend, accompanied by officials, and Messers. G. P. and S. P. Hinduja in Mumbai in March 1999.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149271]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The Department's financial year starts 1 April and runs to 31 March. For each financial year from 1996 the advertising and public opinion research spend are set out. There was no expenditure on direct mail.

	£
Television Advertising	
1996–97	3,836,887
1997–98	3,154,027
1998–99	3,449,938
1999–2000	7,457,172
2000–01[1]	9,858,387
Radio Advertising	
1996–97	461,937
1997–98	926,232
1998–99	1,048,951
1999–2000	661,303
2000–01[1]	2,163,822
Press Advertising	1,741,197
1996–97	1,559,001
1997–98	861,097
1998–99	1,059,974
1999–2000	663,396
2000–01[1]	
Other Advertising (eg posters, leaflets)	
1996–97	1,178,979
1997–98	860,740
1998–99	640,014
1999–2000	2,821,551
2000–01[1]	1,314,395

	£
Total Advertising Spend	
1996–97	7,219,000
1997–98	6,500,000
1998–99	6,000,000
1999–2000	12,000,000
2000–01[1]	14,000,000
Public Opinion Research	
1996–97	264,492
1997–98	299,358
1998–99	281,379
1999–2000	801,600
2000–01[1]	357,410

[1] planned

The increased expenditure on advertising and research in 1999–2000 results from:

(i) An increase of £3.6 million on the "Are you doing your bit" campaign to help people to take action to protect the environment; and

(ii) £2.9 million spent on a campaign to encourage voting in the Greater London Authority elections.

The increase in planned expenditure in 2000–01 results from:

(i) An additional increase of £2 million on the "Are you doing your bit" campaign; and

(ii) A £4 million increase on the campaign aimed at further reducing deaths and serious injuries on our roads.

Government Initiatives (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what initiatives embarked upon since May 1997 have benefited Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [149909]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The constituency of Pendle has benefited from a range of Government Initiatives since May 1997, including:

Capital allocations for housing

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	2.0
1998–99	2.3
1999–2000	2.4
2000–01	3.0
2001–02	3.6

Under the Government's first comprehensive spending review, Pendle received significantly more resources for housing. For the years 1998–99 and 1999–2000 the authority received more than £1.5 million over and above its normal HIP allocation through the capital receipts initiative (when resources distributed under the CRI were identified separately) and in the current year the authority's total allocation rose again by a further 27 per cent. Following the spending review 2000, the amount allocated to the authority for housing next year totals over £3.7 million. This compares to a figure of £2.015 million which had been allocated in 1997–98.

Also in 2000, measures were announced enabling authorities to support the renovation and improvement of private sector housing in a more targeted way. We also announced our intention to proceed with more fundamental reforms to the legislation to give authorities more effective powers to turn around areas of low demand and unpopular housing.

Single Regeneration Budget:

SRB Round 2—The Way Ahead—Pendle

A six-year strategy to arrest decline caused by contraction of the manufacturing industry. The two main themes are for developing business opportunities and developing people. With diversification the aim is to create a stronger, less vulnerable economy. A private sector-led partnership with involvement of the community.

SRB total—£9.3 million (scheme period 1996–97 to 2001–02)

SRB Round 4—Pendle Youth Focus—Kick Start for jobs

A seven-year scheme to tackle low educational attainment and high unemployment among 16–24-year-olds in Pendle by working with local employers to identify skill needs. It will provide dedicated training and assistance in accessing jobs.

SRB total £2.6 million (scheme period 1998–99 to 2004–05)

SRB Round 5—Pendle—Opening Doors, Unlocking Opportunities

This seven-year scheme targets the five most deprived wards in Pendle. It aims to support community capacity building and enterprise, improve skill levels, health and access to jobs.

SRB total—£16 million (scheme period 1999–2000 to 2005–06)

SRB Round 6—The Time is Now for Nelson, Pendle

A seven-year scheme targeting Central Nelson and Brierfield. It aims to support planning housing improvements in Nelson with a package of measures to improve health, reduce crime, improve the local environment and encourage new small business.

SRB total—£12 million (scheme period 2000–01 to 2006–07)

Local Transport Plans

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	[1]11
1998–99	[1]8
1999–2000	[1]10
2000–01	[2]11
2001–02	28

[1] These figures are for Lancashire County Council's Transport Policies and Programmes allocation.

[2] This figure is from Lancashire County Council's Provision Local Transport Plan settlement.

It is not possible to determine exactly how much of these amounts has been spent on the Pendle constituency. The constituency has benefited from Lancashire County Council's integrated transport policies.

European Funding

The East Lancashire Partnership (ELP) comprises representatives interest from the six local authority districts of East Lancashire, including Pendle.

Under the GMLC programme, ELP was allocated some £10.65 million grant (European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and European Social Fund (ESF)) for

a range of business support and vocational training activities. Pendle was a significant beneficiary of this overall resource.

In addition, Pendle was allocated a £5 million ERDF grant for Nelson town centre initiatives.

Community economic development support totalling £1.2 million grant has been allocated for Nelson and the Waterside and Brierfields Wards.

The resources detailed must be drawn down by the end of December 2001.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Pendle will receive the following indicative funding over the next three years:

Year	*£ million*
2001–02	0.98
2002–03	1.47
2003–04	1.96

New Commitment to Regeneration

There is one pathfinder in East Lancashire, which includes Pendle.

WALES

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what plans he has to introduce proposals to amend the Wales departmental expenditure limit for 2000–01. [151101]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £18,450,000 from £7,808,235,000 to £7,826,685,000. The increase is a result of:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility entitlement of £5,408,000

(ii) net transfers from other Government Departments of £1,645,000

(iii) additional support for flood defence of £118,000 resulting from the Environment, Transport and Regions Minister's autumn 2000 statement, an additional £10,195,000 for education resulting from the Chancellor's pre-Budget statement, and take up of an allocation of £1,084,000 from the Modernising Government Fund

The increase includes the following transfers:

(i) £112,000 from Home Office for the Partnership Development Fund;

(ii) £131,000 from Home Office for the Drug Prevention Advisory Service;

(iii) £57,000 to Scottish Executive for Out of Area Treatments;

(iv) £512,000 from Department of Health for Out of Area Treatments;

(v) £92,000 to Department of Health for Medical Training Costs;

(vi) £1,000 from the Northern Ireland Executive for Out of Area Treatments:

(vii) £19,000 from Home Office for Youth Justice Board work;

(viii) £146,000 from Intervention Board for Slaughter Premium inspection costs;

(ix) £10,000 from Home Office for Youth Justice Board inspection costs;

(x) £43,000 to Home Office for the Crime Reduction Team; and

(xi) £906,000 from DTI for the Phoenix Fund

The increase in DEL will be offset by transfers from other Departmental Expenditure Limits or from the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Steel Industry

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions he has had with the First Secretary of the National Assembly concerning the future of steel production at Llanwern; and if he will make a statement. [149923]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I regularly meet the First Secretary to discuss a range of issues including the future of the Llanwern plant.

It is well known that I believe the proposal to end steelmaking at Llanwern is a short-sighted one. I have urged the company to reconsider its position and I know that the Trade Unions are presenting their own proposals for the company's consideration. However, if the threatened closures go ahead, the Government and the National Assembly have made it clear that we shall both take appropriate steps to assist those affected.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will provide details of the assistance package offered to the Corus Steel company, prior to the announcement of job losses on 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [150251]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 13 February 2001):* The UK Government and the Assembly indicated a willingness to talk to Corus about whether any action on their part would assist the company. As Corus did not wish to engage in such discussions, the Government were unable to make any offer of assistance.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Heppell: To ask the Solicitor-General what plans he has to amend the Law Officers' Department's Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for 2000–01. [151100]

The Solicitor-General: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class V, Vote 4 (The Crown Prosecution Service), Class V, Vote 5 (Serious Fraud Office) and Class V, Vote 6 (HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor) the Attorney-General's Departments Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £8,823,000 from £369,547,000 to £378,370,000.

The Crown Prosecution Service's Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by £4,438,000 from £343,790,000 to £348,228,000. The running costs limit will be increased by £2,504,000 from £245,165,000 to £247,669,000. This increase is required to fund delivery of the pledge on persistent youth offenders, deployment of Higher Court Advocates in the Crown court, diversity and equality issues and achieve improvements against

CPS and CJS targets. An increase in capital expenditure of £5(,000 will be used to fund the introduction of joint CPS/police criminal justice and trial units.

The Serious Fraud Office's Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by £17,486,000 from £1,833,000 to £19,319,000. The Running Costs Limit will increase by £611,000 from £11,324,000 to £11,935,000. The increase is required to fund the impact in 2000–01 of the decision to increase the office's targeted case load to 100 cases in 2003–04; to meet the cost of trials held over from 1999–2000; and to offset reductions in police resources available to combat serious and complex fraud. Capital expenditure will increase by £34,000.

HM Procurator General and Treasury Solicitor's Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by £552,000 from £8,271,000 to £8,823,000. The Running Costs Limit will increase by £1,550,000 from £6,432,000 to £7,982,000. The increase in net running costs is due to an increase in capital charge following a revaluation of TDS's premises (Queen Anne's Chambers). The increase is offset by a matching non-running cost receipt. Capital expenditure will increase by £294,000.

A transfer of £250,000 will be made to the Attorney-General's Departments Departmental Unallocated Provision from the Modernising Government Fund and a transfer of £1,750,000 will be made to the Attorney-General's Departments Departmental Unallocated Provision from the Capital Modernisation Fund.

The increases will be partly offset by transfers totalling £1,206,000 from the Home Office, surrender of £4,565,000 of the Attorney-General's Departments end year flexibility, an allocation of £500,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund and an allocation of £250,000 from the Modernising Government Fund.

The remainder of the expenditure will be charged to the Reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

SCOTLAND

Benefit Statistics

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will publish for each constituency in Scotland her latest estimate of the number of *(a)* male and *(b)* female (i) lone parents, (ii) pensioners, (iii) people in receipt of DSS benefits, and (iv) female unemployed persons, (A) under the age of 18 years, (B) aged 18 to 24 years and (C) aged over 24 years, (I) pensioners qualifying for the free TV licence and (II) households qualifying for the £200 winter fuel allowance. [146986]

Mr. Foulkes: I shall write to my hon. Friend and place a copy of the letter in the House Library.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what proposals there are to amend the Scotland Office Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01. [151111]

Mrs. Liddell: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XIII, Vote 1, Scotland and Transfers to the Scottish Consolidated Fund, the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2000–01 will be increased by £77,265,000 from £15,305,728,000 to £15,382,993,000.

The changes in the DEL include the following:

a draw forward of £32,000,000 from 2001–02 for European structural funds;

an increase of £23,031,000 for the cost of the Lockerbie trial;

an increase of £2,300,000 for additional funding for forestry;

£206,000 for the cost of flood damage and coastal work;

£1,738,000 from the Civil Service Modernisation Fund;

£40,000 for the Employment coalition;

£800,000 for the costs of Kosovo refugees; and

£17,893,000 previously announced in the Pre-Budget Report for education.

Also included in the revised Departmental Expenditure Limit are transfers to and from other Government Departments amounting to a net decrease of £743,000. These include:

(i) £5,100,000 from the Home Office for the costs of asylum seekers;

(ii) £1,576,000 from DTI for the Phoenix fund;

(iii) £5,014,000 to DfEE for Open University payments;

(iv) £1,870,000 to MAFF for the cattle traceability scheme;

(v) £1,250,000 to the Department. of Health for Reserved Health bodies;

(vi) £252,000 from the Northern Ireland Executive for Out of Area treatments;

(vii) £289,000 from the Cabinet Office for telecommunications costs;

(viii) £160,000 to DSS for intercalating students;

(ix) £57,000 from National Assembly for Wales for Out of Area treatments;

(x) £78,000 to the Home Office for the Animal Rights index;

(xi) £342,000 to MAFF for the BSE inquiry;

(xii) £46,000 to MAFF for the Marine Coastguard agency;

(xiii) £750,000 from DETR for track access grants; and

(xiv) £7,000 to Home Office for GRECO (European Commission for the Prevention of Corruption).

The increase in DEL will be offset by transfers from other Departmental Expenditure Limits or from the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

International Criminal Court

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Advocate-General for Scotland what advice she has given on the development of the proposed International Criminal Court. [149841]

The Advocate-General: This Government have strongly supported the establishment of an International Criminal Court. I cannot, however, give the information requested. By long-standing convention, followed by successive Governments, neither the existence nor content of Law Officers' advice is normally disclosed outside Government. There seems no reason to depart from the convention on this occasion.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when his planning department was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the department on a full-time basis. [150371]

Mr. Lock: The Lord Chancellor's Department has carried out a planning function in some form for many years. Since 1998 the planning branch has been a discrete unit within the Department's Finance Division. Prior to that it was part of a separate Planning and Communications Division. The planning branch writes the Department's annual departmental report, which is published by the Stationery Office and placed on the Department's website. In spring 2001 it will produce the departmental business plan.

No departmental or non-departmental advisers participate in this work. There are no non-departmental staff involved in this work. The planning branch consists of five full-time departmental staff and one part-timer.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Special Adviser working for the Lord Chancellor will relinquish his post when the next general election is called. [149313]

Mr. Lock: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Correspondence

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when her Department expects *(a)* to reply to letters of 27 October 2000, 13 November 2000 and 12 December 2000 from Beeney and Co., Reigate, on behalf of Mrs. Nicola Morrison, a constituent, and *(b)* to achieve enforcement of the maintenance order given under case no. 1988-D-257 in Australia under the terms of the Maintenance Orders (Reciprocal Enforcement) Act 1972. [150201]

Jane Kennedy: The Reciprocal Enforcement of Maintenance Orders section of the Department forwarded the letters of 27 October 2000, 13 November 2000 and 12 December 2000 from Messrs. Beeney and Co. to the Australian authorities asking for news of the case, in the usual manner. Unfortunately, notification of this was not given to Beeney and Co. The Department has now acknowledged receipt of the correspondence.

It is for the Australian authorities to decide how to enforce this maintenance order in Australia.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Bermuda

Mr. Reed: To ask the President of the Council what representations she has received from the Government of Bermuda about proposed constitutional changes; and if she will make a statement. [149996]

Mr. Battle: I have been asked to reply.

In December 2000, HMG received a list of proposed constitutional changes from the Government of Bermuda, through the Governor's Office. These, and suggestions for amendments to the constitution from other sources, are under consideration. HMG takes their responsibility to the people of Bermuda seriously and will not agree to changes to the constitution without due deliberation.

People's Peerages

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the ethnic backgrounds of applicants for a people's peerage. [150918]

Mrs. Beckett: I understand that the information requested is as follows:

Indian origin—4 per cent.
Pakistan origin—2 per cent.
Bangladeshi—less than 1 per cent.
East African—less than 1 per cent.
Chinese—less than 1 per cent.
Other Asian—1 per cent.
Caribbean—1 per cent.
African—1 per cent.
Other Black origin—less than 1 per cent.
White—85 per cent.
Other ethnic origin—2 per cent.
Not Specified—1 per cent.

The 15 per cent. non-white applications compares with 2.6 per cent. ethnic minority representation in the present House of Lords, and 5.5 per cent. in the population as whole.

Crown Appointments

Mr. Beith: To ask the President of the Council, pursuant to the answer of 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 332W, to the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) if, in the discussion with the Shrievalty Association, she will seek arrangements to ensure *(a)* that in the cases of nominations for High Sheriff of persons who have been politically active, those nominations do not arise predominantly from any one political party and *(b)* that those nominated are not required to have sufficient means to meet the expenses of the office from their own resources. [149564]

Mrs. Beckett: The Shrievalty is a non-political office, and any person nominated who has been politically active is required to refrain from local or national political activity during his or her year as Sheriff. Provision is made for funding statutory functions performed through Under-Sheriffs and for certain other functions. There are no plans to fund further the non-statutory activities of

Sheriffs from public resources. The extent to which Sheriffs wish to incur personal expenditure on additional activities is a matter for individual decision.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Special Advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149321]

Mr. Chris Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if Millennium Commission funds may be used to pay compensation for costs incurred in bidding for the dome site in the event of the failure of negotiations. [149342]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* The Millennium Commission, as providers of grant from the national lottery to the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), has not underwritten bidders costs in relation to the competition for the sale of the dome. The rules of that competition makes no provision for meeting the costs of unsuccessful bidders.

Departmental Grants (Vale of Clwyd)

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what grants his Department has made to organisations in the Vale of Clwyd since the general election. [149786]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* This Department has made no grants to organisations in the Vale of Clwyd since the general election. However, according to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, there have been 101 national lottery awards to the Vale Clwyd, totalling £6,607,271, since 1 May 1997. I have placed copies of a table showing the details of these awards in the Libraries of both Houses.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what incentives the Government make available to farmers to encourage tourism in the English countryside. [150131]

Janet Anderson: The England rural development programme's rural enterprise scheme will help farmers and others to develop tourism and craft initiatives in order to assist in the development of more sustainable, diversified and enterprising rural economies and communities. Rural England will receive, in total, around £152 million of rural enterprise scheme funding from April 2001 to the end of 2006. The programme's agri-environment measures also help to promote tourism by encouraging farmers to conserve and enhance the intrinsic attractiveness of English landscapes. Similar funding arrangements exist for areas classified as objective 1 for European structural funds support.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what incentives are provided to local residents in rural tourist resorts to encourage them to promote tourism in their town; and to whom these incentives are targeted. [150093]

Janet Anderson: A range of funding bodies and sources is available to assist rural communities and the rural economy, including in relation to tourism. The regional development agencies support a broad range of projects generated by local partnerships and voluntary groups to address regeneration through the single regeneration budget, the capital investment fund and their rural development programme. Support is also available from the Countryside Agency and the European structural funds. The EU LEADER+ programme will complement these mainstream programmes by piloting integrated bottom-up rural development strategies developed and implemented by local community action groups. The programme aims to help rural communities to help themselves in developing a sustainable rural economy, which may include sustainable tourism based on local distinctiveness. Rural England will receive around £32 million of LEADER+ funding from 2001 to the end of 2006.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money was spent by tourists visiting rural areas of north-west England in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [150133]

Janet Anderson: Spending by domestic and overseas tourists visiting the two regional tourist board areas in north-west England was as follows:

£ million

	1998	*1999*
North West Tourist Board	1,393	1,595
Cumbria Tourist Board	429	600

Separate figures for rural areas are not kept, but the North West Tourist Board estimates that approximately 56 per cent. of spend was in rural areas, while the Cumbria Tourist Board estimates that approximately 79 per cent. of spend was in rural areas.

Figures for 2000 are not yet available.

Wembley Stadium

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the prospects for opening the new stadium at Wembley. [150337]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* I understand the Football Association and Wembley National Stadium Ltd. are currently holding discussions with their financial advisers on when to restart the process of loan syndication. The timing of this is entirely a matter for them.

Regional Film Theatres

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to

ensure that publicly funded regional film theatres do not compete unfairly with the purely commercial sector; and if he will make a statement. [150544]

Mr. Chris Smith: Regional film theatres tend to show a wider range of films than commercial cinemas. Public funds also support screenings for minority audiences or for educational purposes and in rural areas. There are also initiatives between public and commercial sectors aimed at making available a broader programme at mainstream cinemas. I am not aware of any difficulties arising from these longstanding policies. The Film Council is developing a strategy for cinema exhibition which it aims to complete by September, building on the work of the British Film Institute.

Digital TV (Audio-described Programmes)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he plans to make available to blind and partially sighted people equipment for the reception of audio described programmes for digital TV. [150270]

Janet Anderson: No. The Government's role is to set the legislative framework within which audio description and other services for people with sensory impairments can be provided. Requiring broadcasters to meet statutory targets is the most effectve and practicable way to ensure the provision and expansion of these services. We have recently announced plans to increase the target for subtitling on digital terrestrial television (DTT) to 80 per cent. of programming and to extend the current targets for subtitling, signing and audio description on DTT to digital cable and digital satellite when legislation permits. We also introduced half-price television licences for the blind last April.

Creative Partnerships

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to make an announcement on creative partnerships. [151191]

Mr. Chris Smith: On Wednesday 21 February, I will announce the locations in which my Department plans to develop creative partnership pilots: an initiative which will provide sustained opportunities for schools to work in partnership with creative arts organisations and individuals. I will also give details of the local consultation that will begin in these areas to determine the partners involved. Copies of this announcement will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Flood Defences (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total expenditure on improving flood defences in the Soar Valley since the Easter 1998 floods. [149998]

Mr. Morley: In addition to their own expenditure of £156,000, the Environment Agency estimates that local authorities have spent approximately £1 million on improving flood defences in the Soar Valley since Easter 1998.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much has been spent by the Environment Agency on improving the flood defences in *(a)* Leicestershire and *(b)* the Soar Valley since Easter 1998. [149997]

Mr. Morley: I understand that since Easter 1998 the Environment Agency has spent some £840,000 on improving flood defences and warnings in Leicestershire, of which £156,000 was spent in the Soar Valley. In addition some £350,000 a year is spent on maintenance.

Fishing

Mr. Steen: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what estimate he has made of the annual revenue generated by commercial fishing in the west country in each of the last three years. [149549]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Following are the landings by the UK fleet into Devon, Cornwall and the Scilly Isles for the calendar years 1998–2000.

Year	*£ million*
1998	67.34
1999	53.79
2000	58.49

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what proposals there are to amend the Forestry Commission Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01. [151102]

Mr. Morley: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class X, Vote 3 (Forestry Commission), the Forestry Commission Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £4,100,000, form £76,065,000 to £80,165,000. The increase is required to meet the net cost of a fall in receipts from sales of timber offset by savings in other net expenditure. The increase will be a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes are proposed to the gross running cost control and Departmental Expenditure Limits for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board for 2000–01. [151232]

Mr. Nick Brown: The Gross Running Cost Control Limit for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food will be decreased by £9,605,000 from £316,371,000 to £306,766,000 and the Gross Running Cost Control Limit for the Intervention Board will be increased by £954,000 from £70,092,000 to £71,046,000.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and the Intervention Board's joint Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £101,326,000 from £1,362,859,000 to £1,464,185,000.

The increase is the net effect of an Intervention Board (IB) increase of £83,884,000 comprising administration transfers of £980,000 from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and £120,000 from HM Customs and

Excise and a transfer of £146,000 to the National Assembly for Wales Agriculture Department; and increases in programme provision of £71,489,000 for the Over Thirty Months Scheme (BSE), £398,000 for the Selective Cull Scheme (BSE) and £11,043,000 for Dairy Agrimonetary Compensation; and a net MAFF increase of £17,442,000 comprising an increase of £1,646,000 for the BSE Inquiry—funded by transfers from the Department of Health, the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales; £2 million for flood defence works—being part of the £51 million Flood Defence package announced on 23 November 2000; £1.87 million from the Scottish Executive as a contribution to the development costs of web-based access to Cattle Traceability Scheme data; and £14.5 million in respect of the Agrimonetary Compensation scheme for Arable Area Payments announced on 2 November 2000. These increases are offset by net transfers to the DETR of £41,000 in respect of work carried out by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA); £654,000 to the Department of Health in respect of surveillance work on Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies (TSEs); £470,000 to the Cabinet Office for Government Pathway costs; and a decrease of £429,000 in net provision for the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) resulting from projects under the Wider Markets Initiative.

Within the DEL there will be a transfer of £980,000 from MAFF to IB to cover the cost of administrative work on Pig Welfare Disposal, Modernising Government and the Over Thirty Months Scheme (OTMS).

The Supplementary Estimate also provides a transfer of £5.691 million Supplementary Credit Approvals capital and £1.35 million programme provision from the MAFF non-voted DEL to voted DEL.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for changes to the Departmental Expenditure Limits and Running Costs Limits for 2000–01. [151099]

Mr. Straw: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the Departmental Expenditure Limit, which covers Class IV Vote 1 (Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) and Vote 2 (Prisons, England and Wales), will be increased by £66,499,000 from £8,867,256,000 to £8,933,755,000. The Running Costs Limit will be decreased by £6,000 from £2,353,684,000 to £2,353,678,000.

The changes are the net effect of the following transfers: £200,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) and £70,000 from the Crown Prosecution Service (Class V Vote 4) in respect of contributions for the Integrated Business Information Systems Unit; £130,000 to the Department of Health (Class II Vote 2), £29,000 to the National Assembly for Wales (Class XIV Vote 1), £23,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) and £76,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service (Class V Vote 4) in connection with Youth Justice Board inspections; £3,000,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) in respect of the reorganisation of responsibility for the Children and Family Court Advisory Services; £23,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1), £7,000 from the Scottish Executive and £3,000 from the Northern Ireland Office (Class XV Vote 1) towards membership costs of the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO); £3,500,000 from the Department of Social Security (Class XII Vote 2) in connection with housing benefit for residents in approved hostels; £32,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund and £32,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) for criminal justice system interface development; £112,000 to the National Assembly for Wales (Class XIV Vote 1) for the partnership development fund; £150,000 to the Department of Health (Class II Vote 2) in support of the project "communicating with professional audiences"; £43,000 from the National Assembly for Wales (Class XIV Vote 1) for crime reduction costs; £39,000 to the Department of Health (Class II Vote 2) for the funding of the drug service commissioners handbook and the Methadone Alliance and £120,000 in respect of the training of drug workers; £131,000 to the National Assembly for Wales (Class XIV Vote 1) in respect of drug projects to be supported by the Confiscated Assets Fund; £404,000 to the Single Intelligence Vote (Class XVII Vote 2) in respect of drug projects to be supported by the Confiscated Assets Fund; £21,700,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund in respect of the Airwave project; £50,000 to the Department for Education and Employment (Class I Vote 1) for the Connexions Direct project; £99,000 from HM Customs and Excise (Class XVI Vote 4) £99,000 from the Department for Education and Employment (Class I Vote 1) and £221,000 from the Department of Health (Class II Vote 2) towards the costs of drug action teams; £315,000 from the Department of Health (Class II Vote 2) for the recruitment of drug action teams; £1,130,000 to the Single Intelligence Vote (Class XVII Vote 2) as a contribution towards three overseas drugs prevention projects; £78,000 from the Scottish Executive as a contribution to the animal rights national index; £95,000 from the Electoral Commission (Class XVIIIC Vote 1) in respect of set up costs; £5,100,000 to the Scottish Executive in respect of local authority asylum support costs; £38,000,000 from the Department of Social Security (Class XII Vote 2) in respect of closure of the housing benefit loophole; £1,200,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service (Class V Vote 4) and £467,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) in respect of the youth justice pledge; £559,000 to the Cabinet Office (Class XVII Vote 1) to resource the news co-ordination centre; £860,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department (Class V Vote 1) following postponement of the transfer of warrant enforcement from the police; £306,000 from the DEL Reserve in respect of free travel for Metropolitan police officers; £14,200,000 in respect of expenditure from the Capital Modernisation Fund for an increase in prison capacity; £1,400,000 in respect of expenditure from the Capital Modernisation Fund on the video links project; and £2,000,000 from the Departmental Unallocation Provision to cover additional non-Voted expenditure on the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections.

The increase in the Department's running costs limit is the net effect of the following transfers: £200,000 from the Lord Chancellor's Department and £70,000 from the

Crown Prosecution Service in respect of contributions for the Integrated Business Information Systems Unit; £130,000 to the Department of Health, £29,000 to the National Assembly for Wales, £23,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department and £76,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service in connection with Youth Justice Board inspections; £112,000 to the National Assembly for Wales for the partnership development fund; £50,000 to the Department of Health in support of the project "communicating with professional audiences"; £43,000 to the National Assembly for Wales for crime reduction costs; £95,000 from the Electoral Commission in respect of set up costs; £2,263,000 from capital expenditure provision in connection with the costs of the Sirius programme; £1,200,000 to the Crown Prosecution Service and £467,000 to the Lord Chancellor's Department in respect of the youth justice pledge; £465,000 to the Cabinet Office to resource the news co-ordination centre; and £125,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision to cover additional non-Voted expenditure on the 1999 European Parliamentary Elections.

These changes will be offset by transfers or a charge on the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Race Equality

Ms Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish his proposals for implementation of the duty to promote race equality under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the second annual report on progress implementing the Stephen Lawrence Action Plan. [151106]

Mr. Straw: The second annual report on progress in implementing the Stephen Lawrence Action Plan and the consultation document on implementation of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 will be published on Thursday 22 February 2001, to mark the second anniversary of the publication of the Report of the Lawrence Inquiry. Copies of these documents will be placed in the Library and the consultation document will be circulated widely among the public bodies that are likely to be affected and to other interested parties for comments.

The consultation document will provide information about timing of the implementation of the 2000 Act. It will, in particular, seek views on the introduction of a number of specific duties to help public bodies better fulfil their obligations under the general duty to promote race equality. It will also seek views on extending the list of public bodies that are subject to the general duty to promote race equality.

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the second edition of the basket of race equality performance indicators which he has developed. [151107]

Mr. Straw: I have today placed in the Library a copy of the document "Race Equality in Public Services". The document sets out performance data in a number of key areas which are of interest to minority ethnic communities, and provides a quantifiable way of demonstrating the Government's progress in promoting race equality.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce the registration fees to be charged by the Criminal Records Bureau. [151198]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Applications to the Criminal Records Bureau for Standard and Enhanced Disclosures need to be counter-signed by a person registered in advance with the Bureau for this purpose. Often this will be the employer or voluntary organisation. We have concluded that the fee for registration should be a one-off payment of £300, with a one-off charge of £5 for each additional counter-signatory nominated by the registered person. These fees reflect the cost to the Bureau of the processes in question. Regulations will be laid accordingly.

Terrorism Act

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will bring the Terrorism Act 2000 into force. [151105]

Mr. Straw: In answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller) on 31 October 2000, *Official Report*, column 419W, I indicated that we were working towards an implementation date for the Terrorism Act 2000 of 19 February 2001. I can now confirm that, by virtue of a Commencement Order which I have made under the Act, the date of implementation will be Monday 19 February 2001. On that day, the Terrorism Act 2000 will replace the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 and the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act 1996. As a consequence of the new judicial extension of detention arrangements which will come into force on 19 February, the United Kingdom will be in a position to lift the derogations entered under Article 15 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 4 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and I can confirm it is our intention to deposit notifications with the Council of Europe and the United Nations to this effect early next week. To take account of any detentions under the Prevention of Terrorism (Temporary Provisions) Act 1989 made up to midnight on 18 February, these notifications will lift the derogations as of 26 February 2001.

Hinduja Brothers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which Ministers and officials in his Department have *(a)* been contacted by and *(b)* contacted (i) Mr. G. P. Hinduja and (ii) Mr. S. P. Hinduja since 2 May 1997; if he will list the occasions on which there was such contact; and if he will make a statement. [148074]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 31 January 2001]:* My Department has had contact with Mr. G. P. Hinduja and Mr. S. P. Hinduja in respect of their applications for naturalisation and in respect of immigration matters. Information about contacts concerning their applications for naturalisation will be made available to Sir Anthony Hammond as part of his review of the possibility of an application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja in 1998. Sir Anthony's report will be published and copies placed in the Vote Office and the Library. It would

be inappropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of this review. Information about contact in respect of immigration matters can be produced only at disproportionate cost.

Neither I, nor any of my Ministers, have had any official meetings with either Mr. G. P. Hinduja or Mr. S. P. Hinduja.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng) received a letter at his constituency office from Mr. S. P. Hinduja in September 2000 in his capacity as a local MP about parking facilities for people visiting the Swaminarayan Hindu Mandir in his Brent, South constituency. This was dealt with by my right hon. Friend in the usual way and referred to his local authority. Otherwise, neither I, nor my Ministers, recall having been contacted by or having contacted either Mr. G. P. Hinduja or Mr. S. P. Hinduja in the period from 2 May 1997, although we may have been present at functions at the same time as Mr. G. P. and Mr. S. P. Hinduja. For example, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), believes that when he spoke, by invitation, as a Minister at the Sikh Forum Dinner on 18 October 1999, Mr. S. P. Hinduja was a guest on the platform table and that at a reception organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Southall (Mr. Khabra) on 3 July, which he attended, Mr. S. P. Hinduja was also present. I understand that Mr. G. P. Hinduja was present at the Asia Light evening held in Brighton last year and that Mr. S. P. Hinduja and Mr. G. P. Hinduja were present at the Labour Party's Annual Gala Dinner on 15 April 1999. I was present at both these events. My hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire and I received invitations to the Hinduja Foundation Diwali Gala evening on 3 November 1999. We did not attend; officials from the Home Office Race Equality Unit attended the event.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the allegations against G. P. Hinduja and S. P. Hinduja respectively of which his Department was aware when the decisions to award citizenship to each of them were made. [150377]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the hon. Members for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 166W.

Domestic Violence

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policies to tackle domestic violence. [150588]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Domestic violence is a serious and abhorrent crime which the Government are determined to tackle effectively. We have emphasised that the domestic context in which it occurs is an aggravating not a mitigating factor and that it is an issue which we expect local crime reduction partnerships to cover in their audits of local problems and strategies for addressing them.

Since coming to office, we have undertaken a broad range of measures to reduce the level of domestic violence and strengthen support for victims. That is why we have provided £7 million for a violence against women initiative within the Crime Reduction Programme. That initiative is currently funding for development and evaluation 34 projects that will help us identify what interventions in what circumstances are the most effective and cost-effective.

Among other significant measures within the last year are: the issue of multi-agency guidance to agencies dealing with domestic violence and of specific guidance to Health Service professionals; the issue of a new Home Office circular to the police; the inclusion of domestic violence within police Best Value performance indicators; the provision of £120 million additional capital funding for a new Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund for specified vulnerable groups, including the survivors of domestic violence; and increased funding for Victim Support.

Other current initiatives include work with the Association of Chief Police Officers on a circular on effective use of provisions in the Protection from Harassment Act 1997; the evaluation of probation service domestic violence perpetrator programmes; the development of a domestic violence toolkit on the Home Office's crime reduction website; research on possible future publicity work; and, the inclusion in the British Crime Survey 2001 of a special module on domestic violence.

Essex Constabulary

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* funded and *(b)* actual police officers were in post in the Essex constabulary on (i) 31 March 1997 and (ii) the latest date for which figures are available. [148699]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* The information requested has been provided by the chief constable of the Essex police.

Essex police

Year	*Funded officer numbers*	*Actual police numbers*
31 March 1997	2,944	2,952
7 February 2001	2,955	2,907

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many civilian staff were employed by Essex constabulary *(a)* on 31 March 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [148701]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* On 31 March 1997 the Essex police had 1,199 civilian support staff. This had increased by 273 to 1,472 civilian staff on 30 September 2000. Many of the extra civilian support staff have, I understand, been used to free police officers from paperwork and from jobs that can be as effectively undertaken by civilians.

Endangered Species

Sir Paul Beresford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police units there are in

the United Kingdom to enforce international obligations on the protection of endangered species; and what budget has been set aside for this purpose in each of the last five years. [147715]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 29 January 2001]:* There is, in England and Wales, a network of Police Wildlife Liaison Officers, the vast majority of whom carry out this role in addition to their other police duties and responsibilities.

Six police forces in England and Wales have a full-time Wildlife Liaison Officer. Only a small part of the work of Wildlife Liaison Officers would deal with enforcing international obligations in respect of endangered species.

There are no figures available in respect of the budgetary provision for this work as that is a matter for individual chief officers.

Police Statistics

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many officers *(a)* were recruited to and *(b)* retired, resigned or were dismissed from each police force and in total between (i) April and September 1999 and (ii) October and March 2000. [148013]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* The information in the table sets out the number of officers who were recruited, retired or resigned for the six monthly periods, 1 April 1999 to 30 September 2000 and 1 October 1999 to 31 March 2000. The category for "other wastage" includes death, dismissals and departures for other reasons. Because of the way in which the statistics are collected we are unable to provide a breakdown of each of the sub-categories in the "other wastage" column.

Police figures in England and Wales

	Recruitments		*Retirements*		*Resignations*		*Other*[1]	
Police force	*September 1999*	*March 2000*	*September 1999*	*March 2000*	*September 1999*	*March 2000*	*September 1999*	*March 2000*
Avon and Somerset	60	44	43	61	13	8	4	17
Bedfordshire	37	0	19	20	6	5	6	2
Cambridgeshire	23	0	21	16	4	9	3	1
Cheshire	25	11	31	36	6	11	2	4
City of London	0	0	20	9	3	3	8	7
Cleveland	9	59	29	24	3	0	2	1
Cumbria	15	8	28	22	4	5	3	4
Derbyshire	34	45	14	22	2	1	5	3
Devon and Cornwall	42	32	56	56	5	12	4	1
Dorset	15	72	22	27	9	7	5	5
Durham	15	36	15	17	6	8	4	8
Dyfed Powys	38	16	17	14	2	6	0	0
Essex	41	52	72	27	13	4	14	39
Gloucestershire	29	30	23	13	6	7	1	3
Greater Manchester	159	127	118	117	23	12	14	12
Gwent	49	33	29	20	4	5	7	3
Hampshire	61	91	71	58	17	15	23	6
Hertfordshire	88	79	33	34	17	13	0	18
Humberside	37	54	38	38	4	9	6	0
Kent	107	67	43	59	14	20	7	13
Lancashire	51	48	44	34	9	22	1	1
Leicestershire	38	29	21	25	15	8	0	0
Lincolnshire	0	34	26	32	2	6	1	0
Merseyside	39	2	71	45	10	7	4	8
Metropolitan police	566	428	409	406	182	184	124	172
Norfolk	19	24	19	26	6	1	3	2
Northamptonshire	11	8	9	16	6	4	1	2
Northumbria	87	34	43	60	9	19	10	10
North Wales	40	39	24	25	0	4	2	1
North Yorkshire	1	9	25	26	5	6	3	1
Nottinghamshire	43	61	34	33	6	5	5	9
South Wales	81	43	83	22	7	7	5	7
South Yorkshire	67	61	42	58	13	9	8	7
Staffordshire	21	1	23	28	10	13	6	1
Suffolk	2	15	20	17	5	6	4	4
Surrey	87	96	27	27	8	18	0	0
Sussex	70	31	50	57	22	25	16	15
Thames Valley	88	102	57	52	29	25	4	22
Warwickshire	24	35	12	13	7	2	2	2
West Mercia	13	2	45	34	10	10	2	1
West Midlands	160	95	90	94	39	75	28	1
West Yorkshire	1	60	80	73	13	21	12	10
Wiltshire	20	9	17	23	7	18	1	0
Total all forces	2,413	2,122	2,013	1,916	581	655	360	423

[1] "Other" includes death, dismissals and departures for other reasons.

Police Numbers (North Yorkshire)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what means the increase in the number of police officers in North Yorkshire will be funded. [149453]

Mr. Charles Clarke: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave her on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 174W.

Arrests

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made on average per police officer for each force area in England in each year since 1990. [150104]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information given in the table is for arrests for notifiable offences and for the year 1999–2000 only. Information for earlier years is not available on a consistent basis.

Number of arrests for notifiable offences and average arrests per police officer by police force area in England, 1999–2000

Police force area	Total arrests	Total police officers[1]	Average arrests
Avon and Somerset	21,856	2,934	7
Bedfordshire	13,011	1,028	13
Cambridgeshire	12,418	1,237	10
Cheshire	18,202	2,011	9
Cleveland	20,521	1,404	15
Cumbria	15,568	1,084	14
Derbyshire	18,499	1,777	10
Devon and Cornwall	24,609	2,841	9
Dorset	12,472	1,306	10
Durham	[2]—	1,558	[2]—
Essex	24,405	2,806	9
Gloucestershire	11,352	1,114	10
Greater Manchester	69,317	6,795	10
Hampshire	42,598	3,419	12
Hertfordshire	14,111	1,767	8
Humberside	[2]—	1,932	[2]—
Kent	34,684	3,204	11
Lancashire	37,535	3,179	12
Leicestershire	18,000	1,993	9
Lincolnshire	20,700	1,115	19
London, City of	4,726	732	6
Merseyside	44,315	4,085	11
Metropolitan police	202,218	25,485	8
Norfolk	16,313	1,381	12
Northamptonshire	12,730	1,117	11
Northumbria	47,295	3,788	12
North Yorkshire	20,353	1,283	16
Nottinghamshire	33,001	2,204	15
South Yorkshire	34,727	3,163	11
Staffordshire	[2]—	2,170	[2]—
Suffolk	10,787	1,145	9
Surrey	12,993	1,785	7
Sussex	24,183	2,822	9
Thames Valley	43,605	3,740	12
Warwickshire	8,376	900	9
West Mercia	21,172	1,887	11
West Midlands	78,592	7,194	11
West Yorkshire	44,800	4,822	9
Wiltshire	10,498	1,118	9

[1] Police officer strength as at 31 March 2000.
[2] Not available

Police (Immediate Calls)

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan police response vehicles have been involved in accidents while attending immediate response calls, broken down by borough, since September 2000. [150285]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that the numbers of police response vehicles involved in accidents while attending immediate response calls, broken down by borough, since September 2000 were:

Borough	September	October	November	December	Total
Barking and Dagenham	0	4	5	3	12
Barnet	4	6	1	3	14
Bexley	3	2	2	1	8
Brent	8	3	4	1	16
Bromley	2	1	3	4	10
Camden	7	3	1	0	11
Croydon	2	3	3	2	10
Ealing	6	2	2	7	17
Enfield	5	1	4	9	19
Greenwich	2	1	1	2	6
Hackney	5	2	5	3	15
Hammersmith and Fulham	2	3	1	2	8
Haringey	6	10	5	4	25
Harrow	1	2	1	0	4
Havering	1	2	4	2	9
Heathrow Airport	0	2	0	0	2
Hillingdon	2	6	6	1	15
Hounslow	2	3	3	4	12
Islington	4	7	0	1	12
Kensington and Chelsea	4	5	3	1	13
Kingston-Upon-Thames	0	3	1	2	6
Lambeth	2	3	2	3	10
Lewisham	2	1	5	5	13
Merton	1	2	1	0	4
Newham	1	6	3	5	15
Redbridge	6	4	4	6	20

Borough	September	October	November	December	Total
Richmond-Upon-Thames	3	0	2	0	5
Southwark	3	4	5	6	18
Sutton	2	0	0	2	4
Tower Hamlets	3	6	5	5	19
Waltham Forest	5	8	6	3	22
Wandsworth	7	5	3	3	18
Westminster	5	2	5	2	14
Metropolitan Police Service	106	112	96	92	406

Jackie Ballard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list, on a borough-by-borough basis, the percentage of immediate calls which were met within the target time for the Metropolitan police since September 2000. [150284]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that the Metropolitan Police Service's charter standard is to attend 80 per cent. of immediate calls within 12 minutes. The percentage of immediate calls which were met within the target time for the Metropolitan police since September 2000 were:

Percentage

Borough	September	October	November	December	January
Barking and Dagenham	72.6	80.1	78.2	80.2	74.3
Barnet	74.5	71.2	70.3	72.5	71.7
Bexley	79.9	79.2	81.5	84.8	83.3
Brent	70.1	69.0	70.2	70.9	70.0
Bromley	76.2	78.0	77.9	76.4	76.2
Camden	66.5	66.7	69.4	70.1	69.9
Croydon	73.7	73.6	72.8	73.6	75.2
Ealing	79.1	75.4	76.7	83.0	79.5
Enfield	74.6	74.5	69.9	72.3	77.1
Greenwich	69.0	72.3	69.2	72.4	75.1
Hackney	80.9	84.5	88.9	88.2	85.7
Hammersmith and Fulham	84.7	83.8	87.3	87.2	88.9
Haringey	74.5	74.4	74.8	76.4	79.6
Harrow	77.7	78.7	80.1	79.8	77.2
Havering	69.4	71.8	71.6	69.7	70.5
Heathrow Airport	92.9	89.3	91.1	89.1	94.1
Hillingdon	72.4	70.8	70.4	75.2	77.2
Hounslow	74.0	76.3	73.9	76.0	76.5
Islington	70.2	70.1	70.9	72.5	74.3
Kensington and Chelsea	81.8	82.7	84.1	84.0	83.2
Kingston-Upon-Thames	83.7	83.3	83.2	80.5	85.6
Lambeth	74.5	75.1	72.6	76.2	76.1
Lewisham	75.9	78.5	77.3	76.5	80.1
Merton	80.0	77.7	77.0	77.8	73.6
Newham	68.8	71.3	70.5	68.3	76.3
Redbridge	73.4	70.5	68.6	69.6	73.9
Richmond-Upon-Thames	79.6	79.2	76.1	81.1	81.6
Southwark	79.0	76.7	78.1	79.4	80.9
Sutton	84.7	87.0	86.4	86.3	82.4
Tower Hamlets	69.1	68.9	68.5	70.0	73.0
Waltham Forest	73.7	81.1	82.2	80.7	82.7
Wandsworth	81.4	81.1	78.4	82.4	79.5
Westminster	82.6	84.2	83.9	83.6	85.3

Violent Offences (Waverley)

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what reported offences involving violence there were in Waverley in the past three years; and how many of those involved *(a)* village shops and *(b)* post offices. [150309]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Totals of violent crimes in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas were not collected centrally prior to September 1999, and are not collected by location of offence. The table gives the number of violent offences recorded in Waverley in the year to September 2000 in the three categories of violent crime. There are no previous comparable year data held centrally. This information, with that on all other Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, was published in table 5 of the Home Office Statistical Bulletin 1/01, "Recorded Crime England and Wales October 1999 to September 2000", which is available in the Library.

Waverley crime and disorder reduction partnership

Notifiable offences recorded by the police	Number
October 1999 to September 2000	
Violence against the person	665
Sexual offences	55
Robbery	23

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department since the introduction of the new allowances for housing for police officers in London, *(a)* how many officers joined the Metropolitan police from other police forces and *(b)* how many left the Metropolitan police to join other police forces; and if he will make a statement. [148650]

Mr. Charles Clarke: No new allowances for housing have been introduced for police officers in London. The London Allowance paid to those police officers recruited into the Metropolitan police since 1 September 1994 who are not in receipt of housing allowance was increased with effect from I July 2000.

I understand from the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis that between 1 July 2000 and 31 January 2001, 68 police officers joined the Metropolitan police from other forces and 245 left the Metropolitan police for other forces.

Departmental Policies (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tooting parliamentary constituency the effect of his Department's policies and actions since 1 May 1997. [149862]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although following are examples relating to the Tooting constituency or the immediate locality:

Crime Reduction Programme (CRP):

Targeted Policing Initiative:

Round 2: Understanding and Responding to Hate Crime—A Metropolitan Police Project seeking to tackle domestic violence and racially motivated crime in all London boroughs within their policing area. Scheme seeks to develop a data system that will inform the investigation of hate crime; create a system for training and support for those dealing with 'hate crime' and improve the understanding of different forms of hate crime and how to respond to it. Also aims to find more effective ways of identifying both new and repeat victims. Allocated funding of £287,000 for a 22 month project.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV):

Three schemes approved under the CCTV initiative 1999—total £327,500

Lennox Estate—15 CCTV cameras and related equipment which will provide coverage around the Lennox Housing Estate with the aim of targeting criminal damage, vandalism, anti-social behaviour and attempted burglaries.

St. George's Hospital—providing 11 cameras and associated equipment the scheme seeks to facilitate coverage around St George's Hospital, focusing primarily on the car park area, which has experienced relatively high levels of vehicle crime. The scheme will also target burglary, bicycle theft and anti-social behaviour.

Battersea Park Extension—four CCTV cameras and associated equipment have been funded to provide further coverage of the Battersea Park area and the vicinity of Prince of Wales Drive. This will enable the Metropolitan police and the Wandsworth Parks Constabulary to respond to incidents quickly and control public events more effectively. The scheme also seeks to reduce motor vehicle crime, which has been a problem affecting off-street parking around Prince of Wales Drive.

Wandsworth has recently submitted six bids under round two of the CCTV Initiative. The funding requested from the CRP is £530,299. These bids have been submitted to the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme Unit (CRPU) and a decision is awaited.

Reducing Burglary Initiative:

There are three initiatives at present within the borough:

Round 2: Over 60's—The Metropolitan police in partnership with Wandsworth Borough Council have been allocated funding for a project covering the over 60's. The main interventions proposed are target hardening for repeat victims, particularly among elderly households. Allocated Crime Reduction Programme funding of £7,100.

Round 2: Balham Ward—The project encompasses the Balham area. Main interventions proposed are raising awareness, roadshow and watch link, target hardening and a property accreditation scheme for an area with large numbers of flats and houses in multiple occupation. Allocated Crime Reduction Programme funding of £19,400.

Round 2: West Putney Ward—Main interventions proposed are target hardening, awareness raising and direct offender targeting in areas with large detached properties and council estates. Allocated Crime Reduction Programme funding of £25,100.

Wandsworth has submitted a bid under round 3 of the Reducing Burglary Initiative. The bid covers a significant proportion of the borough and asks for funding of £526,100. The bid has been submitted to the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme Unit (CRPU) and a decision is awaited.

Drug Arrest Referral Initiative:

A drug arrest referral scheme has been established in Wandsworth. The scheme aims to reduce drugs misuse and drug related crime by providing treatment options for problem drug users, who are arrested. A specialist drugs worker is employed to identify, assess and refer people to treatment who have been arrested and want help in relation to problem drug use. The cost of employing Arrest Referral Workers is being matched jointly by the Metropolitan Police until April 2002. Under the Crime Reduction Programme, the Joint Finance Initiative additionally provides a contribution towards local treatment of problem drug-users. The CRP allocation of funding for arrest referral is £25,974 and for treatment is £21,468.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Tooting to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

Racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

The asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000; and

Good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum claims have been refused because the applicants did not submit their SEF within the two-week deadline. [150098]

Mrs. Roche: Information relating to asylum applicants who did not submit their Statement of Evidence Form (SEF) within the 10 working day deadline is not currently routinely collected so could only be obtained through examination of individual case records and is therefore available only at disproportionate cost.

The available information relates to total refusals of asylum on non-compliance grounds; comprising failure to provide further evidence as required and failure to respond to invitations for interview to establish identity as well as failure to complete a SEF correctly and within the time allowed.

The information that is available is given in the table.

Refusals of asylum on non-compliance grounds in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, April—December 2000[1,2]

Month	Total refused	Of which on no compliance grounds: Cases under normal procedures	Cases under backlog criteria[3]
April	4,205	1,165	—
May	5,780	1,655	255
June	6,740	2,135	380
July	6,575	2,015	230
August	7,680	3,125	170
September	6,785	2,885	75
October[4]	7,250	3,110	[5]—
November	10,105	4,425	[5]—
December	7,850	2,840	[5]—

[1] Provisional figures (other than percentages) rounded to the nearest 5
[2] Information is for initial decision, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions
[3] Includes cases decided under measures aimed at reducing the pre 1996 asylum application backlog
[4] Cases considered under normal procedures may include some cases decided under the backlog criteria
[5] Nil
Note:
Includes some cases where the application has been refused on substantive grounds

Information on the number of refusals, and the number of refusals on non-compliance grounds is published regularly on the Department's website at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/index.htm.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum cases have been dispersed under the terms of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; how many of these were *(a)* single adults and *(b)* couples without children; and if he will make a statement. [150039]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* As at the end of December 2000, 16,590[1] bedspaces in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation were allocated to asylum seekers and their dependants. The number of bedspaces allocated to single adults and to couples without children is not available.

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest ten.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in each of the past three years *(a)* how many failed asylum seekers were removed from the United Kingdom and *(b)* how many asylum applications were refused; and if he will make a statement. [150076]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* The information is given in the table.

Year	Total refusals[1,2]	Asylum seekers removed[3]
1998	22,315	6,990
1999[1]	12,300	7,660
2000[4]	78,180	8,970

[1] Initial decision outcome
[2] Figures rounded to the nearest 5
[3] Figures rounded to the nearest 10
[4] Provisional figures

The Government are determined to increase substantially the number of failed asylum seekers who are removed.

We are taking additional measures, including expanding the number of detention places, to increase and speed up the removal of failed asylum seekers. The programme of works to deliver around 2,000 new detention places by the end of 2001 is well on track. In addition to the current facilities at Tinsley House, Gatwick, Campsfield House, Oxford and Harmondsworth, near Heathrow, we have successfully let contracts to deliver 900 places at Yarl's Wood in Bedfordshire by May 2001 and 550 places at Harmondsworth, to replace the current facility by the end of June 2001. We are also tendering a contract to deliver up to 150 places on the old Dungavel House prison site in Lanarkshire, Scotland by the autumn of 2001 and progressing plans to deliver 300 places at Aldington in Kent. An agreement is also in place with the Prison Service to allow us to use 112 places at Her Majesty's Prison Lindholme and up to a further 500 prison places throughout England for Immigration Act detainees, while the new facilities are under construction.

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what average payments were made to each London borough per asylum seeker for housing allowance for the latest year for which information is available. [150547]

Mrs. Roche: It is not possible to give separate figures for housing allowance. The table gives the information that is available and shows the actual average amounts paid by the Home Office to each London borough for families and single adults for the year 1999–2000. The amount covers accommodation, support and administration costs.

Average unit costs for 1999–2000

	Adults	Families
Barnet	134.5	243.5
Barking and Dagenham	134.5	245.2
Bexley	141.2	231.1
Brent	119.2	240.1
Bromley	140.0	240.0
Camden	140.0	240.0
Corporation of London	140.0	240.0
Croydon	110.6	194.5
Ealing	136.2	242.4
Enfield	142.1	226.5
Greenwich	83.3	221.0
Hackney	137.2	158.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	140.0	240.0
Haringey	155.7	197.5
Harrow	140.0	240.0
Havering	140.0	240.0
Hillingdon	124.9	240.0
Hounslow	130.4	247.9
Islington	140.0	240.0
Kensington and Chelsea	140.0	240.0
Kingston upon Thames	141.2	222.5
Lambeth	137,6	215.4
Lewisham	91.1	180.3
Merton	142.8	230.7
Newham	127.1	191.4
Redbridge	110.3	224.0
Richmond upon Thames	78.4	243.6
Southwark	140.0	240.0
Sutton	140.0	240.0
Tower Hamlets	140.0	240.0
Waltham Forest	75.5	233.2
Wandsworth	132.7	241.8
Westminster	140.0	240.0

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for naturalisation *(a)* he has determined personally and *(b)* have been determined personally by other Ministers in his Department (i) in total since 2 May 1997 and (ii) in (1) 1997, (2) 1998, (3) 1999 and (4) 2000. [149572]

Mrs. Roche: This information is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The overwhelming majority of decisions are taken by officials.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which hon. Members made representations to his Department between 2 May 1997 and 28 July 1998 in support of relaxing the residence requirement for applicants for naturalisation. [150040]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* None so far as we can determine. It would entail disproportionate cost for us to check for any representations made in the context of individual cases.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the residence requirements are with which an applicant for naturalisation is expected to comply; what is the legal basis for these requirements; and if he will make a statement. [149575]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to Schedule 1 to the British Nationality Act 1981 where the residency requirements are set out. Schedule 1 is the legal basis for the requirements.

Prison Statistics

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners *(a)* were in category B prisons, *(b)* escaped from category B prisons and *(c)* absconded from category B prisons in each year between 1990 and 2000. [149916]

Mr. Boateng: Available statistics show the category B prison population at the end of June for each year was:

Year	Number
1995	5,274
1996	8,162
1997	9,016
1998	7,181
1999	7,396
2000	7,763

I am unable to provide figures for 1990–1994 in the time available.

Determining the number of prisoners who have either escaped or absconded from category B prisons over the 10 year period can be supplied only at disproportionate cost. However, I can advise the House that there has not been an escape from a category B establishment since September 1999.

Police (Avon and Somerset)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate *(a)* the total number of police officers and *(b)* the number of frontline officers in the Avon and Somerset area in each year since 1978–79. [148739]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on police numbers in Avon and Somerset constabulary from December 1978 is provided in the table. However, it is only possible to provide information from December 1990 on the number of operational (frontline) officers. The information on operational officers has been provided by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

Data on operational numbers were collected on a calendar year basis between 1990 and 1993. Police numbers prior to 1994–95 have therefore been provided on the same basis so that the data are comparable. From 1994–95 all data are on a financial year basis (ie as at 31 March of each year).

Avon and Somerset Constabulary police numbers since 1978 and operational numbers since 1990

Year	Total number of police officers	Number of operational police officers
1978[1]	2,775	n/a
1979	2,861	n/a
1980	2,962	n/a
1981	3,014	n/a
1982	2,996	n/a
1983	2,985	n/a
1984	2,979	n/a
1985	2,965	n/a
1986	2,982	n/a
1987	3,021	n/a
1988	2,975	n/a
1989	3,055	n/a
1990	3,059	2,599

Avon and Somerset Constabulary police numbers since 1978 and operational numbers since 1990

Year	Total number of police officers	Number of operational police officers
1991	3,072	2,640
1992	3,065	2,379
1993	3,034	2,286
1994–95[2]	3,000	2,262
1995–96	2,981	2,277
1996–97	2,989	2,378
1997–98	2,976	2,417
1998–99	2,999	2,394
1999–2000	2,934	2,777
2000–01[3]	2,941	[3]n/a

[1] Figures between 1978 and 1993 are on a calendar year basis.

[2] Figures from 1994–95 are on a financial year basis.

[3] Total police numbers for 2000–01 are those for 30 September 2000. Information on the force's operational numbers for 31 March 2001 will not be available until the middle of the year.

Victim Support

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums of money his Department will in future make available each year for independent charities providing support for victims by victims; and what procedures there will be for applying for such funding. [150457]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government are considering the allocation of grant to victims programmes and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums of money his Department has given each year, from 1995 to date to *(a)* Victim Support, *(b)* other independent victim charities, and the amounts per charity, and *(c)* other victim support organisations with non-charitable status, and the amounts per organisation; and what proportion of the above amounts had gone to provide support for bereaved and injured road traffic victims (i) via Victim Support, (ii) via the independent victim charities and (iii) via the other victim support organisations with non-charitable status. [150458]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The available information about Home Office grant given to victim support organisations since 1995 is summarised in the table.

	Victim Support (£ million)	Support after murder and manslaughter (£)	Other victim support organisations (£)
1995–96	10.817	0	0
1996–97	11.682	0	0
1997–98	12.682	0	0
1998–99	12.682	43,000	0
1999–2000	17.500	100,000	0
2000–01	18.600	100,000	0

Information about the proportion of such grant which might have gone to provide support for victims of road traffic incidents is not available.

Since 1999 the Home Office has also provided £23,000 a year to the road safety organisation, BRAKE, for the supply of the booklets 'Coping with grief' and 'Procedures following a death on the road in England and Wales'. The booklets are distributed free of charge by the police to the families of those killed in road crashes.

New Prison, Peterborough

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects work to start on demolishing existing buildings to make way for the new prison in Peterborough; [150536]

(2) for what reason the demolition of existing buildings prior to the building of the new prison in Peterborough has been delayed. [150538]

Mr. Boateng: There has been no delay. The Prison Service carried out its own investment appraisal as to whether to demolish the existing buildings before appointing a preferred supplier to construct and operate the new prison at Peterborough. Discussions took place with the city council, demolition contractors and the consortiums bidding for the new prison. At the conclusion of these discussions it was decided that the best option was to incorporate the demolition work into the PFI construction contract.

Work on demolishing the existing buildings on the site of the new prison to be built at Peterborough is expected to commence in late 2001.

Work on demolishing the existing building on the site of the new prison to be built at Peterborough is expected to commence in late 2001.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he expects the new prison to be operational in Peterborough; [150535]

(2) when he will announce funding details for the new prison in Peterborough. [150537]

Mr. Boateng: Details of contract costs and funding will be announced to coincide with contract signature which is expected in late 2001. The new prison at Peterborough is expected to take its first prisoners in early 2004.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received from the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) on behalf of her constituents *(a)* for and *(b)* against the new prison in Peterborough. [150546]

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) has made representations on behalf of three constituents, one of whom was against the prison proposal with the other two being respectively against the proposed location within Peterborough and the access route into the prison.

Offences against Children

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about the Government's policy on offenders who commit offences against children. [150569]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Government believe those who offend against children should be dealt with severely by the courts and appropriate action taken to prevent their re-offending. Recent measures include the provisions in Part II of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 to prevent people who commit serious offences

against children from subsequently working with them; to raise the penalties for the offence of possession of child pornography to five years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both, and for the making and distributing of child pornography to 10 years' imprisonment or an unlimited fine or both; and to raise the age limit for the offence of indecent conduct towards a child to protect children up to 16. All these measures came into force on 11 January 2001. They form part of a programme of work we have undertaken to increase protection for children from those who may harm them.

Assaults on Police Officers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on assaults on police officers. [150570]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Assault is a serious offence and assaults on the police are deplorable. The Government are committed to reducing the number of assaults on police officers as part of their overall strategy to reduce violent crime, as set out in "fighting violent crime together: an action plan" published in January. We are determined to support the right of every law-abiding individual to go about his or her daily life without the fear of falling victim to crime. We recognise our responsibility in supporting the police to protect the community. That is why we are increasing police funding significantly and in real terms.

The Government are determined to ensure that all police officers are protected in carrying out their duties. We support the use of the best available means to protect our police officers. In addition to the development of protective clothing to guard against knife or gun attack, police now have access to the up-to-date extendable side handled batons and the CS incapacitant spray, which help to protect them from assault. The Home Office's Police Scientific Development Branch continues to monitor developments in this area, in order to provide the police service with advice on the most effective equipment available.

We recognise the importance of high quality training in protecting police officers in carrying out their duties. In May 2000 the Government published "Police Training: The Way Forward" which set out a range of proposals to ensure common national standards in police training and life-long learning for staff.

In order to allow the identification of the level of recorded assaults on the police, in 1998 we introduced assault on a constable as one of the new elements in the recording of crime figures. Assault carries a range of sentences depending on the seriousness of the incident. We expect the courts to use their full powers when considering sentences in cases where the police are assaulted.

Departmental Business (Overseas Travel)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits abroad have been made by Home Office officials on departmental business *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149042]

Mr. Straw: The information which has been requested is not held centrally and would incur disproportionate cost to obtain.

Orders

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many sex offender orders have been made to date in each police force area in England and Wales; how many have been *(a)* discharged and *(b)* breached; and if he will make a statement; [149162]

(2) how many child safety orders have been made to date in each police force area in England and Wales; how many have been *(a)* discharged and *(b)* breached; and if he will make a statement; [149164]

(3) how many parenting orders have been made to date in each police force area in England and Wales; how many have been *(a)* discharged and *(b)* breached; and if he will make a statement. [149163]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[pursuant to his replies, 8 February 2001, c. 674W]:* The information given in the table covering the number of Parenting Orders and Child Safety Orders made up to 31 May 2000 was incorrect. An updated table with amendments is given.

Number of parenting, child safety and sex offender orders (as introduced under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) made, discharged or breached within pilot areas and nationally up to 30 September 2000[1]

	Made			
Type of order and police force area	*Number up to 31 May 2000*	*Nationally from 1 June to 30 September 2000*[1]	*Discharged*	*Breached (up to June 2000)*[1]
Sex Offender Order[2]	[3]32	11	[4]n/a	n/a
Greater Manchester	—	1	—	—
Metropolitan police	—	1	—	—
Lancashire	—	2	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	1	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	1	—	—
Suffolk	—	1	—	—
West Yorkshire	—	2	—	—
Dyfed-Powys	—	1	—	—
North Wales	—	1	—	—
Parenting Order[5]	[6]284	[7]40	n/a	[8]1
of which given at:				
Civil and family proceedings courts	—	18	n/a	—
Cleveland	[10]—	1	—	—
Greater Manchester	[10]—	6	—	—
Metropolitan police	—	5	—	—

Number of parenting, child safety and sex offender orders (as introduced under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998) made, discharged or breached within pilot areas and nationally up to 30 September 2000[1]

	Made			
Type of order and police force area	*Number up to 31 May 2000*	*Nationally from 1 June to 30 September 2000*[1]	*Discharged*	*Breached (up to June 2000)*[1]
Northumbria	—	4	—	—
Suffolk	[10]—	1	—	—
West Sussex	[10]—	1	—	—
Criminal courts	[6]284	22[7]	n/a	—
Bedfordshire	48	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	12	—	—	—
Durham	[10]—	2	—	—
Greater Manchester	[10]—	4	—	—
Hampshire	44	—	—	—
Lancashire	[10]—	6	—	—
Leicestershire	[10]—	1	—	—
Merseyside	27	—	—	—
Metropolitan police	24	1	—	—
Northumbria	96	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	[10]—	2	—	—
South Yorkshire	12	1	—	—
Warwickshire	[10]—	2	—	—
West Midlands	21	3	—	—
Child Safety Order[5]	2	—	[9]n/a	[10]—
Northumbria	2	—	—	—
Care Order for Non-Compliance with Child Safety Orders	—	—	n/a	[10]—

[1] Provisional.
[2] Implemented on 1 December 1998.
[3] Data by area for Sex Offender Orders only available from 1 June 2000.
[4] Subsection 2(7) of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provides that "except with the consent of both parties, no sex offender order shall be discharged before the end of the period of five years beginning with the date of service of the order".
[5] Piloted from 30 September 1998 and implemented nationally from 1 June 2000.
[6] An actual breakdown by type of court is not readily available for parenting orders made within the piloting period. Information suggests that 62 per cent. were made by criminal courts, 37 per cent. by civil courts and 1 per cent. at family proceedings courts.
[7] Data for parenting orders given at criminal courts up to 30 June 2000 only.
[8] Breach recorded in Dyfed-Powys police force area in 1999.
[9] If the child fails to comply with any requirement, the court may, on application of the responsible officer, discharge the order and make in respect of him a care order under s31(10(a)) of the Children Act 1989.
[10] Not applicable.
n/a = not available

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what initiatives embarked upon since May 1997 have benefited Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [149910]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Under round one of the Crime Reduction Programme Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) Initiative, £201,000 was awarded to the Pendle Community Safety partnership in January 2000, for a CCTV scheme in Nelson town centre. The scheme proposes to reduce violent crime, vehicle crime, burglary and fear of crime.

The Youth Justice Board has also invested £228,018 on two development projects in Lancashire, including Pendle. The projects cover a victim/offender mediation service and a community bail support scheme.

£14,000 has also been invested in Pendle under the Youth Inclusion "Summer Splash" Scheme, aimed at 13 to 17-year-olds at risk of offending during the Easter and Summer school holidays.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will announce his response to the consultation exercise on the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme. [151098]

Mr. Straw: I will shortly be announcing details of a wide-ranging package of improvements to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme, based on the outcome of the public consultation exercise that we launched in 1999. This package has been drawn up in the light of careful analysis of all the responses to the exercise, and in consultation with Scottish Ministers. Details will be placed in the Library.

Airwave Radio System

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what concerns were raised by Lancashire constabulary regarding health and safety matters in relation to its pilot of the Airwave radio system; and if he will make a statement; [150571]

(2) if he will make a statement on interference caused by the Airwave radio system with other electronic equipment, with particular reference to equipment at

(a) hospitals and *(b)* airports; and what guidance has been issued to officers regarding the use of Airwave equipment where it might cause such interference; [150568]

(3) what assessment he has made of the health and safety risks associated with the Airwave radio system and TETRA radio signals. [150567]

Mr. Straw: Health and safety considerations have been of paramount importance in the development of Airwave, a system which should in itself contribute to a safe and effective working environment for the police. The system has been designed to enable the use of terminals which comply with guidelines issued by the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) and the International Commission on Non-Ionising Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) on exposure to electro-magnetic fields.

The Independent Expert Group on Mobile Phones, which reported in May 2000, included in its report reference to the possible effects of radio frequency emissions at or near a modulation of 16Hz on the release of calcium from brain tissue. This may be of significance in relation to Airwave given that it uses the Terrestrial Trunk Radio System (TETRA) which modulates at 17.6Hz. No obvious health risks were suggested although the report concluded that as a precautionary measure, amplitude modulation around 16Hz should be avoided, if possible, in future developments in signal coding. The first, core parts of the TETRA standard were adopted as European Telecommunications Standards on 12 January 1996.

The best advice I have received is that no obvious health risks have been identified; in these circumstances and in the light of the benefits that Airwave will bring to the police service, I have concluded that its roll-out should continue according to the planned timetable. However, I have also agreed that the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and the NRPB should conduct a review of the relevant science.

In addition I understand that the Lancashire Police Federation has raised with senior officials in Lancashire concerns about the possible harmful effects of pulsed radio waves at 17.6Hz. These concerns arose following media reports. I have also received a letter from the Police Federation at the national level about the safety implications if Airwave radios are required to be switched off in circumstances where interference might be at issue.

Police radio terminals (hand-held radios and radios installed in vehicles), when transmitting, are capable of interfering with sensitive equipment in hospitals. This is not a new problem and is not an issue confined to police radios. Guidance was issued in 1997 restricting the use of public radios in hospitals (Home Office Communications Advisory Panel Guidance Note HGN(P)33).

Police radio terminals are used at airports with the normal operational precautions. This means that, when close to any sensitive equipment (eg the Instrument Landing System at the end of a runway) or near hazardous areas (eg for re-fuelling), police officers currently refrain from making calls. When using Airwave (TETRA) radios, which can transmit autonomously to keep in contact with the network, officers would have to switch them off in such circumstances. Guidance is being prepared in Lancashire on the use of TETRA radio terminals in airports. Work is also being carried out to develop a transmit-inhibit mode of operation for TETRA terminals so that they will transmit only when calls are being made, as is the case with current police radios.

Police radio terminals can also interfere with traffic law enforcement devices (TLEDs). Guidance was issued in 1989 (Home Office circular 39/1989) advising that radios should not be used close to breath testing equipment. Further operational guidance will be prepared in the light of research currently being carried out into the susceptibility of TLEDs to frequency interference from a TETRA or GSM (Global System for Mobile Communications) terminal.

The Home Office is writing to Chief Constables (copied to the Police Federation) advising them of the action being taken in relation to interference and health issues. Copies of that letter will be placed in the Library.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Hon. Member for Leicester, East

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the occasions upon which the Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), met in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office individuals and organisations over issues not related to his ministerial duties, and the names of those persons and bodies and the purposes for which the meetings were held. [149803]

Mr. Vaz: Very occasionally, and because of parliamentary or ministerial commitments, meetings scheduled to be held outside the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have had to be transferred to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office at short notice. No other official resources are involved, nor are central records kept of such meetings.

Iraq

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government will make representations to the UN Sanctions Committee for the early release of *(a)* food-testing equipment and *(b)* equipment to combat cancer, which is being held from entry into Iraq. [147375]

Mr. Wilson: The UK works consistently in the UN Sanctions Committee to facilitate the export to Iraq of humanitarian goods such as those described by the hon. Member. We will continue to do so.

If the hon. Member, or any other hon. Member, is aware of any specific examples of such goods on hold by any member of the Sanctions Committee, we are prepared to look into the matter and, where appropriate, make representations bilaterally and in the Sanctions Committee.

The UK only places holds on goods where there is insufficient information about the goods or their intended end-use or because the goods have military as well as civilian applications. The hold is lifted as soon as we receive the information required to reassure us that the goods will not be used for purposes prohibited by Security Council resolutions.

I am anxious further to refine this process in any way which is consistent with UN Security Council resolutions and also the humanitarian interests of the Iraqi people.

Mr. Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will provide details of the current contracts on hold in respect of permitted supplies to Iraq; and for what reason 26 per cent. of goods under agreed oil spares contracts to Iraq have so far been received. [150195]

Mr. Wilson: The UN Sanctions Committee has approved 82 per cent. of the contracts submitted for the export of goods to Iraq under the UN oil for food programme. The UK puts on hold only about 2 per cent. of all contracts submitted to it for approval and then usually only on a temporary basis until concerns about the nature or end-use of the goods have been met. Details of all oil for food contracts are available on the UN website at www.un.org/Depts/oip.

The UN continues to streamline its procedures to accelerate the export of goods to Iraq. The Sanctions Committee has therefore agreed lists of items, including oil spare parts, which no longer need to be referred to the UN for approval. At the same time Iraq continues to hamper the UN's efforts. Delays in the issue of letters of credit by the Central Bank of Iraq, for example, have prevented the delivery at one time of up to $1.1 billion worth of goods already approved by the UN.

MOX Fuel

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests have been received from the United States nuclear authorities in respect of the construction of lead test assemblies of mixed oxide nuclear fuel in British fabrication plants. [149761]

Mr. Wilson: As part of its agreement with Russia to dispose of TN 34 of plutonium declared surplus to its military requirements, the US has undertaken to immobilise TN 25.5 through irradiation in a reactor.

We have not received any request from the US to construct "lead test assemblies" for this programme in UK fabrication plants.

Korea

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on the prospects for the reunification of Korea; [149906]

(2) if he will make a statement on the implementation of the Joint Declaration between North and South Korea. [149907]

Mr. Battle: The UK welcomed the signing by President Kim Dae-Jung and Chairman Kim Jong Il of a joint declaration on reunification, family reunions, economic co-operation and future dialogue when they met in Pyongyang in June last year.

North-south dialogue on implementing the joint declaration has continued to develop since the summit. So far there have been four rounds of ministerial level talks and five rounds of military contacts. Land mine clearance operations are under way and a road and rail link across the demilitarised zone is being rebuilt. Three rounds of talks between the Red Cross societies on both sides have resulted in two rounds of separated family visits with a further round scheduled for the end of February. Commercial links have continued to develop in a number of sectors, including the signature of investment protection and double taxation agreements. Both the ROK and DPRK have continued to express their commitment to further reconciliation and to eventual reunification.

It was in support of these positive developments that the UK established diplomatic relations with the DPRK in December. However, long-term improvement of north-south relations also depends on the eventual resolution of issues such as human rights, weapons of mass destruction, nuclear proliferation, and the development and exports of missiles. Establishing diplomatic relations with the DPRK should provide a more effective channel for pressing UK concerns on these issues.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for a reduction of North Korean exports of arms. [150282]

Mr. Wilson: We are concerned by North Korea's past record of exporting arms, especially ballistic missile systems and their related technology. We were encouraged by talks held last year between the DPRK and the US. In the context of those talks, the DPRK said they would be willing to stop exporting missiles if they could be compensated for the loss of foreign earnings.

We have raised our concerns on this issue during our discussions on the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and the DPRK. We will continue to use our diplomatic relations with the DPRK to reinforce the need for them to stop destabilising arms exports. We have also drawn the DPRK's attention to the draft international code of conduct against ballistic missile proliferation.

Indonesia

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Indonesian Government concerning the continuing forced conversion of Christians to Islam in the Moluccas. [150203]

Mr. Battle: We are deeply concerned by recent reports of attempts to force Christians to convert to Islam in Maluku and our ambassador has raised this with senior officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta.

Both the Secretary of State for International Development and I visited Indonesia in October 2000 and discussed the situation in Maluku with President Wahid and senior Ministers. We urged tolerance and restraint and made clear to them the Indonesian Government's responsibility to maintain law and order and take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice. I also discussed events with Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, in the margins of the EU-ASEAN meeting in Vientiane on 12 December.

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Indonesian Government about attacks on Christians. [150103]

Mr. Battle: We continue to urge the Indonesian Government to exercise tolerance and restraint and remind them of their responsibility to maintain law and order and to take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice.

Both the Secretary of State for International Development and I visited Indonesia in October 2000 and discussed the situation in Maluku with President Wahid and senior Ministers. We urged tolerance and restraint and made clear to them the Indonesian Government's responsibility to maintain law and order and take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice. I also discussed events with Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, in the margins of the EU-ASEAN meeting in Vientiane on 12 December.

Qualified Majority Voting

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the Government supported the provisions in the treaty of Nice relating to the extension of qualified majority voting. [150194]

Mr. Vaz: The decision to agree to qualified majority voting was made on a case-by-case basis. The Government agreed to majority voting where this will be of benefit to Britain and where it promotes efficient decision making in the institutions of the EU. But the Government made it clear before the Nice European Council that they would insist on unanimity in areas of overriding national interest, such as taxation, social security, defence, treaty change and own resources.

Embassies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the benefits of sharing premises used as embassies with other EU member states. [150196]

Mr. Battle: Since 1992, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has actively pursued opportunities to share embassy premises with out EU partners. We are already co-located with EU partners in Almaty, Lima, Minsk, Quito and Reykjavik and are in the construction phase of a major co-location project in Dar es Salaam. A further four possible sites for co-location are also currently under consideration.

Panikos Tsiakourmas

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made on the case of Mr. Panikos Tsiakourmas, a Greek Cypriot; and if he will make a statement. [150394]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has sent messages to both Mr. Denktash and Turkish Foreign Minister Cem about the circumstances of Mr. Tsiakourmas' arrest, emphasising the importance we attach to a resolution of this very serious matter. Our high commissioner in Nicosia also continues to make strong and regular representations to Mr. Denktash. We will continue to pursue this matter until it is resolved satisfactorily.

Nice Treaty

Mr. Gill: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers under the treaty of Nice exist to enable a member state of the European Union to have its voting rights forfeited. [150116]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* There are no new powers in the treaty of Nice that provide for the suspension of voting rights.

Article 7 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, amending the treaty on European Union, introduced the possibility for the Council to suspend certain rights under that treaty, including voting rights, where a member state is found to have seriously and persistently breached the founding principles of the Union set out in article 6 (1). The treaty of Nice amends article 7 TEU to introduce an early warning mechanism where there is a clear risk of those principles being breached. This mechanism allows for the Council to make recommendations to be made to the member state concerned, having listened to its views.

UN Education Rapporteur

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 357W, on the UN special rapporteur on right to education, if he will make a statement on the outcome of his meeting on 7 February. [150384]

Mr. Battle: The UN special rapporteur on the right to education was due to meet with my right hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards and the Minister of State, Home Office on 7 February to discuss the report of her previous visit in 1999.

Unfortunately, the special rapporteur was unable to travel from Sweden to the UK due to adverse weather conditions. We are in contact with her office with a view to her visiting the UK at a later date.

Congo

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the nature and extent of the continuing violence in the region of Bunia in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and what representations he has made to the Government of Uganda about its responsibility for restoring peace to that region. [150471]

Mr. Wilson: We have received distressing reports about continuing inter-ethnic violence in and around Bunia. The conflict is complex, but seen by many as a violent extension of the local administration's inability to manage long-standing tensions between communities in the province. There are also accusations that the Ugandan forces, who effectively control eastern DRC, have been guilty of failing to prevent the violence. In some cases, Ugandan officers have been accused of participating in the killings.

Tension remains high, and humanitarian agencies have moved their staff to Bunia town for safety. Humanitarian access in the rest of the region is extremely difficult.

From the first reports of killings last year, our high commissioner in Kampala maintained a close dialogue with the Ugandan Government and army command. He

urged them to restore calm in the region and to defuse the situation, ensure humanitarian access, and check any action by the Ugandan army that may be contributing to the conflict. We continue to monitor the situation closely and remain in close contact with humanitarian NGOs working in the region. In addition to bilateral contacts, we maintain close contact with the UN on these issues.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Rwandan Government about the involvement of their armed forces in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [150469]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development met President Kagame on 28 January. She encouraged him to seize the opportunity to move the Lusaka peace process forward. The UK permanent representative to the United Nations in New York also encouraged President Kagame to ensure Rwandan participation in the forthcoming meetings of signatories to the Lusaka agreement (12 and 15 March) during bilateral discussions in New York on 7 February, and urged him to engage in further dialogue with the other parties.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 557W, and his answer to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd) of 24 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 593W, what steps Her Majesty's Government are taking to encourage dialogue between the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [150467]

Mr. Wilson: The Secretary of State's special representative for the Great Lakes and the UK permanent representative to the United Nations met President Kabila in New York on 2 February. They assured him of Britain's readiness to help, including through contacts with other parties to the conflict, and urged him to show the political will to make real progress on implementing the Lusaka agreement. Our ambassador in Kinshasa has spoken similarly to the Congolese Foreign Minister. We have taken similar action with all the other parties to the conflict in recent weeks. We have also been working with our UN, EU and African partners on moving the peace process forward.

Burma

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Burmese regime concerning the treatment of the Chin, Kachin and Naga ethnic minority groups in Burma. [150585]

Mr. Battle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) today, *Official Report*, column 266W.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions took place about atrocities against the Karen, Karenni and Shan people during the recent European Union fact-finding mission to Burma; and if this mission visited Karen, Karenni and Shan states. [150573]

Mr. Battle: EU Troika representative visited Rangoon on 29–31 January and had meetings with the regime, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and ethnic minority representatives. They discussed a wide range of issues, including human rights.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made during the last 12 months to the Government of Burma regarding atrocities against the Karen, Karenni and Shan people. [150575]

Mr. Battle: We remain deeply concerned about human rights violations of all Burma's peoples, including ethnic minorities, and take every opportunity to highlight our concern. I raised our concerns at the EU-ASEAN ministerial meeting in Vientiane, Laos, in December 2000. The Burmese Foreign Minister was present. I have also raised them with the Burmese ambassador in London. We also raise our concerns through our embassy in Rangoon and visiting officials from London, most recently with the Deputy Foreign Minister on 19 January 2001; with EU partners through the recent EU Troika mission and the EU Common Position on Burma, which was strengthened in April 2000 and subsequently renewed in October; and with co-sponsorship of UN resolutions condemning the abuses at the UN Commission on Human Rights in April 2000, and most recently at the UN General Assembly in November 2000.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government have taken to build a consensus at the United Nations Security Council in support of the establishment of an International Criminal Tribunal on Burma; and if he will make a statement. [150574]

Mr. Battle: We have raised our concerns over Burma with our Security Council partners, but there is no consensus at the moment for Security Council engagement on Burma issues, including that of establishing an international criminal tribunal.

Ministerial/EU Commission Meetings

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many working meetings have been held between Ministers and members of the European Commission since 1 July 1999; and if he will list the *(a)* dates of, *(b)* subjects discussed and *(c)* Ministers and Commissioners involved in these meetings. [150265]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* UK Ministers routinely meet members of the Commission at all meetings of the Council of Ministers and other occasions and discuss a wide range of issues.

National Missile Defence

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans *(a)* he and *(b)* his NATO counterparts have to propose amendments to the outer space treaty to take account of national missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [150803]

Mr. Vaz: The Government have no plans to propose amendments to the outer space treaty, nor are we aware of any such plans by NATO counterparts.

US-UK Relations

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the US-UK relations following the decision to sell RR Spey turbofan engines to China; and if he will make a statement. [150572]

Mr. Battle: The matter has not been raised by the US Administration. US-UK relations are excellent.

PRIME MINISTER

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Maria Eagle: To ask the Prime Minister what proposals he has to change the Cabinet Office: Security and Intelligence Services Vote Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01. [151189]

The Prime Minister: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for Class XVII, Vote 2 will be increased by £6,417,000 from £789,586,000 to £796,003,000 and the gross running cost limit will be increased by £2,121,000 from £422,648,000 to £424,769,000.

The change is to effect transfers of £2,878,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Class VII, Vote 1), £1,534,000 from the Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1) and £289,000 to the Scottish Executive, the take up of running costs end year flexibility of £2,065,000 and of current end year flexibility of £229,000 being partial take up of the entitlements announced in Table 7 of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (CM 4812) published on 18 July 2000.

The increase will be offset by transfers and a charge to the DEL reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total public expenditure.

Chester Street Holdings Limited

Mr. Worthington: To ask the Prime Minister if he will instruct the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to collate a joint response to the collapse of Chester Street Holdings and its impact on sufferers from asbestos-related diseases; and if he will make a statement. [148918]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer the Economic Secretary gave to him on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 181–82W.

CABINET OFFICE

Honours System

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what criteria are applied to the selection of those who will be recognised by award of an honour. [149273]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

Candidates for honour are selected on merit based upon their achievements and quality of service in a wide range of areas of our national life.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to modify the system of nominations for honours. [149166]

The Prime Minister: I am replying to this question as it relates to matters for which I am responsible.

There are currently no plans to modify the system. The honours nomination process is kept under review.

Government IT Projects

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much was paid to Compaq during its unsuccessful bid for the Government Gateway project; how much has so far been paid to Microsoft for services related to the project; and what the expected cost of the project is. [148656]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Compaq undertook work for the Cabinet Office and a final settlement figure of £5.6 million, including VAT, has been agreed. This includes £2.2 million worth of hardware that is to be redeployed throughout Government Departments.

Details of specific payments to Microsoft and other suppliers remain commercially confident at this stage. We expect the first phase of the project to cost an additional £18.3 million, including VAT. This is within the project budget.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) how many official visits were carried out in the United Kingdom by Cabinet Ministers in *(a)* January 2000 and *(b)* January 2001; if she will list the location of each visit; and if she will make a statement; [150425]

(2) how many ministerial visits have been made within London since January; on what dates and to which locations; which Ministers attended; and if she will make a statement; [150427]

(3) if she will make a statement on the procedure used to decide the location of official ministerial visits; [150426]

(4) what ministerial visits are planned in the next month; which Ministers will take part; and if she will make a statement. [150428]

Marjorie Mowlam: Detailed information in the form requested for Ministers visits within the United Kingdom is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I and ministerial colleagues in the Cabinet Office aim to visit all regions of the country in support of Government policies that are national.

Regulatory Impact Assessments

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans her Department has to place all regulatory impact assessments on a single website. [150476]

Mr. Stringer: At present a list of regulatory impact assessments published since 1998 is available on the regulatory impact unit's website. We are currently

developing plans to enable visitors to the regulatory impact unit's website to access RIAs via links to departmental websites.

Central Office of Information

Ms Perham: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has for a review of the Central Office of Information. [151195]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The last comprehensive review of the Central Office of Information (COI) was carried out in 1996–97. I have decided the next review of this agency should be completed early in 2001–02 and should be started as soon as possible. It will be conducted by Cabinet Office in close consultation with the chief executive and staff of the COI, under the general direction of a steering group.

The COI is responsible for procuring communications for Government Departments and advising on media relations in the regions. This quinquennial review will follow Cabinet Office guidelines, which require the examination of prior options for the delivery of COI's services taking into account the performance of the agency and the views of its customers, suppliers and staff. It will assess the added value of COI, its role in relation to other Departments and arrangements for funding.

The standard options are: continued agency status, privatisation, abolition, merger, contracting out and market testing. Each option will be considered on its merits and the preferred option will be the one that offers best value for money.

Civil Service (Sickness Absence)

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the overall level of sickness absence in the civil service was in 1999. [151194]

Mr. Stringer: The report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 1999", prepared for my Department by Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland (BioSS), shows that by applying the same methodology as in previous years the average level of sickness absence was 10.1 days per staff year. Calculated on the basis of absence per person, the figure for the civil service was 8.5 days. The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the 1999 figures.

The figure of 10.1 days sickness absence per staff year represents an increase over the equivalent figure of 9.8 days set out in the report for 1998. However, as I explained in the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett) on 11 May 2000, *Official Report*, column 433W, a more accurate comparator for 1998 is the figure of 10.3 days which emerged after Departments own audits of their sickness absence systems had revealed an element of under-recording. On that basis, the figures show that there has been a small decrease in sickness absence per staff year in 1999 as compared with 1998.

Departments have now published service delivery agreements which contain their individual targets for reducing sickness absence. Overall, the civil service has been targeted to reduce sickness absence by 20 per cent. for 2001 and by 30 per cent. for 2003 against the 1998 baseline. My Department is continuing to work with other Departments and agencies as they take forward their plans to reduce sickness absence.

I have placed copies of the BioSS report in the Libraries of the House.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Consumer Protection

11. **Mr. Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department has taken to increase consumer protection. [149012]

Dr. Howells: Taking forward our consumer White Paper proposals we have already increased consumer protection, particularly in areas such as distance selling and e-commerce. We are taking forward further measures now, including "stop now" orders and legislation for the full pint of beer.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the levels of spending on consumer protection per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [150013]

Dr. Howells: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 701–02W.

Earthquake (Gujarat)

12. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the UK construction industry about making a trade visit to Gujarat to investigate how British companies may participate in the rebuilding programme there. [149013]

Mr. Caborn: There is still an emergency in Gujarat. The immediate priority is to ensure that the needs of the survivors for food, shelter and medical assistance are met. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has established an emergency assistance allocation of £10 million. Future planning for reconstruction of the affected area is essential and can begin once the requirements have been fully assessed. At this stage, it would be premature for the Government to promote commercial visits by UK construction companies, but we are keeping the situation under review, including through our small commercial team based in Ahmedabad, and are in close touch with the Indian authorities about their future requirements.

Confidential Business Information

13. **Mr. Grieve:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the disclosure of confidential business information to other countries. [149014]

Dr. Howells: I have received representations from the Confederation of British Industry on this subject.

Universal Bank

14. **Mr. Stephen O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has held with the Post Office concerning the universal bank. [149015]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I regularly meet with the Post Office to discuss a range of issues.

Manufacturing

15. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the competitiveness of British manufacturing. [149016]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Manufacturing industry makes a vital contribution to the economy. We are helping manufacturing industries to be more competitive by creating a stable macroeconomic climate and by pursuing policies which help firms to innovate, to develop the skills of their work force and to grow.

Company Directors' Liabilities

16. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will introduce legislation to make company directors personally liable if they continue to trade while they are aware that their company is unable to honour contracts. [149017]

Dr. Howells: No. There are already provisions in the Insolvency Act 1986 under which directors of companies in insolvent liquidation may be ordered to contribute personally to the company's assets. This may arise, for example, where the company's business has been carried on with intent to defraud creditors or where the directors have carried on business when they knew or ought to have known that there was no prospect of the company avoiding liquidation.

BAE Systems

18. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between his Department and BAE Systems concerning the restructuring of the company. [149019]

Mr. Alan Johnson: My Department maintains a regular dialogue with BAE Systems on a wide range of issues. Following BAE Systems financial announcement to the stock exchange, I met with the chief executive of the company on 23 January.

Miners' Compensation

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress being made in settling miners' claims for respiratory disease compensation. [149020]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon. Friend the Member for Easington (Mr. Cummings), *Official Report*, column 446W. In Wales alone, we paid out £1 million in mining compensation last week. In Bridgend alone, we have already paid out over £5.5 million.

Earlier this week, I attended a meeting of the Welsh sub-group of the national monitoring group. The sub-group is looking at ways of speeding up the process and the payment of compensation specifically in Wales.

25. **Mr. Ronnie Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people have benefited from the compensation scheme for former mineworkers. [149029]

Mr. Hain: To date, some 43,100 claimants have received full and interim settlements in relation to claims for vibration-related diseases. In addition, a further 30,700 claimants have received full and interim settlements in relation to claims for respiratory disease.

In total to date, the Department has paid out £332.5 million in coalmining compensation, and continues to pay out around £1 million a day.

Exports (China)

20. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to encourage UK exports to China. [149021]

Mr. Caborn: The Government, through Trade Partners UK, recently announced for 2001–02 the largest programme of supported activity ever for British companies in the China market. This will consist of 17 trade missions, 30 trade fair groups and eight sector-specific seminar initiatives during the year. This increased activity is in addition to the regular exchanges of ministerial visits to and from China of which my own visit earlier this month and that of the Deputy Prime Minister last October formed part. The Minister for Small Business and E-Commerce visited China last month.

Our activity in China is complemented by awareness-raising activity in the UK. Trade Partners UK, in close co-operation with the China-Britain Business Council (our official trade advisory group on China), is engaged in a two-year programme of events around the country to draw the attention of UK companies to business opportunities in China. These events are held in close co-operation with local partners such as trade associations and chambers of commerce.

UK exports to China rose by 40 per cent. in 1999 over 1998 and by a further 22 per cent. in the first 11 months of 2000. I hope that the continued efforts I have described will improve on this performance still further.

Manufacturing (South-West)

21. **Mrs. Organ:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the state of manufacturing in the south-west. [149023]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The performance of manufacturing industry in the south-west region has most recently been assessed by the CBI in its business strategies regional trends survey, dated November 2000.

The Government office for the south-west is in regular contact with local and regional partners about business matters in the region.

Centres of Expertise

22. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps his Department is taking to encourage business collaboration and to develop centres of expertise. [149024]

Ms Hewitt: In the White Paper "Opportunity for All in a World of Change", published earlier this week, the Department demonstrated its continuing commitment to supporting collaborative activity and centres of expertise.

We announced support valued at £30 million over the next three years for five new regionally based university innovation centres, including one at the university of Warwick focusing on business-to-business e-commerce.

We also announced the establishment of a new manufacturing advisory service in partnership with the regional development agencies, consisting of regional centres of manufacturing excellence and a supporting national network, to provide practical advice on manufacturing issues.

Hinduja Brothers

23. **Mr. Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the contacts he has had with members of the Hinduja family. [149026]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 336W.

Energy Market Liberalisation

24. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures he is taking to liberalise the energy market at *(a)* UK and *(b)* EU level. [149027]

Mr. Hain: UK electricity and gas markets are already liberalised. In addition, my Department is working closely with the regulator to reform the wholesale electricity market in England and Wales by replacing the electricity pool with more competitive trading arrangements. The target implementation date for the new electricity arrangements is 27 March.

In Europe, the Commission will soon be proposing a new directive to accelerate the liberalisation of European electricity and gas markets. The UK Government will be urging a rapid move to a properly open and competitive electricity and gas market in Europe.

National Minimum Wage

26. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what abatement is available in the national minimum wage to those employers who provide board and lodging. [149030]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Following the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission, there is no offset allowed for the provision of board when calculating whether the national minimum wage has been paid. There is a limited offset of up to £19.95 a week allowed against the national minimum wage to recognise the benefit of the provision of accommodation. I have asked the commission, as part of the terms of reference for its third report, to consider whether there is a case for making any change to the maximum accommodation offset. It is due to report its findings by July.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many enforcement notices have been issued to employers to help enforce the national minimum wage. [150447]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Since the national minimum wage was introduced on 1 April 1999, the Inland Revenue, who enforce the minimum wage on behalf of the DTI, have issued 328 enforcement notices against employers.

Mr. Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many enforcement officers, region by region, are employed to police employers who pay less than the national minimum wage. [150446]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The allocation of resources to enforce the national minimum wage is agreed between the DTI and the Inland Revenue, and is covered by a service level agreement between the two Departments. There are presently 77 enforcement officers based in 14 teams across the United Kingdom. In addition there are a further 10 staff at the national minimum wage helpline and seven at the central information unit, both based in Longbenton, Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

The number of enforcement officers can be broken down into the following Inland Revenue regions:

Inland Revenue Regions	*Number*
East Region	6
London Region	13
Northern Ireland	5
North Region	7
North West Region	7
Scotland	8
South East Region	10
South West Region	5
South Yorkshire Region	6
Wales and Midlands	10

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many workers have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage in the Tooting parliamentary constituency; [144576]

(2) how many workers in the Greater London area have benefited from the introduction of the national minimum wage. [144577]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Tom Cox, dated 15 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about the number of workers in Tooting and Greater London who have benefited from the national minimum wage (NMW) (144576,144577).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than NMW rates for 1998, 1999 and 2000. These are based on an improved methodology using data from both the New Earnings Survey and Labour Force Survey. Estimates for the United Kingdom and Government Office Regions, including Greater London, are available on the National Statistics website at: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/themes/labour—market/nmw—l owpay—tables.asp

No estimates are available for Parliamentary Constituencies.

Nuclear Power

27. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what decline his Department forecasts in nuclear power output over the next 20 years as a result of planned nuclear power station closures. [149032]

Mr. Hain: The DTI has recently published UK energy projections for the period up until 2020[1]. The baseline projections embody a rundown in nuclear output and

capacity between 2000 and 2020 as existing stations reach the end of their lives. On an assumption of no new nuclear build, the projections are that by 2020 nuclear capacity will have fallen to 4GW and the annual electricity generated by the nuclear sector will have fallen to 27TWh. These translate into falls from current levels of 69 per cent. and 66 per cent. respectively.

There is, of course, great uncertainty about the lifetimes of existing plant and hence future output levels. Plant lives will depend on the economics of continued production, which in turn will depend on the actions required of their owners to ensure safe operation.

[1] Energy Projections for the UK, 2000–20. Energy Paper 68. Published November 2000.

Steel Industry

28. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will made a statement on the latest position in talks between the Government and owners of steel production companies. [149033]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government have had discussions with Corus on a wide range of issues and have assured the company of the Government's continuing support for the steel industry. In the period before Corus' recent announcement of 6,050 job cuts in the UK, the question of a package of support measures from the Government was raised with Corus, but the company made it clear that this would not change its decisions. The Government will continue to work with Corus and all parts of the steel industry to ensure the future competitiveness of the sector.

29. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to maintain and enhance steel production in Britain. [149034]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The steel industry is a vital part of UK manufacturing and the Government will continue to work closely with all parts of the industry to ensure its future competitiveness. The Government stand ready to work alongside Corus, the trade unions and the National Assembly for Wales to identify a way forward that builds on the strengths of the industry and secures a long-term future for it in the UK.

31. **Mr. Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with Corus plc about Government support for the steel industry. [149036]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government continue to talk to steel companies about a wide range of issues. Specifically in relation to Corus, the largest UK steel production company, the Government are continuing to press the company to engage in constructive dialogue with the trade unions and others affected by the 1 February announcement of 6,050 job cuts in the UK.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his oral statement of 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 458, on the steel industry, what powers he will use to require Corus to pay the costs of the clean-up of the sites affected by its decision to close plants. [149760]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Where any land, including sites where an industry has closed, poses unacceptable risks to humans or the environment in the light of the current use of the site, local authorities and the Environment Agency (or, in Scotland, the Scottish Environment Protection Agency) have duties under Part IIA of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 to enforce remediation. Those who have caused or knowingly permitted the pollution are liable to carry out that remediation. Ministers have only appellate powers. In Wales, the National Assembly exercises these ministerial powers.

When this new regime came into force, I wrote to top UK-registered companies asking about their plans to deal with contamination for which they are responsible, and was told by the chairman of Corus that they are committed to the economic redevelopment of brownfield sites.

We therefore look forward to learning of Corus' proposals for ensuring that the sites affected by any closures are appropriately remediated and brought rapidly back into beneficial economic use and do not become derelict.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will meet the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs to discuss the restructuring of Corus. [150207]

Mr. Byers: I would be happy to meet the Dutch Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received from Corus about the long-term future of steel production at the plants in Wales; and if he will make a statement. [150232]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* I have had discussions with senior representatives of Corus on a number of occasions when we have discussed, among other issues, the long-term future of steel production at plants in Wales, Scotland and England.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a breakdown by region of the job losses in the steel industry announced by Corus on 1 February; and if he will make a statement. [150229]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Following Corus's announcements about its planned restructuring of the company, I made a full statement to the House on 1 February 2001.

A breakdown of job losses by business unit, indicating the location affected, based on information supplied by Corus is as follows.

Plant/location	*Number of job losses*
Corus Strip, Llanwern, Wales	1,540
Corus Colours, Shotton,	319
Bryngwn, Wales	127
Corus Strip, Lackenby, Teesside	234
Corus Construction and Industrial Teesside	648
Scunthorpe	436
Dalzell, Scotland	2
Engineering Steels Rotherham	87
Stocksbridge	45
West Midlands and others	258

Plant/location	*Number of job losses*
Construction and Industrial and Corus Engineering Steels Head Office/shared services (Teesside, Scunthorpe and Rotherham)	400
Stockholding (various locations)	[1]292
Rail, Workington	27
Special Profiles, Workington	46
Tubes Corby	141
Hartlepool/Stockton	142
West Midlands	15
Packaging Plus, Ebbw Vale	780
European Electrical Steels	[2]276
Special Strip Products Rotherham, Newport, West Midlands	[2]35
Corporate Centre/Central Functions (various locations)	[2]200

[1] Split across locations.

[2] Split across locations, breakdown not known

Utility Charges

30. **Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on gas and electricity charges for pre-payment meter customers. [149035]

Mr. Hain: Charges for pre-payment meter customers are generally higher than those for direct debit and standard credit customers. This reflects the additional costs of supplying and maintaining the meters and the infrastructure that supports them.

The Government recognise that pre-payment meter use is concentrated among the poorest members of society (although pensioners, who make up half of the fuel poor, are low pre-payment meter users). They attach considerable importance to reducing these costs and have put in place a number of measures to drive down prices. The Utilities Act 2000 gave Ofgem and the new Gas and Electricity Consumer Council a specific responsibility to have regard to the interests of vulnerable individuals, including those on low incomes. The Act also provides a reserve power to take action if some groups of customers are not benefiting to the same extent as others from the competitive market.

The regulator, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem), has taken a number of measures to assist pre-payment meter customers following the publication of its social action plan last year. In April 2000, Ofgem introduced a licence condition that limited to £15 the surcharge that public electricity suppliers can charge to cover the cost of supplying electricity through pre-payment meters. Ofgem's proposals for removing suppliers' rights to block transfers on the ground of debt are designed to improve access to the competitive market for pre-payment meter customers.

Energy companies are developing programmes aimed at low income and disadvantaged customers. Some of these, including reduced charges, new energy efficiency programmes and improved access to other payment methods, will directly benefit pre-payment meter customers.

Environmentally Friendly Policies

32. **Dr. Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress he is making in encouraging UK industry to adopt environmentally friendly policies. [149037]

Ms Hewitt: As demonstrated by the increased investment and other measures announced in the White Paper "Creating Opportunities", the Government are committed to providing the conditions and, where appropriate, the support that will enable the UK to become a leading player in the new markets for green energy and products, waste minimisation, recycling and re-use.

Late Payment

33. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received from business organisations concerning late payments of bills. [149038]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are committed to improving the payment culture in the UK and aim to build on the package of measures that have already been established.

Departmental officials continue to work with business organisations and representatives from the banking, factoring, accountancy, trade credit insurance and credit management sectors on this issue through the better payment practice group.

The Small Business Service has recently published a consultation document on changes to legislation required following the adoption of the directive on combating late payment in commercial transactions. Responses from business to that consultation will inform how the directive is best implemented.

Regeneration (Clay Cross)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he has taken since the closure of the former Biwater works at Clay Cross to help create alternative employment in the area and to regenerate the local economy; and if he will make a statement. [149018]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government Office for the East Midlands is co-ordinating the work of regional and local partners to ensure that effective support is being given to those made redundant. So far, over 150 have found jobs and a further 133 are being retrained to improve their employment prospects. A new business centre at Coney Green providing space for up to 50 businesses has been opened and phase 2 of this development has started. Plans to redevelop Clay Cross town centre are well advanced and this will provide further job opportunities.

Miners' Pensions

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what surpluses have been received by the Government in each of the past five years from the British Coal staff superannuation scheme. [148130]

Mr. Hain: Under the terms of the guarantee/surplus sharing arrangements agreed with the trustees of the British Coal staff superannuation scheme (BCSSS) in 1994, the Government are entitled to receive 50 per cent.

of any scheme surpluses. Annual Government receipts following surpluses at BCSSS valuations in 1995 and 1997 are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1994–95	0
1995–96	0
1996–97	39.5
1997–98	39.5
1998–99	107.1
1999–2000	107.1
2000–01	53.9

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid to the Government from the mineworkers' pension scheme surplus in each year since 1994. [148129]

Mr. Hain: Under the terms of the guarantee/surplus sharing arrangements agreed with the trustees of the mineworkers' pension scheme (MPS), the Government are entitled to receive 50 per cent. of any scheme surpluses. Annual Government receipts following surpluses at MPS valuation in 1996 and 1999 are as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1994–95	0
199596	0
1996–97	0
1997–98	113
1998–99	113
1999–2000	0
2000–01	257

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate he has made of the surpluses to be paid to the Government from *(a)* the mineworkers' pension scheme and *(b)* the British Coal staff superannuation scheme, this year and in each of the next five years. [148131]

Mr. Hain: Prior to the privatisation of British Coal in 1994, the trustees of the two British Coal pension schemes (the mineworkers' pension scheme and the British Coal staff superannuation scheme) reached agreement with HMG whereby the schemes were given HMG solvency guarantees that ensured that pension entitlements at privatisation would rise at least in line with inflation. As part of these arrangements the trustees receive, for distribution to scheme members, a 50 per cent. share of surpluses from periodic valuations usually carried out every three years. The remaining 50 per cent. is paid to HMG over a 10 year period.

Current provisional estimates of surplus payments to Government from the coal pension schemes are as follows:

	£ million
Mineworkers' Pension Scheme	
2000–01	257
2001–02	180
2002–03	180
2003–04	180
2004–05	180
2005–06	180
British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme	
2000–01	53.9
2001–02	c.200
2002–03	c.200
2003–04	c.200
2004–05	c.200
2005–06	c.200

Research and Development

Mrs. Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on research and development in each of the last 10 years. [149305]

Mr. Hain: I understand that this request refers to research and development in the gas industry. Unfortunately, the UK business enterprise research and development survey (carried out by the Office for National Statistics) does not collect information at this level. The survey collects aggregated information for business R&D performed in the electricity, gas and water supply industry (£137 million in 1999). Information on the topic is regularly published in "MA14: Research and Development in UK Business", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Disused Mineshafts

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has received the report commissioned from Heriot-Watt University into the relationship between house values and mineshafts in Stoke. [149446]

Mr. Hain: My Department has received a near-final draft of the report by Heriot-Watt University, but there remain a few points which require clarification.

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the recommendations made by the Trade and Industry Committee in its Seventh report of Session 1995–96 *(a)* have been implemented and *(b)* are being implemented. [149445]

Mr. Hain: Recommendations 1, 2, 9, 11 and 12 of the Committee's report have been implemented. I am awaiting the outcome of the research by Heriot-Watt University on the relationship between former coal mineshafts and property values in Stoke-on-Trent before deciding whether to reconsider the remaining recommendations rejected by the previous Government, along with recommendation 8, which is dependent on the way in which the other recommendations are acted upon.

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he is taking to compensate home owners whose properties are unsaleable or have suffered undue financial loss in value due to their proximity to disused mineshafts. [149510]

Mr. Hain: Where damage has been caused to property by disused coal mineshafts, home owners are entitled to have the damage made good, at no cost to themselves or their insurers, under the Coal Mining Subsidence Act 1991. I intend to consider whether there are any steps which the Government might be able to take to deal with other forms of loss connected with disused mineshafts in

the light of the final report from Heriot-Watt University on the relationship between coal mineshafts and property values in Stoke-on-Trent.

Mr. Stevenson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he intends to publish and respond to the report of the inquiry commissioned by his Department from Edinburgh University into housing blight due to abandoned mineshafts. [149639]

Mr. Hain: My Department has received a near-final draft of the report from Heriot-Watt University on the relationship between former coal mineshafts and property values in Stoke-on-Trent, but there remain a few points which require clarification. I intend to publish and respond to the final report when I have had an opportunity to consider its findings.

BNFL

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who the employer was of the quality control official at Sellafield who first detected the falsification of quality control data at the MDF plant at Sellafield. [149632]

Mr. Hain: As noted in the Health and Safety Executive's report published on 18 February 2000 on the events and issues surrounding the falsification of quality control data at BNFL's MOX Demonstration Facility (MDF), it was a member of BNFL's quality control team at MDF who first identified, and brought to the attention of quality control managers, similarities between successive sets of records for secondary MOX pellet diameters. I understand from BNFL that the individual concerned was, at that time, employed as a contractor to BNFL through the Employment Agency NRL. The individual has subsequently joined BNFL as a permanent member of staff.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the reasons were for the dismissal from BNFL last year of *(a)* Mr. John Taylor, *(b)* Mr. Ross Chiese, *(c)* Mr. David Coulston, *(d)* Mr. Roger Leek and *(e)* the non-executive directors; and what compensation terms they received. [149633]

Mr. Hain: I understand that Messrs Taylor, Chiese, Coulston and Leek left the company by mutual agreement following a review of management conducted by the chairman of BNFL designed to ensure greater management focus, transparency and accountability. As part of that review, the chairman announced that he was looking to refresh and strengthen his team of non-executive directors in the light of the different future needs of the company. All six of his then non-executive directors have now left the company.

As members of the BNFL board, payments to John Taylor and Ross Chiese are published in the company's annual report and accounts and are therefore a matter of public record. They received £300,000 and £270,000 compensation respectively for termination of their employment. David Coulston and Roger Leek were employees of the company, but not members of the board. As such, any compensation was entirely a matter between the company and those individuals. The departing non-executive directors were not entitled to compensation for loss of office.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many BNFL *(a)* non-management employees, *(b)* managers, *(c)* senior managers and *(d)* directors who were granted voluntary severance terms were subsequently re-employed by BNFL as (i) consultants, (ii) contractors and (iii) employees; [149871]

(2) how much money has been paid by BNFL under its voluntary severance terms in each year that the terms have been available; [149870]

(3) how many BNFL *(a)* non-management employees, *(b)* managers, *(c)* senior managers and *(d)* directors applied for voluntary severance terms in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000; and how many of these applications have been granted. [149873]

Mr. Hain: These are matters for the company's management. I have asked the chief executive of BNFL to write to the hon. Member and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Electricity Industry

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will publish a draft order under section 59(1) of the Utilities Act 2000 relating to the provision in section 27A(8) and (9) of the Electricity Act 1989. [149661]

Mr. Hain: My Department plans to publish a draft order for consultation shortly.

Legal and Accountancy Professions

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has received the report of the Office of Fair Trading into the legal and accountancy professions; when he will publish the report; and if he will make a statement. [150002]

Dr. Howells: I have received the report. It is for the Director General of Fair Trading to decide when it is to be published.

Fireworks

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations he has received about the sale of fireworks; what plans he has further to restrict the sale and use of fireworks; what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of current legislation on the control and use of fireworks; and if he will make a statement. [150022]

Dr. Howells: I have received a total of 361 representations on firework safety matters during the period 1 September 2000 to 31 January 2001, comprising 155 letters from parliamentary colleagues, six parliamentary questions and 200 letters from the public.

The Consumer Protection Act 1987 provides powers to deal with the intrinsic safety of goods, including fireworks, but not to regulate when they are sold or used. The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 introduced comprehensive controls on the types and sizes of fireworks which can be sold to the public. I have made no formal assessment of the effectiveness of the 1997 regulations, but my Department continues to monitor movements in the annual firework injury statistics.

Post Office Services

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the Girobank contract with Post Office Counters Ltd. prevents POCL giving better prices to clients wishing to use bill payment services for their customers at post office counters. [149846]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Post Office is in partnership with Girobank for the provision of over-the-counter bill payment services. The terms of this contractual relationship are commercially confidential under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Coal Mine Methane

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the potential for energy generation from coal mine methane. [150101]

Mr. Hain: The Coal Authority monitors for methane emissions at over 100 sites and this information is made available to coal mine methane operators and other interested parties on request.

Operators have shown considerable interest in several of the sites and are currently evaluating the potential for commercial gas extraction. To date, schemes are operational at five Coal Authority sites:

Shirebrook
Markham
Steetley
Hinkleton
Sliverdale.

Enterprise Skills and Innovation

Mr. White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement concerning the publication of the White Paper on enterprise skills and innovation "Opportunity for all in a world of change" (Cm 5052). [150692]

Mr. Byers: The White Paper on enterprise, skills and innovation "Opportunity for all in a world of change", was published jointly by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and me on 13 February 2001.

At the request of Mr. Speaker, I have investigated a number of matters.

It appears that elements of a draft version of the text of the White Paper—but not the final version—were obtained by the *Financial Times* prior to publication. I share Mr. Speaker's concern about this matter. However, I have investigated this and can confirm that no advance copies of the White Paper were made available to the media by my Department or by the Department for Education and Employment prior to the day of publication.

The House was informed of the publication of the White Paper in a written parliamentary question at 8.30 am on 13 February. Publication of the White Paper was announced to the media at a press conference which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and I held at 12.30 pm on 13 February.

The White Paper was laid before Parliament at 11.00 am. Copies of the White Paper were due to be delivered to the Vote Office of the House for release at 11.00 am. Unfortunately, these were delivered late by The Stationery Office with the result that copies were not available in the House until noon. The delay in delivering copies of the White Paper to the House was very regrettable and my Department has asked for procedures to be put in place by The Stationery Office to ensure that such a delay is not repeated in future.

Solar Energy

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance the Government give to *(a)* householders and *(b)* businesses towards the installation of solar energy devices. [150266]

Mr. Hain *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The White Paper on enterprise, skills and innovation, published on 13 February, includes a major initiative for a solar photovoltaic (PV) demonstration programme to bring us in line with those of our main competitors. The aim is to support the installation of PV arrays on the roofs and walls of domestic homes and medium and large-scale non-domestic buildings. This should enable the establishment of a high-tech industry of the future in the UK with the potential to challenge our main competitors in this field, Japan, Germany, and the US.

The new proposal complements current Government support for field trials for domestic and large-scale building-integrated PV systems. In addition, since April 2000, a reduction of VAT from 17.5 per cent. to 5 per cent. has been available for professionally installed solar panels.

Writers Copyright

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what steps he is taking to ensure an equitable return to writers for the re-use of their work; [150543]

(2) what representations he has made to the European Commission regarding provisions in the draft copyright directive affecting the interest of writers in the re-use of their material by broadcasters. [150542]

Dr. Howells: The Council of Ministers reached a common position on this draft directive last September on the basis of a text which we fully support and which was also endorsed by the Commission. This does not contain any provision addressing re-use of material by broadcasters, but the directive is currently undergoing its Second Reading in the European Parliament, where an amendment has been proposed which would permit member states to provide an exception to rights allowing broadcasters to use archive material in new services without right owners' consent, provided they receive remuneration. We do not consider this amendment appropriate or desirable, and we believe that writers and other right owners should continue to be able to exercise their rights to control re-use of their material in order that they can obtain a fair return for this. The Council has also to agree on the content of the directive before it can be finally adopted.

Objective 1

Mr. Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the four European objective 1 regional programme delivery bodies. [149005]

Mr. Caborn: Neither my right hon. Friend nor I has received any recent request to meet representatives of the objective 1 delivery bodies. However, our Department is in touch with the English objective 1 regions through the Government offices and regional development agencies, and also liaises with the devolved Administrations.

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149266]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The information is as follows:

Direct mail expenditure excluding postage through COI

£ (ex VAT)

Financial year	*Amount*
1997–98	19,081.00
1998–99	34,628.00
1999–2000	[1]150,018.66
2000–01	6,375.00

[1] Includes costs of £119,831.66 for direct mail campaigns to promote export awareness of information technology among small businesses
[2] As up to 31 January 2001

Direct mail costs were not separately identified before 1997–98.

It is not possible to identify a separate figure for public opinion research.

Television, radio and newspaper advertising through COI

£ (ex VAT)

Period	*TV*[1]	*Radio*	*Press*
1996–97	—	477,697.00	1,190,332.00
1997–98	—	320,319.00	1,987,233.00
1998–99	—	136,613.00	2,008,075.00
1999–2000	15,250.00	242,166.00	842,027.00
2000–01[2]	1,919,559.00	792,044.00	2,147,097.00

[1] All TV advertising relates to the National Minimum Wage campaign
[2] As up to 31 January 2001

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes will be made to the Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for his Department, British Trade International and the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets. [151104]

Mr. Byers: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates, the voted element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Department of Trade and Industry will be increased by £92,052,000 from £3,591,516,000 to £3,683,568,000. In addition, the gross Running Costs Limit will be increased by £771,000 from £412,915,000 to £413,686,000.

The net provision of Class IX, Vote 1, which falls within the Departmental Expenditure Limit, will be increased by £62,751,000, which results from:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility of £70,498,000 comprising £8,000,000 for capital expenditure and £62,498,000 for current expenditure, of which £45,340,000 will be added to the provisions for Coal Operating Subsidy, £9,000,000 for Employment Relations, £8,000,000 for Regional Selective Assistance, £5,000,000 for the Regional Development Agencies, £1,750,000 for Invest UK and Aid in Yugoslavia, and £1,408,000 for consultancy advice on implementing the Postal Services Act;

(ii) the transfer of £1,583,000 in running costs and £190,000 in capital expenditure provision from the Department of Trade and Industry's Science Vote (Class IX, Vote 2);

(iii) the transfer of £700,000 in gross provision from British Trade International (Class IX, Vote 4) in respect of the expenditure of Simpler Trade Procedures Board (SITPRO);

(iv) the transfer of £105,000 in running costs from MAFF (Class X, Vote 2) for the administration of the Farm Business Advice Service;

(v) the transfer of £8,000,000 to Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Class III, Vote 1) to enable Advantage West Midlands to take forward work in connection with the Rover Task Force;

(vi) the transfer of £1,750,000 to British Trade International (Class IX, Vote 4) for claims for additional expenditure for Invest UK and for assistance to Yugoslavia;

(vii) the transfer of £500,000 to Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (Class III, Vote 3) in respect of the Fuel Poverty Scheme;

(viii) the transfer of £75,000 to the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Class IX, Vote 10) to cover the costs for implementing the Climate Change Levy exemption for electricity from renewable sources during this financial year;

(ix) an increase of £1,257,000 in running costs and capital expenditure provision in respect of expenditure incurred on behalf of the Postal Services Commission before 6 November 2000, offset by an equivalent amount in appropriations in aid;

(x) an increase of £2,097,000 in the gross expenditure provision, which is offset by an equivalent increase in appropriations in aid which relates to increased lease fees paid by the Department on capital assets and an increase in the sales of scientific equipment to Royal Bank Ltd.;

(xi) other minor movements within and between Sections of the Vote.

The net provision of Class IX, Vote 2, which falls within the Departmental Expenditure Limit, will be increased by £1,000, which results from:

(i) the take up of end year flexibility of £1,774,000 in current expenditure, which is offset by the transfer of £1,583,000 of running cost and £190,000 of capital expenditure from Sections I and J to the Department of Trade and Industry's Programmes and Administration Vote (Class IX, Vote 1);

(ii) increases in provision of £11,071,000 for Section K (Biotechnology and Biological Science Research Council); £3,900,000 for Section O (Natural Environment Research Council); £3,900,000 for Section S (Science Enterprise Challenge Scheme). These increases are offset by reductions in provision for Section F (University Challenge Fund); Section G (Synchrotron Radiation Source); and Section H (Cambridge/Massachusetts Institute of Technology);

(iii) further minor movements of programme provision between Vote Sections.

In addition, the Departmental Expenditure Limit of the Department of Trade and Industry will be increased by a further £29,300,000 through take up of part of the EYF entitlement of £147,680,000 announced for European Structural Funds expenditure for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in Table 7 of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper Cm 4812 published on 18 July 2000. This will meet DTI's share of the additional expenditure now forecast for 2000–01 on projects funded from the European Regional Development Fund.

Also, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for British Trade International, Class IX, Vote 4, will be increased by £1,050,000 from £85,643,000 to £86,693,000. This gives effect to the following changes of provision relating to

(i) the transfer of £700,000 in gross provision to the Department of Trade and Industry (Class IX, Vote 1) in respect of the expenditure of the Simpler Trade Procedures Board (SITPRO);

(ii) the transfer of £1,750,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry (Class IX, Vote 1) for claims for additional expenditure for Invest UK (formerly the Invest in Britain Bureau) and to provide assistance to Yugoslavia via the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Task Force.

In addition, subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate, the Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem), Class IV, Vote 1) to fund work on the Climate Change Levy. Ofgem is also reflecting in its spring Supplementary Estimate, the transfer of functions, assets and liabilities from the Director General of Gas Supply and the Director General of Electricity Supply to the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority, under the provisions of the Utilities Act 2000. Provision is also made for payments to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in respect of the creation of the authority, and the transfer of responsibility for the Electricity Consumer Committees to Energywatch, which is funded from DTI's Programmes and Administration Vote (Class IX Vote 1).

All of the increases will either be offset by transfer or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Industrial Clusters

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his policy of support for industrial clusters. [149028]

Ms Hewitt: The Government recognise the importance of clusters and networks and are working closely with the RDAs to identify and remove barriers to their growth and development. In the White Paper "Opportunity for all in a world of change", published on 13 February, the Government set out their proposals to promote the growth of successful clusters by asking the RDAs to develop strategies for success for their regions, building on their existing strengths. They will do so with the assistance of a clusters map and consultants' report, "UK Business Clusters: A First Assessment", which was also published on 13 February.

Government funding for cluster development will continue to be provided to RDAs via the regional innovation fund. Continued work on clusters will be undertaken by Lord Sainsbury's clusters policy steering group.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 23 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 499W, when the index of regulation on small business will be published. [150475]

Mr. Byers: When a number of outstanding issues have been resolved.

Post Office Closures

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices closed in *(a)* the third quarter of 2000–01 and *(b)* cumulatively in 2000–01. [149888]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 136W.

Textile Industry

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking to deal with the difficulties faced by the textile industry in the United Kingdom. [149022]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry announced a package of support for the textiles and clothing industry in the form of a 12-point plan on 6 June 2000. This was an initial response to the report of the textile and clothing strategy group and included:

The establishment of a major new supply chain initiative for the industry;

Temporary relaxation of the rules for trade fair support to enable more textiles and clothing companies to receive assistance;

The establishment of more projects to help the technical textiles sector;

A major programme of re-skilling for the textiles and clothing industry;

Support for up and coming new designers.

In addition, the Government provide a wide range of support for industry, including regional selective assistance and SMART awards. This support is available to textiles and clothing companies.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the programme of visits to central and eastern Europe planned for Ministers in his Department. [149011]

Ms Hewitt: My noble Friend the Minister for Science will visit Poland on 19–20 February. The overseas visit programme for DTI Ministers for the second half of this year is currently under consideration.

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, North (Mr. Wilson), will be visiting Lithuania in March on trade and investment issues.

Goodyear (Wolverhampton)

Mr. Purchase: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received from Goodyear Wolverhampton in respect of Government assistance; and if he will make a statement. [149001]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has received no representations from Goodyear in Wolverhampton in respect of Government assistance. Currently, the management and unions at Goodyear are involved in discussions that offer the prospect of improving the cost base of the plant.

EU Trade Balance

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on trends in the trade balance with the European Union. [149025]

Mr. Caborn: The EU is the most important market for UK exports of goods and services. The EU accounts for over 50 per cent. of total UK exports. During 2000, the UK's bilateral trade (in goods) with the rest of the EU was broadly in balance. This contrasts with a modest deficit which prevailed for much of the 1990s.

Working Time Directive

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what resources are available to enforce the working time directive. [149031]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The working time regulations, which implement the European working time directive, provide for the entitlements to daily, weekly and in-work rest and paid annual leave to be enforced through the Employment Tribunals. The working time limits are enforced by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and local authorities. There is a network of local authority enforcement officers who enforce the working time regulations and other health and safety legislation. The HSE have regulatory teams based throughout the country, which include specialist working time officers who work solely on working time enforcement. Any significant risks to health and safety revealed by their investigations are referred to HSE inspectors.

Offshore Oil and Gas

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action he is taking in relation to access to offshore oil and gas infrastructure to promote exploration and development in the United Kingdom continental shelf. [151187]

Mr. Hain: I have today placed in the Library of the House a copy of a consultation document from my Department dealing with access to oil and gas infrastructure, which:

consults on the effectiveness of the industry's code of practice on third party access to offshore infrastructure;

seeks evidence of any anti-competitive behaviour in relation to third party access to oil and gas infrastructure;

provides informal guidance which the industry has sought to meet a requirement of the 1998 gas directive to publish main commercial conditions for access to onshore gas terminals;

makes proposals for publication of guiding principles on the use of legal powers to settle disputes over access by third parties to oil and gas upstream infrastructure, which will reduce industry uncertainty about the regulatory regime.

My Department's proposals in the consultation document are intended to encourage a pro-competitive environment in relation to third party access to oil and gas transportation and processing.

We believe it is important to establish whether there are any barriers to development of new and marginal fields and, if so, to address them. The consultation on the effectiveness of the industry's voluntary code of practice gives an opportunity to see if the negotiation and level of third party tariffs is causing problems. If, as a result of this greater clarity, future tariffs are better aligned with costs, there will be better use of the UK's oil and gas infrastructure, which will increase the exploitation of our reserves, enhancing security of supply for consumers.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Pensions (Overseas Residents)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Mr. Jones), of 15 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 79W, if he will break down by each country of residence the number of pensioners living abroad who receive *(a)* a frozen pension, and *(b)* an annually up-rated pension. [148504]

Mr. Rooker: Retirement pension can normally be paid anywhere. However, annual upratings have never been generally paid abroad. The exception is those countries with which we have reciprocal arrangements, that is EEA countries and countries covered by the appropriate legislation.

Retirement pensioners by overseas country with annually uprated pension at 31 March 2000

Thousand

	All cases
All	377.7
Austria	4.3
Barbados	3.6
Belgium	4.1
Bermuda	0.7
Channel Islands	13.3
Cyprus	6.1
Denmark	0.9
France	16.2
Germany	25.0
Gibraltar	0.7
Greece	1.7
Ireland, Republic of	84.1
Israel	3.0
Italy	25.7
Jamaica	22.0
Malta	2.6
Netherlands	5.7
Norway	0.8
Portugal	3.9
Spain	39.4
Sweden	1.2

Retirement pensioners by overseas country with annually uprated pension at 31 March 2000

Thousand

	All cases
Switzerland	3.1
USA	107.0
Rest of the world	2.8

Retirement pensioners by overseas country with frozen rate pension at 31 March 2000

Thousand

	All cases
All	460.9
Australia	213.9
Bangladesh	3.0
Canada	137.9
Dominica Commonwealth	1.2
Ghana	0.5
Grenada	1.3
Hong Kong	1.0
India	4.2
New Zealand	33.7
Nigeria	1.1
Pakistan	6.1
Poland	2.0
South Africa	34.1
St. Kitts-Nevis	0.6
St. Lucia	1.2
St. Vincent and Grenadines	0.7
Trinidad and Tobago	0.9
Yemen, Republic of	2.8
Zimbabwe	5.0
Rest of the world	9.8

Notes:

1. The figures quoted are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Information is taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the Pension Strategy Computer System and therefore may not include all countries.
3. Countries with fewer than 500 rated cases have been added together and shown under 'Rest of the world'.

Source:

5 per cent. sample from the Pension Strategy Computer System at 31 March 2000.

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Charles Kennedy: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will alter the formula for calculating interest on capital in determining an individual's eligibility for Council Tax Benefit so that it more accurately reflects the interest that might reasonably be expected to be earned from that capital; and if he will make a statement. [147578]

Angela Eagle: We have already made arrangements to increase the lower capital limit from £3,000 to £6,000 from April 2001 for those on the Minimum Income Guarantee, and for those aged 60 or over on Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. This is part of our commitment to continue the drive to end pensioner poverty. With the introduction of the proposed Pension Credit from 2003, we propose to abolish both the current capital limits and the assumed £1 a week rate of return for every £250 of capital, and to replace this with a system that ensures that those who have saved are rewarded for their efforts in their retirement.

At the same time, we will also be looking at the treatment of income and capital in assessing entitlement to support for working-age families, including those on Council Tax Benefit, as part of our programme of modernising the social security and tax credit system.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if the Special Advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149309]

Mr. Darling: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer from my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in Halton have received the £200 Winter Fuel Payment. [150292]

Mr. Rooker: Winter Fuel Payments are made on a household basis. For the latest information available on the number of payments made in Halton, I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) on 31 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 238W.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many winter fuel applications were received from those aged 60 years or over on 19 September 1999; how many were received from 24 September 2000 to 31 January 2001; and how many had been processed by 31 January 2001; [150590]

(2) what the processing time is of applications made for a Winter Fuel Payment in respect of this and previous years; [150592]

(3) how many winter fuel applications were received between April 2000 and 22 September 2000; how many were received *(a)* from those reaching the age of 60 years between 27 September 1999 and 24 September 2000 and *(b)* from those aged 60 years or over on 19 September 1999; and what was the total processed in both categories. [150589]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the chief executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the right hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Robert Maclennan, dated 15 February 2001:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions asking how many Winter Fuel applications were received from those aged 60 or over on 19 September 1999; how many were received from 24 September 2000 to 31 January 2001; and how many had been processed by 31 January 2001. How Many Winter Fuel applications were received between April 2000 and 22 September 2000; how many were received (a) from those reaching the age of 60 years between 27 September 1999 and 24 September 2000 and (b) from those aged 60 years or over on 19 September 1999; and what was the total processed in both categories. Also what is the processing time of applications made for a winter fuel payment in respect of this and previous years.

The information is not available in the format requested. Information that is available is as follows.

Between April 2000 and 22 September 2000 1,185,131 claims forms were received and between 24 September 2000 and 31 January 2001 156,104 claims forms were received.

As of 31 January 2001, approximately 1.1 million claims in respect of previous years and approximately 1.2 million winter 2000 claims had been processed. The total number of claims processed is higher than the number of forms received as a single claim form can potentially be a claim for both a Winter 2000 payment and payment for previous years.

A straightforward Winter Fuel claim takes up to 10 days to process from the date of receipt by the Department.

I hope this is helpful.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when Mr. James Little will receive his Winter Fuel Payment. [150346]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 14 February 2001:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent parliamentary question regarding Mr. James Little and when he will receive his Winter Fuel Payment (WFP).

My enquiries into this matter have revealed that Mr. Little had not been sent his WFP at the correct time. This was due to a clerical oversight and I have written to Mr. Little to apologise for any inconvenience caused by the delay.

I have, after the matter was brought to my attention, taken steps to ensure that Mr. Little's payment has been dealt with promptly and I can now confirm that it was posted (by first class mail) on 9 February.

Mr. Maclennan: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will undertake additional national advertising to alert men who on 24 September 2000 were over 60 years of age of their possible entitlement to Winter Fuel Payments for this and past years; and if he will make a statement. [150591]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the right hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan) on 15 January 2001, *Official Report,* column 79W.

Pensioners (Benefits)

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the number of retirement pensioners who are expected to be entitled to the pension credit; and of those, how many are also expected to be *(a)* entitled to (i) Housing Benefit, (ii) Council Tax Benefit and (iii) both and *(b)* liable to pay income tax. [150066]

Mr. Rooker: Over half of all pensioners, 5.5 million individual pensioners and pensioner couples, will benefit from the pension credit.

The detailed design and coverage of the pension credit are being considered in the light of the current consultation exercise.

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many retirement pensioners are currently *(a)* entitled to income-related benefits but not liable to income tax and *(b)* entitled to income-related benefits and liable to pay income tax. [150067]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available.

War Pension Scheme

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when the seven-year rule relating to the war pension scheme was introduced; and how it was announced to the House. [150532]

Mr. Bayley: The seven-year rule was introduced in May 1947 as an amendment to the 1946 Royal Warrant under Command Paper 7124.

Far East Prisoners of War

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many *(a)* former UK military personnel and *(b)* civilians imprisoned by the Japanese during the second world war have applied for the ex-gratia payment; and how many have been refused in each category; [150577]

(2) how many civilian internees imprisoned by the Japanese during the second world war, who at the time were not UK citizens but who subsequently were given British nationality, have been refused the ex-gratia payment. [150578]

Mr. Bayley: The information is not yet available. Figures will be available in due course.

Mobility Benefit

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security from what date applications can be lodged for the higher rate mobility component for children aged three and four years; and who is entitled to this benefit from 9 April. [149914]

Mr. Bayley: I refer the right hon. Member to the written answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) on 9 January 2001, *Official Report,* column 477W. From 9 April 2001, the higher rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance will be extended to severely disabled three and four-year-old children who are unable, or virtually unable, to walk.

Claims can be made at any time on or after 9 January. Almost all the children most likely to benefit from this welcome change are already receiving DLA in respect of their care needs, and they will all be sent a letter by the end of February inviting them to apply for the higher rate mobility component.

Child Support

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) how many parents with care who are eligible for maintenance payments through the Child Support Agency receive the Working Families Tax Credit; [149850]

(2) how many parents with care in receipt of maintenance payments through the Child Support Agency are non-resident parents who are liable to pay maintenance for children of previous relationships. [149851]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is as follows.

There are 234,000 parents with care with a current full maintenance assessment who are receiving the Working Families Tax Credit. This represents around 24 per cent. of all such parents with care on the Child Support Agency's books.

Notes:

1. Information on the number of parents with care who are also non-resident parents is not available since there is no facility on the existing child support computer system for linking data in this way.

2. Figures are taken from 5 per cent. scan of the Child Support Computer System and are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:

Child Support Agency Quarterly Summary of Statistics—August 2000, Department of Social Security Information Centre, Analytical Services Division.

Appeal Tribunals

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many social security appeal tribunal hearings concerning cohabitation or living together as man and wife cases there were in each of the last five years; and in what percentage the tribunal found in favour of the client. [149450]

Angela Eagle: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is in the table.

Appeals heard in the periods shown with an issue code of "Living Together" from 1 October 1998

	Appeals cleared at hearing	*Appeals decided in favour of the appellant*
1 October 1997 to 30 September 1998	n/a	
1 October 1998 to 30 September 1999	874	354 (40.5 per cent.)
1 October 1999 to 30 September 2000	1,311	681 (51.9 per cent.)

Notes:

1. Issue codes were only added to the GAPS system in November 1999, although some earlier cases have been coded.

2. Figures are provisional and are subject to change.

Source:

100 per cent. download from the Appeals Service GAPS computer system.

TREASURY

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for Scotland and each local authority area in Scotland *(a)* the weekly median earnings and *(b)* the amount of median earnings for those in the first and ninth deciles for (i) all manual, (ii) all non-manual and (iii) all workers. [146247]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Alasdair Morgan, dated 15 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on weekly earnings for workers in Scotland and the local authorities in Scotland (146247).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. However, the NES has incomplete coverage of those on low pay because the sample is limited to people earning above the income tax threshold. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. I have provided the available data for Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland in the attached tables, only where the samples are large enough and have an acceptable level of accuracy. These are based on the 2000 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Gross weekly earnings for Scotland

£

	Median[1]	*Lowest decile*[2]	*Highest decile*[3]
Full-time			
Non-manual	363.2	202.8	673.3
Manual	289.3	171.5	479.0
All Employees	330.0	190.0	608.3
Part-time			
Non-manual	123.9	51.9	270.1
Manual	91.0	39.2	159.7
All Employees	108.8	45.2	233.4
All			
Non-manual	301.6	112.5	619.5
Manual	250.0	77.6	447.7
All Employees	280.8	99.1	564.9

[1] 50th percentile
[2] 10th percentile
[3] 90th percentile

Gross weekly earnings for unitary authorities in Scotland

£

		Median[1]	*Lowest decile*[2]	*Highest decile*[3]
Full-time				
Non-manual	Aberdeen City	404.8	227.5	844.4
	Aberdeenshire	396.6	191.9	738.6
	Angus	368.5	201.0	550.3
	Dundee City	347.4	205.9	638.3
	East Ayrshire	381.6	186.3	584.8
	Edinburgh, City of	379.3	211.2	706.7
	Falkirk	322.7	204.3	681.4
	Fife	348.2	195.3	592.6
	Glasgow City	359.2	205.4	690.6
	Highland	316.3	183.3	592.9
	Midlothian	398.6	243.7	617.5
	North Ayrshire	381.0	192.1	571.0
	North Lanarkshire	359.9	212.7	608.8
	Perth and Kinross	332.0	183.9	526.1

Gross weekly earnings for unitary authorities in Scotland

£

		Median[1]	*Lowest decile*[2]	*Highest decile*[3]
	Renfrewshire	379.6	180.7	648.7
	South Ayrshire	369.7	206.3	681.5
	South Lanarkshire	367.7	191.9	706.4
	West Lothian	393.6	192.2	780.3
Manual	Aberdeen City	325.0	180.0	603.7
	Aberdeenshire	277.0	150.0	464.8
	Scottish Borders, The	246.9	173.3	358.5
	Dumfries and Galloway	275.0	155.7	397.2
	Dundee City	271.7	176.4	439.0
	East Ayrshire	294.3	168.3	443.2
	Edinburgh, City of	275.5	159.4	477.5
	Falkirk	336.0	162.2	574.1
	Fife	287.0	171.7	449.1
	Glasgow City	292.3	176.5	464.3
	Highland	287.9	192.6	512.1
	Inverclyde	308.3	185.1	445.8
	North Ayrshire	295.3	161.5	451.1
	North Lanarkshire	294.6	180.9	481.4
	Perth and Kinross	274.3	180.5	466.8
	Renfrewshire	327.7	173.5	528.5
	South Ayrshire	300.4	188.6	499.9
	South Lanarkshire	308.3	188.7	522.5
	Stirling	285.8	164.5	392.5
	West Lothian	300.0	177.1	510.8
All Employees	Aberdeen City	376.1	203.8	762.2
	Aberdeenshire	308.3	168.7	630.8
	Angus	302.2	182.8	536.3
	Argyll and Bute	345.8	188.9	602.0
	Scottish Borders, The	276.6	176.3	528.5
	Dumfries and Galloway	291.4	172.4	510.4
	Dundee City	322.3	195.3	565.7
	East Ayrshire	328.1	182.3	569.6
	East Lothian	345.3	198.9	561.6
	Edinburgh, City of	345.5	198.7	679.9
	Falkirk	325.0	189.1	621.7
	Fife	311.9	181.6	537.2
	Glasgow City	339.3	194.9	646.1
	Highland	304.2	188.3	564.1
	Inverclyde	323.3	194.8	592.5
	Midlothian	350.7	201.5	562.1
	North Ayrshire	321.5	178.3	540.2
	North Lanarkshire	323.0	202.9	575.8
	Perth and Kinross	294.3	182.3	491.4
	Renfrewshire	355.9	179.6	626.4
	South Ayrshire	344.7	203.7	640.8
	South Lanarkshire	334.4	190.8	638.8
	Stirling	297.1	176.8	497.2
	West Lothian	332.7	189.3	614.7
Part-time				
Non-manual	Edinburgh, City of	124.0	43.7	269.3
	Glasgow City	116.6	56.0	237.2
Manual	Glasgow City	94.1	42.6	156.5
All Employees	Edinburgh, City of	106.9	38.4	229.3
	Glasgow City	106.3	48.6	217.4
	South Lanarkshire	112.2	50.2	194.2
All				
Non-manual	Aberdeen City	345.5	118.9	767.8
	Angus	270.7	113.1	535.7
	Dundee City	294.0	112.0	577.6
	Edinburgh, City of	327.9	138.7	687.0
	Falkirk	268.7	113.8	621.7
	Fife	286.6	105.4	567.3
	Glasgow City	307.1	115.3	652.4
	Highland	264.9	117.4	550.9
	North Ayrshire	306.8	91.4	541.6
	North Lanarkshire	313.2	129.7	583.4
	Perth and Kinross	260.3	97.3	483.3

Gross weekly earnings for unitary authorities in Scotland

£

		Median[1]	Lowest decile[2]	Highest decile[3]
	Renfrewshire	327.2	137.2	629.6
	South Ayrshire	322.6	90.1	646.9
	South Lanarkshire	287.9	113.9	639.7
	West Lothian	333.5	140.4	658.7
Manual	Aberdeen City	249.0	77.5	529.1
	Aberdeenshire	210.7	55.4	390.9
	Dumfries and Galloway	251.1	82.7	387.0
	Dundee City	244.1	89.6	424.4
	Edinburgh, City of	230.0	73.0	453.3
	Fife	250.5	92.3	432.0
	Glasgow City	249.6	79.4	429.1
	Highland	260.8	64.3	470.2
	North Lanarkshire	256.7	73.7	448.5
	Renfrewshire	287.1	92.0	503.6
	South Lanarkshire	261.8	76.9	491.5
	West Lothian	287.2	115.2	471.7
All Employees	Aberdeen City	317.5	104.9	695.2
	Aberdeenshire	249.2	66.8	558.2
	Angus	248.6	103.6	499.0
	Argyll and Bute	261.0	74.0	546.1
	Scottish Borders, The	236.6	85.1	490.4
	Dumfries and Galloway	257.3	88.9	475.9
	Dundee City	275.0	106.1	521.1
	East Ayrshire	276.4	87.6	541.0
	Edinburgh, City of	296.4	107.6	634.9
	Falkirk	283.5	95.1	574.5
	Fife	266.0	99.2	508.7
	Glasgow City	285.3	100.3	588.8
	Highland	262.7	88.4	517.1
	Inverclyde	265.0	89.9	490.2
	Midlothian	294.5	101.9	548.0
	North Ayrshire	278.6	84.9	490.4
	North Lanarkshire	286.3	105.0	551.7
	Perth and Kinross	253.8	85.8	475.9
	Renfrewshire	312.2	121.0	602.0
	South Ayrshire	284.7	74.1	564.8
	South Lanarkshire	269.0	102.8	591.1
	West Lothian	297.2	132.6	578.3

[1] 50th percentile
[2] 10th percentile
[3] 90th percentile

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average weekly earnings are *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding overtime, for part-time workers in (i) Scotland, (ii) each of the local unitary local authority areas in Scotland and (iii) the UK, broken down by (A) men and (B) women in (1) manual employment, (2) non-manual employment and (3) all employment. [145664]

Mr. Andrew Smith: This information falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Dominic Grieve, dated 15 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your question on weekly earnings for workers in Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and the United Kingdom (145664).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. However, the NES has incomplete coverage of those on low pay, because the sample is largely limited to people earning above the income tax threshold. This under-coverage will particularly affect results for part-time workers. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. The data for the United Kingdom is not yet available. I have provided the available data for Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and Great Britain in the attached tables, where the sample sizes are large enough and have an acceptable level of accuracy. These are based on the 2000 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

Average weekly gross earnings including overtime for part-time employees for Great Britain

£

Male:	
Non-manual	163.6
Manual	114.3
All	142.3
Female:	
Non-manual	144.5
Manual	94.2
All	129.7
All employees:	
Non-manual	147.2
Manual	98.8
All	131.8

Average weekly gross earnings including overtime for part-time employees for Scotland

	£
Male:	
Manual	106.5
All	123.7
Female:	
Non-manual	146.4
Manual	94.8
All	129.0
All employees:	
Non-manual	145.6
Manual	97.1
All	128.2

Average weekly gross earnings including overtime for part-time employees for unitary authorities in Scotland

	Edinburgh, City of	*Glasgow City*	*South Lanarkshire*
			£
Female:			
Non-manual	142.3	136.4	—
All	126.8	124.6	118.6
All employees:			
Non-manual	143.4	134.9	—
Manual	—	98.7	—
All	128.5	122.7	118.3

Average weekly gross earnings excluding overtime for Great Britain

	£
Male:	
Non-manual	155.8
Manual	104.8
All	133.7
Female:	
Non-manual	137.7
Manual	89.2
All	123.5
All employees:	
Non-manual	140.2
Manual	92.7
All	125.2

Average weekly gross earnings excluding overtime for Scotland

	£
Male:	
Manual	97.1
All	113.9
Female:	
Non-manual	140.4
Manual	88.9
All	123.0
All employees:	
Non-manual	139.1
Manual	90.5
All	121.7

Average weekly gross earnings excluding overtime for unitary authorities in Scotland

	Edinburgh, City of	*Glasgow City*	*South Lanarkshire*
			£
Female:			
Non-manual	136.5	132.0	—
Manual	—	92.9	—
All	121.4	120.2	113.1
All employees:			
Non-manual	136.7	130.2	—
Manual	91.8	92.3	—
All	122.4	117.4	111.4

Pensioners (Tax Returns)

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many retirement pensioners completed a tax return in the most recent year for which figures are available; and what proportion they represent of total retirement pensioners. [150064]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that about 1.3 million (around 12 per cent.) pensioners compieted a tax return for 1998–99.

Taxation

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what he plans to be the national revenue from taxation in each of the next five years. [150119]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Forecasts of tax revenues were published in Tables B8 and B11 of the pre-Budget report. Updated forecasts will be published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if there are any proposals to amend the Inland Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for 2000–01. [151115]

[illegible] Primarolo: The Inland Revenue Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be decreased by £411,000 from £2,230,571,000 to £2,230,160,000. The Inland Revenue Running Cost Limit will also be reduced by £2,911,000 from £2,373,579,000 to £2,370,668,000.

The reduction in DEL and running cost limit reflect an inter-departmental transfer of £450,000 running costs provision to Customs and Excise to enable Customs to meet its main commitments from the Grabiner report into the hidden economy. This is partially offset by a £39,000 transfer from the Department of Social Development (Northern Ireland) for a bookkeeping service they provide in respect of the national insurance fund.

In addition, there is a further reduction in Inland Revenue's Running Cost Limit of £2,500,000 in respect of an intra-departmental transfer to the Valuation Office agency, to deal with more appeals than anticipated arising from the 2000 revaluation and increased legal costs.

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to Her Majesty's Treasury's Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limits for 2000–01. [151114]

Dawn Primarolo: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XVI Vote 1 (HM Treasury) and class XVI Vote 2 (HM Treasury: UK Coinage), the Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £12,940,000 from £264,023,000 to £276,963,000.

The increase for Class XVI Vote 1 (HM Treasury) is the net effect of the take up of running costs EYF (£3,400,000) to meet the additional costs of the Treasury's planned programme of work, and to cover the custody charges for holding collateral on debt management office's behalf generated as part of the investment of the Spectrum proceeds; provides for the transfer of provision from other current to running costs for payments under the framework agreement for Partnerships UK (£4,000,000); and an increase in running costs of £540,000 to draw down the moneys allocated from the civil service modernisation fund for the Royal Mint Trading Fund. The running costs limit for HM Treasury will accordingly be increased by £7,940,000 from £64,064,000 to £72,004,000.

The increase for Class XVI Vote 2 (HM Treasury: UK Coinage) is the net effect of the take up of other current EYF (£9,000,000), to meet the increased demand for UK coins.

The increases will be offset by transfers or charged to the reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if there are any proposals to amend the Office for National Statistics Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for 2000–01. [151113]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XVI, Vote 12 (Office for National Statistics), the DEL will increase by £5,000,000 from £135,166,000 to £140,166,000 and the Running Costs Limit will increase by £5,000,000 from £132,161,000 to £137,161,000.

The changes in Vote 12 are the result of the take up of £5,000,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Table 7 of the 1999–2000 Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (CM 4812) published on 18 July 2000.

The overall increase is made up of increases in running costs provision in Section A of the Vote of £5,000,000; increases in running costs provision in Section B of £2,500,000 to reflect increased demand for certificate sales and surveys, which will be fully met by additional receipts of £2,500,000; and increases in anticipated EC receipts in Section C of £500,000.

Mr. Ian Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes are proposed to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise Departmental Expenditure Limit or Running Costs Limit for 2000–01. [151112]

Dawn Primarolo: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XVI, Vote 4 (HM Customs and Excise: administration), the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) will be increased by £9,319,000 from £886,858,000 to £896,177,000 and the Running Costs Limit will be decreased by £9,219,000 from £860,957,000 to £851,738,000.

The increase in DEL consists of:

an additional £450,000 running costs transferred from joint provision held by the Inland Revenue to implement recommendations of the Grabiner report into the hidden economy;

an additional £1,550,000 running costs from Customs' share of the civil service modernisation fund; and

an additional £1,538,000 other current and £6,000,000 capital from the take up of part of the Department's entitlement to end-year flexibility.

These increases are partly offset by:

a decrease in running costs of £99,000 transferred to the Home Office for development funding for drug action teams.

The Department is also proposing a number of other changes within its DEL, including increases in expenditure sub-heads which are entirely matched and offset by additional appropriations in aid, as well as virement of £11,000,000 from running costs and £3,000,000 from capital to cover increased legal and investigative expenditure.

There are no changes to the overall levels of public expenditure as a result of this Supplementary Estimate.

Brewing

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many jobs in brewing there were in each region and nation of the United Kingdom for each year since 1995. [147009]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 24 January 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Jim Cousins dated 15 February 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question about the number of people employed in brewing in each region of the UK since 1995 (147009).

The Annual Employment Survey (AES) provides information on employment for 1995 to 1998 for each region and nation of Great Britain. The AES may be accessed from the NOMIS database in the House of Commons Library.

Urban Migration

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the net migration from urban and suburban to rural areas of England and Wales in the past 10 years. [150359]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Colin Pickthall, dated 15 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about estimates of net migration from urban and suburban to rural areas of England and Wales over the last ten years. (150359)

The Office of National Statistics produces quarterly estimates of migration using the movement of NHS doctor's between the former Family Health Service Authorities. They should not be regarded as an exact measure of migration particularly because there is variation in the delay between a person moving and registering with a new doctor.

The attached table shows migration from metropolitan areas (including London) to shire county areas. Migration estimates are only available for the last ten years for these administrative areas.

Movements[1] between London and metropolitan districts and the Shire counties of England and Wales during the years 1989 to 1999

Thousand

Year	*From London and metropolitan districts to shire counties*	*From shire counties to metropolitan districts and London*	*Net migration from metropolitan districts and London to shire counties*
1989	347.2	277.5	69.6
1990	296.2	235.5	60.6
1991	331.3	254.7	76.7
1992	337.8	260.5	77.3
1993	341.8	257.7	84.2
1994	354.1	266.1	88.0
1995	364.1	282.0	82.2
1996	372.9	279.8	93.1
1997	385.4	282.7	102.7
1998	376.0	289.9	86.1
1999	384.1	285.0	99.2

[1] Based on NHS patient re-registration

Source:
Office for National Statistics

HEALTH

Pharmacists (Reimbursement)

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions during each of the last three years pharmacists were denied prescription reimbursement by the NHS because they had submitted forms for prescription charge exemption that had been erroneously completed by patients; and what was the estimated cost of these erroneously completed forms to pharmacists in each of those years. [149063]

Ms Stuart: No pharmacy contractors have been denied reimbursement because they have submitted prescription forms which have been incorrectly completed by patients claiming exemption from charges.

Pharmacists are required to collect a charge in respect of each chargeable item supplied unless a declaration of entitlement to exemption or remission is completed on the prescription form by or on behalf of the patient. This has been a requirement since 1968.

Pharmacists are also required to sort forms into "exempt" and "non-exempt" groups before submitting them to the Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) for payment. When a form is submitted as exempt from charges but without a completed declaration, it will be treated as non-exempt. Forms submitted as exempt but showing a charge are also treated as non-exempt. Forms submitted as non-exempt are treated as exempt if they bear a completed declaration. In each case these forms are processed according to the declaration, as required by law, rather than according to the group in which the pharmacist has submitted them.

A temporary concession has been introduced for prescriptions dispensed from June 2000 onwards to encourage pharmacists and their staff to improve the completion rate. Under the concession, no adjustment is made in respect of forms for patients aged less than 16 or 60 or over on which the patient's age has been printed by the prescriber, even if the declaration required by law has not been completed. In conjunction with this, information is now routinely provided to pharmacists by the PPA about the number of forms which have been submitted as exempt but treated as non-exempt; which would have been treated as non-exempt but for the concession; or have been treated as exempt when submitted as non-exempt.

Information about forms submitted as exempt without a completed declaration of exemption prior to June 2000 is not available. Information about exempt and non-exempt forms since then is in the table.

	June	*July*	*August*	*September*
Items on forms submitted as exempt without a declaration	118,013	107,911	105,822	104,025
Items to which concession applied for patients under 16 or 60 and over	37,965	35,834	36,583	35,290
Charges deducted from payments—line one less line two x £6.00 (£)	480,288	432,462	415,436	412,410
Total items dispensed	45,049,254	42,314,572	43,062,881	42,518,754
Percentage of items on forms submitted as exempt without a completed declaration—line one/line four	0.26	0.26	0.25	0.24

If previous patterns of submitting forms without declarations of exemption were similar, then adjustments to payments would have been around £7 million in 1997–98, £7.4 million in 1998–99 and £7.8 million in 1999–2000.

Older People (Services)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out for the years *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2002–03 and *(c)* 2003–04 how the £1.4 billion announced in the NHS plan for services for older people will be allocated; how much will be available through (i) NHS bodies and (ii) personal social services; and of the sums allocated through social services how much is made up of specific grants and how much is SSA. [150030]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* As stated at paragraph 15.2 of the NHS plan, from 2004 we are making available annually an additional £1.4 billion for new investment in health and social services for older people. The disposition of the funding for services to elderly people, including intermediate care and related services, within the national health service and the personal social services has been set out in two circulars, copies of which are available in the Library. They are:

Health Service Circular (2001) 01/Local Authority Circular (2001) 01; and

Local Authority Social Services Letter (2000) 13;

together with a reply from my noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath to Lord Lipsey on 12 October 2000, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column WA51.

Organ Donation

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many organs were offered for donation for each of the last 12 months for which information is available. [150100]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is in the table.

Organs offered for transplant and 'donor'[1] in UK, February 2000-January 2001, by month

Month	Kidneys	Livers	Hearts	Lungs	Pancreatic	Total solid organs	Corneas	Solid organ 'donors'[1]	Cornea-only 'donors'[1]
February 2000	110	49	39	70	7	275	225	57	118
March 2000	163	77	61	122	15	438	323	84	149
April 2000	120	65	56	104	10	355	348	69	179
May 2000	116	59	48	92	17	332	347	67	181
June 2000	113	63	50	82	16	324	275	66	131
July 2000	111	65	53	104	16	349	306	68	143
August 2000	137	69	57	108	19	390	288	77	138
September 2000	85	46	42	66	8	247	276	47	141
October 2000	134	69	52	100	21	376	262	75	124
November 2000	128	60	49	102	20	359	243	68	113
December 2000	138	67	55	106	21	387	259	72	124
January 2001	136	65	56	104	18	379	278	71	136
Total	1,491	754	618	1,160	188	4,211	3,430	821	1,677

[1] 'Donors' here means potential donors ie they did not necessarily end up donating.

Note:

These are counts of separate whole organs offered from cadaveric donors. Some were not accepted and used and some were offered in combination (double lungs, heart/lungs) and livers in some cases were subsequently split or reduced.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to amend the Department of Health and Food Standards Agency Departmental Expenditure Limit and Running Costs Limit for 2000–01. [151196]

Mr. Milburn: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class II, Votes 1 and 2, the overall Departmental Expenditure Limit for Class II, which includes the Department of Health and the Foods Standard Agency, will be increased by £196,888,000 from £45,090,755,000 to £45,287,643,000.

Of this increase the Department of Health Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £196,888,000 from £44,997,888,000 to £45,194,776,000. The increase is the net effect of changes to Class II, Vote 1 (Hospital, community health, family health and related services, England) of £156,025,000 made up of £74,977,000 in respect of take up of end year flexibility, (£35,217,000) for capital and (£39,760,000) for family health services as set out in Table 7 of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper Cm4812, published on 18 July 2000, and £82,214,000 Trust end year flexibility; transfers from Northern Ireland of £1,373,000 (£1,307,000) for Out of Area Treatments and (£66,000) for contributions to medical training costs of Royal Colleges; £144,000 from the Scottish Executive for contributions to medical training costs of Royal Colleges; £92,000 from the National Assembly for Wales for contributions to medical training costs of Royal Colleges and £88,000 from Class III, Vote 1 (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions) for the Rough Sleepers Unit; partially offset by transfers of £512,000 to the National Assembly for Wales for Out of Area Treatments; £1,065,000 to Class XII, Vote 2 (Department of Social Security: administration) for operating costs of the Road Traffic Accident element of the Compensation Recovery Unit; £536,000 to Class IV, Vote 1 (Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) (£221,000) for Drug Action Teams Development funding and (£315,000) for Drugs Action Teams Recruitment Initiative and £750,000 to Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) for the Institute of Psychiatry new research facilities.

An increase of £1,352,000 for Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) is the net effect of transfers (detailed below) and the take-up of £4,000,000 (running costs) end year flexibility as set out in Table 7 of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper Cm4812, published on 18 July 2000. Transfers of £1,106,000 from the Scottish Executive (£141,000 running costs) for reserved health bodies; £19,000 (running costs) from Northern Ireland for reserved health bodies; £459,000 from Class IV, Vote 1 (Home Office administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) £130,000 (running costs) for the Youth Justice Board inspections and (£329,000) for drug grants and drug related initiatives; £200,000 from Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) for the teenage pregnancy campaign; offset by net transfers of £464,000 to Class X, Vote 1 (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food) (£1,118,000) for the BSE Inquiry, less (£654,000) for research into BSE; and £388,000 to Class 1, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) (£455,000) for the drug advisers project, less (£67,000) for Protection of Children's Act Tribunal costs; and transfers of £3,000,000 to Class V, Vote 1 (Lord Chancellor's Department) for start up costs for the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services (CAFCASS) and £580,000 to Class III, Vote 1 (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions) for the Rough Sleepers budget.

Within the departmental DEL there is also a net transfer of £308,000 from Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) to Class II, Vote 1 (Hospital, community health, family health and related services, England) of which £500,000 is reclassified as running costs following agreement by HM Treasury that Mental Health Review Tribunal clerk costs should no longer be classified as programme costs. There is no increase in Mental Health Review Tribunal costs as a result of this change.

The Department of Health's gross Running Cost Limit will be increased by £4,790,000 from £302,490,000 to £307,280,000 as detailed above.

The external finance limit for NHS trusts has decreased by £140,242,000 from £451,000,000 to £310,758,000 comprising of a reduction in voted trust loans of £173,853,000 partially offset by a take up of £33,611,000 (non-voted) from HM Treasury for Public Finance Initiative schemes.

The external finance limit for the Medicines Control Agency has increased by £5,900,000 from £700,000 to £6,600,000 in respect of take up of end year flexibility entitlement as mentioned above.

There are no changes to the Food Standards Agency element of the DEL.

All increases will either be offset by transfers to or from other Departmental Expenditure Limits (detailed) or charges to the DEL reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Medical Negligence

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the expenditure on insurance against medical negligence claims by *(a)* North Bristol NHS trust and *(b)* all NHS hospital trusts in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [150566]

Ms Stuart: The clinical negligence scheme for trusts (CNST) commenced on 1 April 1995. This is not insurance, but rather a risk-pooling arrangement within the national health service administered by the NHS Litigation Authority. The size of an individual trust's contribution will depend on a number of factors including their claims history and excess level.

North Bristol NHS trust's net contribution to the CNST for 2001–02 was £342,956 with an excess level of £50,000; and for 2000–01 was £382,369 with an excess level of £100,000. This trust formed as a result of a merger between Frenchay and Southmead NHS trusts in April 1999, and so no directly comparable information is available before that date.

Figures for CNST contributions for all NHS trusts are available for each year back to 1995–96. Tables setting out this information will be placed in the Library in due course.

As the CNST did not exist before April 1995, no comparable figures are available before that date.

Correspondence

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a reply will be sent to the letters from the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford to his Department, dated 11 September 2000 and 26 October 2000. [150593]

Ms Stuart: A reply to the hon. Member was sent on 12 February.

Consultants (North Cumbria)

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for consultants, by specialty, in hospitals in the North Cumbria health authority area; and if he will make a statement. [150459]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service trusts within the North Cumbria health authority currently have 11 vacancies for consultants. The Carlisle Hospitals NHS trust has vacancies for consultants in oncology, orthodontics, anaesthetics, histopathology, clinical radiology and neurology. The North Lakeland healthcare NHS trust has a consultant vacancy in child and adolescent mental health services. The West Cumbria Health Care NHS trust has consultant vacancies in endocrinology, gastroenterology, paediatrics and breast surgery.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proposals there are to amend the Departmental Expenditure Limits and Running Costs Limits for the Northern Ireland Office expenditure and the Northern Ireland Executive for 2000–01. [151005]

Dr. Reid: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XV, Vote 1 the Northern Ireland Office Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–2001 will be increased by £16,667,000 from £1,121,564,000 to £1,138,231,000. The running costs limit will be increased by £12,147,000 from £264,861,000 to £277,008.000.

The increase reflects the take-up of end year flexibility of £20,407,000 (£9,340,000 running costs, £10,263,000 other current and £804,000 capital), an increase of £140,000 in respect of Housing Benefit for occupants of bail hostels, £215,000 from the civil service modernisation fund, £610,000 from the capital modernisation fund, net transfers of £4,702,000 to the Northern Ireland Executive and a transfer of £3,000 to the Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1).

The Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Northern Ireland Executive 2000–01 will be increased by £172,993,000 from £5,199,903,000 to £5,372,896,000. The increases reflect:

The take up of end-year flexibility of £147,554,000;

£166,000 allocated in the pre-Budget report for e-learning;

Additional provision of £5,556,000 allocated in the pre-Budget report for Schools;

£8,826,000 for support to the farming industry;

£66,000 as part of the recently announced package to improve flood defences;

£916,000 from the invest to save budget;

£6,500,000 to enable a programme of welfare reform to be undertaken;

net transfers of £4,702,000 from the NIO;

transfer of £10,000 to DETR;

transfer of £1,392,000 to the Department of Health;

transfer of £99,000 from the Department of Social Security;

transfer of £266,000 from the Department of Trade and Industry for the Pheonix fund;

additional funding of £229,000 for the Pheonix fund;

transfer of £39,000 to the Inland Revenue;

transfers of £193,000 to MAFF;

transfer of £252,000 to the Scottish Executive; and

transfer of £1,000 to the National Assembly for Wales.

The Northern Ireland Executive's welfare to work provision increases by £1,753,000 from £74,846,000 to £76,599,000.

These increases will be offset by a charge on the Departmental Expenditure Limit reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Prisoner Releases

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of each terrorist organisation were released under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998; and how many of those have subsequently been *(a)* arrested and charged with offences of a terrorist nature, *(b)* arrested for other criminal activity and *(c)* convicted of activity of the nature set out in *(a)* and (b). [150306]

Mr. Ingram: Information is held, for management purposes, in relation to the perceived paramilitary association of prisoners in Northern Ireland. The following table sets out details of the perceived association of the 434 individuals released under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

Details are held only in relation to those early release prisoners who come to the attention of the police while they are still under licence. At 14 February 2001, 18 of the 434 persons released under the terms of the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998 were arrested and charged with further offences while under licence.

Two early release prisoners were charged with offences of a terrorist nature and 16 were arrested for other criminal activity. Neither of the two cases in the former category have yet been dealt with by the courts. Of the other 16, eight were convicted, three had their charges withdrawn or were found not guilty and five have yet to have the charges against them resolved.

Perceived association	*Number*
PIRA	195
INLA	24
Former INLA	7
Republican association	3
UDA	87
UFF	14
UVF	67
RHC	3
LVF	16
Loyalist association	6
Criminal or No association	12
Grand total	434

Hospital Violence

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on how many occasions the RUC have been called to the accident and emergency and casualty departments of each hospital in Northern Ireland in *(a)* each month in 2000 and *(b)* January 2001 to deal with incidents of violence by patients and their visitors towards hospital staff and damage to equipment. [150294]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 26 February 2001

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the outturn prices were of *(a)* public investment expenditure, *(b)* public resource expenditure and *(c)* private investment in transport in (i) strategic roads, (ii) rail, (iii) local transport, (iv) London and (v) other transport areas using the same criteria for these figures as was used in constructing Table A3 in Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan in each year from 1987 to 1992. [144093]

Mr. Hill: It is not possible to provide this information for the years 1987 to 1992 using exactly the same criteria as was used to construct Table A3 in Transport 2010: The 10 Year Plan. However the table presents the information using similar criteria.

Public expenditure and private investment in transport (1987–88 to 1991–92)

£ billion, rounded, outturn prices[1]

	1987–88	1988–89	1989–90	1990–91	1991–92
Public investment expenditure	2.3	2.5	3.1	3.8	4.3
of which:					
Strategic roads	0.9	0.9	1.2	1.4	1.4
Rail	0.6	0.7	0.9	1.0	1.3
Local transport	0.6	0.7	0.6	0.6	0.8
London[2]	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.8	0.8
Other transport areas	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.0
Public resource expenditure	2.0	1.9	2.0	3.3	3.6
of which:					
Strategic roads	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Rail	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.5	0.7
Local transport	1.8	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.1
London[3]	0.0	–0.1	–0.1	0.4	0.5
Other transport areas	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
Total public expenditure	4.3	4.4	5.1	7.1	7.9
of which:					
Strategic roads	1.0	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.6
Rail	0.7	0.8	1.0	1.5	2.0
Local transport	2.4	2.5	2.6	2.7	2.9
London	0.2	0.2	0.2	1.2	1.3
Other transport areas	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1
Private expenditure	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2
of which:					
Strategic roads	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.0
Rail[4]	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Local transport	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
London	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

[1] Figures may not total due to rounding.
[2] For 1987–88 to 1989–90, public expenditure in London consists of expenditure on London Underground only. Other public expenditure in London is included in strategic roads and local transport.
[3] The negative public resource numbers in 1988–89 and 1989–90 for London reflect the contribution in public capital investment provided by London Transport's farebox revenue.
[4] Excludes private investment of £110/331/453 million by Eurotunnel plc for the period 1987–88 to 1989–90.

Waste

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is with regard to importing radioactive waste from overseas countries; and if he will make a statement. [146045]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 18 January 2001]:* The Government's policy is that radioactive waste should not be imported or exported from the UK. Subject to approval by the Environment Agency, some exceptions can, however, be made. These are for the recovery of reusable materials provided that this is the genuine prime purpose; for treatment that will make subsequent storage and disposal of the waste more manageable; for treatment and disposal of spent sources which were manufactured in the UK; or waste from small users (such as hospitals). Such imports should only be considered until the earliest time that the exporting countries can feasibly be expected to put in place their own treatment facilities.

Since 1976, all contracts to reprocess foreign spent fuel have included an option for the return of the resulting waste to the country of origin. As far as high level waste is concerned, this should be as soon as practicable after vitrification.

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many waste management licences have been revoked because of breaches of the Environment Protection Act 1990 in the last six years. [148723]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Since the establishment of the Environment Agency in April 1996, six waste management licences have been fully revoked under section 38(4) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. The Agency's powers of revocation may be used in the circumstances set out in section 38(1) of the 1990 Act. Data on licence revocations before April 1996 are not held centrally.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the draft climate change levy negotiated agreements for public scrutiny before they are signed. [148911]

Mr. Meacher: The draft climate change agreement templates are available on the DETR website at www.environment.detr.gov.uk/ccl/index.htm. In addition, the sector-level agreements will be published as soon as they are agreed and approved.

Fylde Bathing Waters (EU Legal Action)

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he is making to the EU Environment Commissioner to dissuade her from taking legal action against the UK over the state of the bathing waters off the Fylde coast; and if he will make a statement. [148759]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* The European Commission has announced its decision to initiate proceedings before the European Court of Justice. In the 2000 bathing season, seven out of the nine bathing waters on the Fylde coast passed the mandatory bacteria coliform standards of the Bathing Water Directive, compared with only three passing in 1999. This rate of

improvement gives us optimism that there will be full compliance shortly and every effort is being directed towards achieving this. I have informed the Commissioner of this.

Rail Network (Merseyside)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on planned investment in the rail network on Merseyside. [149759]

Mr. Hill: Our Ten Year Transport Plan earmarked £60 billion of funding for the railways. The current franchise replacement process will also secure additional capacity, a step-change in customer service and a sustained improvement in performance through higher levels of investment. A new 'Northern' franchise, including First North Western services, is currently being negotiated. The Merseyrail franchise will be replaced in due course. The Strategic Rail Authority has recently negotiated a two-year extension to the Merseyrail franchise, securing an additional three coaches for morning peak services in the autumn and a further three coaches in the summer of 2002.

School Transport

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to issue guidance to local education authorities on the use of vehicles specifically designed to carry standing passengers for the transportation of school children. [149808]

Mr. Hill: I have no plans to issue guidance to local education authorities about the use of vehicles specifically designed to carry standing passengers for the transportation of school children. All buses have to comply with specified safety standards, which include the requirement to have seat belts fitted in minibuses and coaches when groups of children are carried on organised trips. But buses that fall outside these definitions (mostly those that can also carry standing passengers) are not required by regulations to have seat belts. Ultimately it is for the schools and local education authorities to ensure the vehicles they will be using are appropriate for the type of journeys planned, including if they should be fitted with seat belts, regardless of whether or not the regulations require belts.

Ministerial Visits

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the official engagements of his Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Mr. Meacher), for Monday 5 February indicating, for each event, the time it commenced and the constituency in which it took place. [149812]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* In my capacity as Minister for the Environment I visited the following in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton).

14:00 Welbourne Junior School

14:45 Jack Hunt Secondary School

15:45 The Boardwalks Nature Reserve.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151024]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There was one such visit. On 5 February 2001, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment met the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) when he visited her constituency.

SSSI, Hindhead

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Director-General of the National Trust concerning damage to the SSSI in the Hindhead area. [150304]

Mr. Hill: The National Trust were represented on the Steering Group of the recently completed road based study of the A3 at Hindhead but there have not been any discussions recently with the Director-General of the Trust.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 532–33W, if he will quantify the indirect allowance made in the SSA for each fire authority in England for *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [150183]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The fire SSA is calibrated on 1990–91 expenditure data of fire authorities. This forms the basis of the underlying fire SSA formula. This expenditure data include the cost of responding the fire calls. However, these data are not detailed enough to identify what element of the base year expenditure relates to specific incidents, such as rescue activities and flooding incidents on inland waterways. It is, therefore, not possible to quantify the indirect allowance made to each fire authority for such specific incidents.

Coach Services (North Wales)

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from National Express Limited about their coach services along the North Wales coast; and if he will make a statement. [150202]

Mr. Hill: My Department has received no representations from National Express Limited in this regard, although of course I am aware from other correspondence of my hon. Friend's concern on this.

I am also aware that the National Assembly for Wales has asked the Welsh Transport Forum to consider the role that might be played by a network of long-distance express bus and coach services.

Turnham Green Tube Station

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will take

steps to ensure that Piccadilly Line trains stop regularly at Turnham Green tube station during the period of work that will disrupt District Line services to that station; and if he will make a statement. [150397]

Mr. Hill: This is an operational matter for London Underground (LUL), but Derek Smith, Managing Director of LUL, has kept in close touch with me about LUL's plans for the handling of the District Line closure between Earl's Court and High Street Kensington—i.e. the closure which will affect services to Turnham Green station. The Government recognise the pressing need to carry out vital safety works on the District Line, which must inevitably cause disruption to the system, but believe it is important that LUL continue to deliver the best service that can be provided to their customers in the circumstances.

LUL's forward planning for the closure involved a wide ranging examination of options. The work aimed in particular to take account of the impact on all the customers who would be affected, and the options considered included the scope for stopping Piccadilly Line trains at Turnham Green station. In other related work, LUL have also been working with Transport for London and London Buses to prepare detailed plans for alternative transport; and they have put in place a wide range of publicity measures to ensure that customers are fully informed about the implications of the closure and how to avoid its effects.

LUL have explained that in reaching conclusions about the best way to handle the closure they have sought to draw on the lessons of past closures, including the closure for similar work in 1999 of the adjacent Circle Line between Gloucester Road and High Street Kensington. I understand that one of the key lessons from that closure was that changes to timetables should be as simple as possible and as near to existing services as possible. Otherwise, attempts to amend a series of interlocking timetables can have the effect of magnifying the effect of the disruption, thereby inconveniencing a much greater proportion of customers overall.

LUL concluded that stopping Piccadilly Line services at Turnham Green station throughout the period of the District Line closure would cause unacceptably high levels of disruption to the Piccadilly Line, ultimately spreading the delay and inconvenience to an even greater number of customers across not one but two of the busiest lines. Instead, LUL believe that running the Piccadilly line reliably according to its existing timetable will make the most effective contribution to addressing the problem.

However, LUL have confirmed that they have set up a number of new arrangements. For the District Line as a whole they have set up a team to monitor closely the effects of the closure throughout the period. To date, robust operational planning has meant that service levels have been maintained in accordance with LUL's plans. Within that wider framework, special operational arrangements apply at Turnham Green. Extra staff will be in place on platforms to monitor the pressures on the station including any overcrowding. In the case of serious service problems on the District Line, local managers and operational staff will have discretion to instruct Piccadilly Line trains to stop temporarily at the station to relieve congestion; indeed, these plans have been operating for some days now and LUL tell me that they have already made use a number of times of the facility to stop Piccadilly Line trains on this basis. I understand from LUL that they are offering the best service they can realistically and safely provide throughout the period of this essential closure.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150549]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will help regenerate the more disadvantaged areas of Bristol. Those in my hon. Friend's constituency include:

New Deal for Communities

£50 million of additional Government funding under the New Deal for Communities programme to support regeneration of Barton Hill and surrounding localities.

So far there has been a 20 per cent. reduction in crime in the area, a measurable increase in street cleanliness as part of Project Pathfinder and the Employment Service/Benefits Agency is now operating from a New Deal shop in St. Judes.

Transport

Major public transport investment from Bristol's Transport Settlements of £21.287 million over the period 1998–99 to 2001–2002. This was used in Bristol, East for a host of traffic management priorities such as traffic calming measures (for example on Robertson Road in Eastville). It was also used for Safer Routes to Schools schemes (such as Whitehall Primary).

Housing

Improvements to dwellings under the Housing Investment Programme (amounts to £67.308 million over the same period for Bristol as a whole).

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Over the next three years Bristol will receive £8.022 million from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund to help main programme spending to deliver better outcomes for the most deprived communities.

Single Regeneration Budget

Single Regeneration Budget spending in east Bristol is for a seven-year scheme costing £16.8 million, of which the Single Regeneration Budget is contributing £7.6 million. The scheme is heavily dependent on local residents getting involved. In November 2000 a Community Safety Library and Resource Centre was opened. This is a drop-in centre giving advice to people in three of the most deprived wards on a wide range of topics, including racial harassment and help for victims of crime.

European Structural Funds

The European Structural Fund Objective 2 programme will also provide funding in the constituency, but although £121.2 million is available across the south-west region, it is not possible to say how much of this will benefit Bristol, East directly.

Conservation Areas

Mr. Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the Government's timetable is for *(a)* completing its selection of special areas of conservation and *(b)* completing the submission of the UK's sites to the European Commission. [150722]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: English Nature began consultations on possible additions to England's list of candidate special areas of conservation (cSACs) on 16 August 2000. As they conclude discussions on the scientific justification for each new site, or amendment to an existing cSAC, the site's details will be submitted to the European Commission. I anticipate that this process will be substantially completed by September 2001. Parallel processes are taking place in other parts of the UK where site selection is a devolved matter. In July 2000, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee were requested to initiate work necessary to identify sites beyond territorial waters. Their recommendations for selection criteria are expected by July 2001.

Sub-regions (South-West)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 117W, Ref. 150340, which parliamentary constituencies fall within more than one sub-region of the South-West Region. [150985]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I have nothing further to add to my answer of 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 117W. The sub-areas are broadly defined, overlap and, like the rest of the proposed changes to RPG 10, are open to public consultation. It is not possible to be as specific as the question suggests.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 117W, which sub-regions comprise all or part of *(a)* Dorset, *(b)* Wiltshire, *(c)* Somerset, *(d)* Devon, *(e)* Cornwall and *(f)* Gloucestershire. [150984]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The areas are described in Table 2 (reproduced) of the proposed changes to draft RPG10, which was published on 21 December 2000. The document was sent to all MPs in the region and placed in the House of Commons Library.

Table 2: Sub-regional structure

Sub-region	*Main county areas*	*Principal urban areas in sub-region*
Northern	Former Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire except south	Bristol, Bath, Weston-super-Mare, Gloucester, Cheltenham, Swindon
South-Eastern	Dorset, southern Wiltshire	Bournemouth, Poole
Central	Eastern Devon, Somerset	Taunton, Exeter, Torbay
Western	Cornwall, northern and western Devon, western Somerset, Isles of Scilly	Plymouth

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 117W, if there is an overlap between the south eastern sub-region of the South West and the South East Region; and if he will make a statement. [150990]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The sub-regional approach proposed in the revised draft Regional Planning Guidance (RPG) for the South-West is limited to the South-West region. The Guidance recognises that cross-boundary issues may arise in the implementation of RPG and that regional planning bodies will need to liaise accordingly.

Quarries (Nottinghamshire)

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with Nottinghamshire County Council about the need for extensions to existing *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone quarries in the county. [150818]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State has had no discussions with Nottinghamshire County Council about the need for extensions to existing *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone in the county.

There are a number of applications currently before Nottinghamshire County Council concerning the extension of sandstone quarries. These have been submitted under the provisions of both the Town and Country Planning legislation and the Environment Act 1995. The County Council has statutory responsibility to determine these applications and a duty of legal impartiality prevents the Secretary of State from commenting on their planning merits.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the demand for *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone over the next 20 years. [150816]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State has made no estimate of the demand for *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone over the next 20 years.

Estimates of demand for aggregate minerals at the national and regional levels were published in Minerals Planning Guidance Note 6 "Guidelines for aggregates provision in England" in 1994. Figures were provided for crushed rock but not for separate types of crushed rock such as sandstone. It was left to Mineral Planning Authorities to consider the implications for specific types of mineral within their administrative areas. MPG6 is

being reviewed with a view to publication of revised guidance next year. Current and likely levels of future demand for aggregates as a whole will be considered as part of that process.

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the reserves of *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone with existing planning permissions. [150817]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State has made no estimate of the reserves of *(a)* red and *(b)* yellow sandstone with existing planning permissions.

A survey of aggregate minerals for 1997 in England and Wales, including permitted reserves, was undertaken by Minerals Planning Authorities. Results were collated and published for my Department by the British Geological Survey. These included figures for rock reserves in each region. Permitted reserves of sandstone in England totalled 244 million tonnes, mainly in the North West, West Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber Regions. Specific types of sandstone were not identified in this survey.

Rights of Way

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what areas he will designate for the diversion of public rights of way under Part II of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. [150704]

Mr. Meacher: In designating areas within which local highway authorities may make special extinguishment orders and special diversion orders for crime prevention reasons under Part II of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, we shall seek to identify locations where the new powers are most needed. We shall consult local authorities and others before making any orders to designate areas in which the powers will be available.

Nuclear Contamination

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of ports have used Geigercounters on a regular basis to check for nuclear contamination of cargo vessels for each year since 1981. [150799]

Mr. Meacher: Information of this nature is not held.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many inquiries he has received over the past 10 years about safety standards on ships that have previously been used to dump nuclear waste at sea. [150798]

Mr. Meacher: There have been no inquiries that my Department has been able to identify.

Aggregates

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with other EU Environment Ministers on proposals to tax aggregates. [150842]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning has not discussed the proposals to tax aggregates with other EU Environment Ministers. However, DETR officials have had contact on this and other aspects of aggregates policy with the officials of some other EU countries over the past three years.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with *(a)* quarry operators and *(b)* construction companies regarding the planned aggregates tax. [150841]

Ms Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Housing and Planning and his predecessor have had a range of discussions about the proposed aggregates levy with quarry operators and construction companies.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the change in the number of lorry movements required in the 12 months following the introduction of the Aggregates Levy as a result of the substitution of recycled aggregates for virgin aggregates. [150683]

Ms Beverley Hughes: There are so many variables involved in making an estimate of the change in numbers of lorry movements required in the 12 months following the introduction of an Aggregates Levy that a meaningful figure could not be produced. Aggregates, whether virgin or recycled, will need to be carried to the market so the numbers of lorry movements may be broadly similar for given quantities of each. However it is expected that the Aggregates Levy will reduce consumption of virgin aggregates as a result of increased efficiency and less wastage at the construction site. Other things being equal, this should reduce the amount of lorry movements overall.

Mr. Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what estimate he has made of the amount of recycled aggregates that would be substituted for virgin aggregates as a result of the Aggregates Levy; and if he will make a statement. [150682]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The amount of recycled aggregates that would be substituted for virgin aggregates as a result of the Aggregates Levy cannot be predicted with certainty. The size of any change will depend on how the producers and consumers of aggregate respond to the levy and to consequent changes in prices in both the short and longer term. The Regulatory Impact Assessment that was prepared in 2000 to accompany the proposal for the levy noted that, using the short run estimate of price elasticity produced by ECOTEC for the Quarry Products Association in 1998, a best estimate of the impact of a £1.60 levy on the demand for primary aggregates would be a reduction of around 10 per cent. of production or, currently, about 24 million tonnes per year. Alternative materials, including recycled aggregate, would replace some of this reduced production, and less aggregate would be required as a result of increased efficiency and less waste of all aggregates. At any level of production, the levy should encourage a shift away from virgin aggregate towards alternative materials such as recycled aggregate.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150715]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The constituency of Blackpool, North and Fleetwood has benefited from a range of Government initiatives since 2 May 1997. The information given is based on local authority boundaries in some cases, as it not possible to break down the information to the constituency boundaries.

Capital allocations for housing—Blackpool

	£ million
1997–98	2.9
1998–99	[1]4.8
1999–01	5.06
2000–01	7.2
2001–02	8.3

[1] Including capital receipts initiative

The resources made available from Government to support the authority's housing capital investment programme will have nearly trebled in 2001–02 compared to 1997–98.

Wyre (includes Fleetwood)

	£ million
1997–98	1.3
1997–99	1.6
1999–2000	1.7
2000–01	1.5
2001–02	1.1

Wyre is a large scale voluntary transfer authority which transferred all its stock to Wyre housing association in 1996 and subsequently became debt free.

Neighbourhood Renewal Fund

Blackpool will receive the following indicative funding over the next three years:

Neighbourhood renewal fund

	£ million
2001–02	1.5
2002–03	2.3
2003–04	3.0

Single Regeneration Budget

These schemes cover the Blackpool, North and South areas.

SRB Round 2—Blackpool Challenge Partnership

This is a seven year strategy to halt decline of an area of need in the town centre behind the Promenade. This scheme is linked to the opportunity to create employment parks.

SRB total is £19.4 million.

SRB Round 6—Blackpool Challenge Partnership

This seven year scheme will start in April 2001. This scheme links support for growth of the tourist industry and improving the quality of life for Blackpool's most deprived communities. It has been allocated £20 million SRB funding.

Local transport plans

	£ million
1997–98	[1]9.5
1998–99	0.4
1999–2000	0.9
2000–01	1.2
2001–02	2.9

[1] This figure is for Lancashire county council before Blackpool became an unitary authority. Of the £9.5 million, £240k was allocated specifically for the Blackpool tramway, although other money would have gone into Blackpool.

Note:
All other figures are for the whole of Blackpool.

Local Government Finance Settlement

The following figures show the Government Grant to Blackpool borough council, Lancashire county council and Wyre borough council as part of the local government finance settlement.

Lancashire county council was reorganised in April 1988 when Blackpool became a unitary authority.

Blackpool

	£ million
1997–98	15.6
1998–99	93.2
1999–2000	97.2
2000–01	102.5
2001–02	105.3

Lancashire

	£ million
1997–98	696.8
1998–99	578.2
1999–2000	601.8
2000–01	628.2
2001–02	644.5

Note:
Lancashire county council was reorganised in April 1988 when Blackpool became a unitary authority.

Wyre

	£ million
1997–98	6.0
1998–99	5.9
1999–2000	6.3
2000–01	6.6
2000–02	6.8

European Funding:
North West of England Objective 2 ERDF Programme 2000–07

This programme is still under consideration by the European Commission but it is expected this will be agreed soon and start in March/April 2001. Some wards

of both Blackpool and Wyre are fully eligible areas for Objective 2 funding and will be able to bid for funding from £400 million.

European Community Initiative—PESCA

In 1997, two ERDF projects in Fleetwood were approved to a total grant value of £354k. This initiative finished in 1999. Its main aim was to help areas diversify away from the declining fishing industry.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from Sain Quintain plc and Grosvenor Estates in relation to the purchase of the site for the Dome. [150640]

Ms Armstrong: A consortium including Quintain Estates and Grosvenor wrote to the Deputy Prime Minister in January, in relation to proposed development on the Greenwich Peninsula, including the Dome. As the Government were in negotiations with Legacy plc as the preferred bidder at that time, this was forwarded to English Partnerships, which had been asked to register all such expressions of interest.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from *(a)* Mr. P. Y. Gerbeau and *(b)* Nomura in relation to their proposed interest in the purchase of the Dome site. [150636]

Ms Armstrong: Since Dome Europe's withdrawal from the competition in September 2000, the Government have received unsolicited expressions of interest both from P. Y. Gerbeau and Nomura International plc. These submissions were outside the terms of the competition. English Partnerships registered them while exclusive negotiations continued with Legacy plc.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what inquiries have been made by the Government in relation to the occupying of space in the Dome by *(a)* Sun Microsystems, *(b)* BT, *(c)* 3com, *(d)* NTL, *(e)* Imperial College and *(f)* the Open University. [150634]

Ms Armstrong: During the period of the preferred bidder status, it was for Legacy plc to assure the competition team about occupancy of space in the Dome had the contract been finalised. Advice was provided to the Government by the competition team on this issue.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under what circumstances the sole bidder status enjoyed by Legacy plc in relation to negotiations for the purchase of the Dome site expires. [150638]

Ms Armstrong: I refer the hon. Member to my reply of 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 221W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor).

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many meetings he has attended with representatives of *(a)* Legacy plc and *(b)* Treasury Holdings, to discuss the sale of the Dome site. [150641]

Ms Armstrong: The Deputy Prime Minister attended a small number of meetings with the representatives of Legacy plc to discuss the sale of the Dome site, but none specifically with Treasury Holdings.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from English Partnerships in relation to the proposed sale of the Dome to Legacy plc. [150637]

Ms Armstrong: English Partnerships have provided advice to the Government throughout the sale process, including on the offer from Legacy plc.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what inquiries have been made by *(a)* the Government and *(b)* their advisers of Westminster City Council in relation to its dealings with (i) Happy Badge Ltd. and (ii) other companies associated with Mr. Robert Bourne. [150635]

Ms Armstrong: None.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many approaches his Department has received from parties potentially interested in the purchase of the Dome site since 1 January [151275]

Ms Armstrong: Between 12 September 2000, when Dome Europe withdrew from the competition and 14 February 2001, when Legacy plc's preferred bidder status expired, English Partnerships registered, on behalf of the Government, 72 unsolicited expressions of interest, of which five were received after 1 January 2001.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if the deadline of 14 February set out for the negotiations with Legacy plc was specified in the letter setting out the terms of preferred bidder status; [151274]

(2) what deadline has been set for the exchange of contracts with Legacy plc for the sale of the Dome site. [151273]

Ms Armstrong: The preferred bidder letter, agreed by Legacy plc, required Legacy plc to meet several requirements to be delivered by 14 January 2001, and indicated that the Legacy team would work with the competition team with a view to exchanging contracts no later than 14 February 2001.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions at what time and on which day the decision to end the preferred bidder status of Legacy plc for the purchase of the Dome site and to reopen the competition was made. [151460]

Ms Armstrong: The position is set out in my reply of 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 221W to my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor).

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what contacts he, members of his Department or the competition team have had with potential new investors in Legacy plc. [151276]

Ms Armstrong: A small number of calls were received from parties wishing to know if they could join the Legacy team within the rules of the competition. They were advised of the rules, which permitted augmentation

if the bidder so wished, and they were advised that any such proposal would have to be agreed with Legacy, and that neither Ministers or the competition team could play any part in that process. Legacy plc introduced representatives of Teesland to the competition team and government representatives on Monday 12 February.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what advice he has sought on the credentials of Teesland plc as participants in the development of the Dome site. [151272]

Ms Armstrong: Appropriate advice was sought from and provided by the competition team, as is normal practice in a matter of this nature. The competition team advised on bids and bidders throughout the process and continued to do so while negotiations were ongoing with Legacy plc.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department last met executives of *(a)* Teesland plc, *(b)* Mr. Kevin McCabe and *(c)* the housebuilding company, Fairbriar; and for what purpose. [151271]

Ms Armstrong: Officials from my Department accompanied Lord Falconer and the competition team when they met Mr. McCabe and other representatives of Teesland plc, along with other members of the Legacy team, on 12 February to discuss their bid. No meeting has been held with Fairbriar.

Treasury Holdings

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions have taken place between members of Her Majesty's Government and the Irish Government in relation to the background, financial affairs and standing of Treasury Holdings and its directors. [150642]

Ms Armstrong: None.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what reports the Government have commissioned from independent advisers on the background of Treasury Holdings. [150639]

Ms Armstrong: In addition to the usual inquiries made within Government, advice was sought from and provided by the competition team. The competition team advised on bids and bidders throughout the process and continued to do so while negotiations were ongoing with Legacy plc.

Stowaways

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what security measures are in place to prevent stowaways on flights. [150626]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Under the UK National Aviation Security Programme, all those wishing to have access to an airport's Restricted Zone are required to be searched and screened, in order to prevent unauthorised interference with an aircraft.

Before entering service, all aircraft are required to be searched and checked internally and externally. Access is then controlled to that aircraft.

Airports are required to carry out mobile patrols of their airside areas which are physically secured and access is controlled to these areas.

Recycling Bins

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans the Government have to introduce recycling bins to all households. [150657]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Waste Strategy 2000 announced our intention to set statutory performance standards for household waste recycling and composting for 2003, 2005 and 2010. The overall impact will be to raise national recycling rates to at least 17 per cent. in 2003–04 and at least 25 per cent. in 2005–06. It is for individual authorities to decide how best to achieve these targets in the light of local circumstances.

Under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 authorities may specify the type of receptacle in which waste for collection is to be placed, and may choose to provide separate receptacles, for example for recyclables, free of charge.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend his Departmental Expenditure Limits and running cost limits for 2000–01. [151109]

Mr. Prescott: Subject to Parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class III, Votes 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 11, the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions' Departmental Expenditure Limits for 2000–01 will change as follows. All references to the take-up of end year flexibility refer to the Public Expenditure 1999–2000 Provisional Outturn White Paper presented to Parliament by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 18 July 2000 (Cm 4812).

(a) The DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £118,721,000 from £11,114,883,000 to £11,233,604,000. This increase reflects the net impact of a take-up of end year flexibility of £53,709,000; net transfers into the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit of £5,686,000 and calls on the DEL Reserve of £59,326,000. The changes are set out in greater detail as follows.

(i) The changes for Class III, Vote 1 are as follows:

Take up of End Year Flexibility of £17,795,000 comprising £6,000,000 for the Rough Sleepers Initiative, and £11,795,000 for European Regional Development Fund projects which is ring-fenced for these ERDF programmes only. A net increase in provision of £7,118,000 arising from the following inter-vote transfers: £8,000,000 from Class IX, Vote 1 in respect of the Regional Development Agencies; £580,000 from Class II, Vote 2 in respect of the Rough Sleepers Initiative; £1,334,000 to Class XII, Vote 3 in respect of the Benefit Agency's costs for the New Deal for Communities programme; £88,000 to Class II, Vote 2 for Department of Health expenditure on the Rough Sleepers Initiative and £40,000 to Class IV, Vote 1 for Home Office expenditure related to the Special Grants Programme. A

reduction of running costs of £430,000 arising from savings for the Rent Assessment Panel transferred to Class III, Vote 5.

(ii) The changes for Class III, Vote 2 are as follows:

A call on the Reserve of £50,000,000 for London Underground Jubilee Line Extension and a further net increase of £36,980,000 from the following inter-vote transfers: £43,230,000 from Class III, Vote 11 for grant in aid to Strategic Rail Authority; £2,000,000 to Class III, Vote 7 for the Highways Agency; £1,000,000 to Class III, Vote 6 for a loan to the Vehicle Inspectorate; £1,000,000 to Class III, Vote 5 for the TAN21 project; £1,500,000 to Class VI, Vote 1 for the Royal flight and £750,000 to Class XIII, Vote 1 for track access grants. There is also a net increase of £3,175,000 arising from transfers from non-voted credit approvals for grant funding of the Manchester Metrolink (£15,000,000); Sunderland Metro (£4,875,000) and World Squares (£200,000); £2,600,000 from non-voted Air Travel Trust Funds for Eurocontrol and transfers to non-voted credit approvals for the set-up costs associated with Road User Charging (£18,000,000) and a revised forecast IDA grant requirement (£1,500,000).

(iii) The changes for Class III Vote 3 are as follows: A transfer of provision of £6,182,000 from the non-voted element of DETR Main DEL for the Environment Agency to undertake work on contaminated land and to prepare for the Landfill Directive, to assist British Waterways with increased costs associated with flooding and towards clearing the maintenance backlog . A transfer of £500,000 from Class IX, Vote 1 for preliminary work establishing fuel poverty action zones under the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme; transfers to and from Class III, Vote 5 of £489,000 for costs incurred establishing the Carbon Trust and £25,000 for the local authority air quality unit of the Environment Agency respectively.

(iv) The changes to Class III, Vote 5 are as follows:

The take up of £13,792,000 end year flexibility: for the Health and Safety Commission £7,000,000 of which £5,500,000 is running costs to meet the cost of the Cullen inquiry and other pressures; £856,000 for the PSA Services in respect of annual compensation payments for former employees; £1,800,000 to increase capital provision for Strategic IT projects and £4,136,000 to meet residual DETR relocation costs. A transfer of £4,644,000 from the Cabinet Office to increase running costs provision for the Civil Service Modernisation Fund of which £2,779,000 is for Central Administration, £895,000 for Government Offices Administration and £970,000 for the Health and Safety Commission. A net increase in provision of £663,000 arising from the following inter-vote transfers of £25,000 to Class III, Vote 3 for the Environment Agency; £250,000 to Class III, Vote 8 for the smart tachograph costs; £1,000,000 to Class III, Vote 7 to meet 10 year plan and budget 2000 costs; £111,000 to Class III, Vote 6 to meet costs of Secretariat support for major inquiries in the Planning Inspectorate Executive Agency; £50,000 to Class III, Vote 6 to meet additional pension costs for the Rent Officer Services Agency; £430,000 savings from Class III, Vote 1; £489,000 from Class III, Vote 3 for the Carbon Trust; £180,000 from Class III, Vote 4 for the cost of staff loaned by Government Office for London to Greater London Authority and £1,000,000 from Class III, Vote 2 for TAN21 project. There is a further draw down of £4,768,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision and an increase in Appropriations in Aid by £56,000 for Scottish Parking Appeal Fund and £80,000 for the sale of cars by Government offices.

(v) The changes to Class II, Vote 6 are as follows:

The take up of £8,449,000 end year flexibility for: the Planning Inspectorate (£1,136,000) dilapidation payments on Tollgate House; (£272,000) for works on Temple Quay; (£1,500,000) for lower than budgeted receipts; (£76,000 capital) for the Rent Officer Services Agency; (£2,500,000) to cover expenditure on furniture and equipment and on the Estates Rationalisation Programme; (£2,027,000) to cover slippage from 1999–2000 and (£938,000) to meet Information Technology system replacement costs. Transfers from the Cabinet Office Civil Service Modernisation Fund of £226,000 to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency; £290,000 to the Planning Inspectorate; £51,000 to the Vehicle Certification Agency; £187,000 to the Rent Officer Services Agency; £100,000 to the Vehicle Inspectorate; £100,000 to the Driving Standards Agency and £19,000 to the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre; transfer of £1,000,000 from the Capital Modernisation Fund to the Planning Inspectorate; transfers from the Departmental Unallocated Provision of £828,000 to the Rent Officer Services Agency to cover slippage from 1999–2000 and £112,000 to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency; a transfer of £94,000 from Class X, Vote 2 to the Maritime and Coastguard Agency for the testing of fishing vessel engine power, transfers of £111,000 from Class III, Vote 5 to the Planning Inspectorate to meet costs of Secretariat support for major inquiries and £50,000 to the Rent Officer Services Agency to cover a historic pensions liability. There is also a transfer of £1,000,000 from Class III, Vote 2 to cover a loan made to the Vehicle Inspectorate for building a new testing station at Chadderton.

(vi) The changes to Class III, Vote 7 are as follows:

The take up of end year flexibility of £6,021,000 programme capital and £687,000 running costs for dilapidation to Tollgate House, Bristol. The take up of £292,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision for running costs; transfer of £1,000,000 from Class III, Vote 5 for the 10 year plan and budget 2000 costs and £2,000,000 from Class III, Vote 2 for funding outlined in Highways Agency's Business Plan.

A further increase in expenditure of £15,298,000 will be offset by a compensating increase in Appropriations in Aid.

(vii) The changes in Class III, Vote 8 are as follows:

The take up of capital end year flexibility of £6,965,000; the draw down of £4,788,000 from the Reserve to cover costs of the Graduated VED and HGV Rebate Schemes less a £1,400,000 transfer to the Reserve under the demand financing agreement with the Treasury; take up of £2,500,000 from the Departmental Unallocated Provision and a transfer of £250,000 from Class III, Vote 5 for smart tachograph costs. A further increase in expenditure of £9,031,000 will be offset by a compensating increase in Appropriations in Aid.

(viii) The change to Class III, Vote 11 is a transfer of £43,230,000 to Class III, Vote 2 to reflect the establishment of the Strategic Rail Authority.

(ix) As a consequence of the changes to Class III, Votes 5, 6, 7 and 8 the DETR gross running costs limit has been increased by £16,045,000 from £702,154,000 to £718,199,000. The HSE gross running cost limit has increased by £6,470,000 from £180,717,000 to £187,187,000.

(x) Provision within the non-Voted element of the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be decreased by £18,357,000 from £2,650,148,000 to £2,631,791,000. This reflects transfers to: Class III, Vote 2 for grant funding of the Manchester Metrolink (£15,000,000); Sunderland Metro (£4,875,000); World Squares (£200,000); National Air Traffic Services Public Private Partnerships (£2,600,000); to Class III, Vote 3 £6,182,000 for the Environment Agency to undertake work on contaminated land and to prepare for the Landfill Directive, to assist British Waterways with increased costs associated with flooding and towards clearing the maintenance backlog and £500,000 to the Local Government Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Isle of Scilly water credit approvals. It also includes running costs transfers from the DETR Departmental Unallocated Provision of £8,500,000 comprising £4,768,000 to Class III, Vote 5; £940,000 to Class III, Vote 6 for the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (£112,000) and Rent Officer Services Agency (£828,000); £292,000 to Class III, Vote 7; and £2,500,000 to Class III, Vote 8. These decreases are partially offset by transfers from Class III, Vote 2 for costs associated with Road User Charging (£18,000,000) and for revised forecast of Industrial Development Act grant expenditure (£1,500,000).

(xi) The net increase in the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit will be offset by transfers to the Department of Health Departmental Expenditure Limit, Home Office Departmental Expenditure Limit, Department of Social Security Departmental Expenditure Limit, Ministry of Defence Departmental Expenditure Limit, DETR Local Government Departmental Expenditure Limit; from Department of Trade and Industry Departmental Expenditure Limit, Department of Health Departmental Expenditure Limit, Cabinet Office Departmental Expenditure Limit, Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food Departmental Expenditure Limit, the Capital Modernisation Fund and by a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

(b) The DETR Local Government Departmental Expenditure Limit will be increased by £320,000 from £35,361,148,000 to £35,361,468,000. This increase is the net effect of a transfer of £500,000 from the DETR Main Programmes Departmental Expenditure Limit and a transfer of £180,000 to Class III, Vote 5.

(i) The changes for Class III, Vote 4 are as follows: increased provision for Emergency Assistance to Local Authorities by £20,000,000 (mainly offset by a reduction of £15,100,000 in Private Finance Initiative Special grant and £2,900,000 Grant in Aid to the Standards Board for England and a transfer of £1,700,000 from non-voted programmes) and a transfer of £180,000 from the Greater London Authority Preparation Costs to Class III, Vote 5.

(ii) Provision within the non-Voted element of the Local Government Departmental Expenditure Limit will be reduced by £1,200,000 from £139,111,000 to £137,911,000. This reflects a transfer of £1,700,000 to Class III, Vote 4 and a transfer of £500,000 from the Main Department Departmental Expenditure Limit reversing a transfer to the Main Department DEL which took place at Winter Supplementary Estimates.

(iii) The net increase in the DETR Local Government Departmental Expenditure Limit will be offset by a reduction in the DETR Main DEL and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

(c) The Office of the Rail Regulator Departmental Expenditure Limit will increase by a token amount of £1,000. The gross running cost limit will increase by £238,000 from £13,768,000 to £14,006,000 but the overall total is offset in full by a corresponding increase in Appropriations in Aid.

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150884]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The constituency of North-East Derbyshire has benefited from a range of Government initiatives since May 1997, including:

Housing resources made available to North-East Derbyshire district council

Year	*£ million*
1997–98[1]	0.805
1998–99	1.55
1999–2000	2.262
2000–01	3.439
2001–02	5.762

[1] Last year of funding determined by previous administration

Under the Government's first Comprehensive Spending Review, all local authorities received significantly more resources for housing. The increase in resources for North-East Derbyshire is illustrated in the table.

North-East Derbyshire has a large number of non-traditional properties requiring significant investment. North-East Derbyshire was successful in 1998 in attracting Private Finance Initiative (PFI) resources for a non-Housing Revenue Account (HRA) scheme on the Holmewood Estate, the first social housing PFI scheme to be approved by the Government. (Note: This scheme was worked out under the old Administration, but approved under the current one.) The council is taking forward a HRA PFI scheme to repair and refurbish defective stock centred on three housing estates comprising the former coalfield villages of North Wingfield, Danesmoor and Pilsley. This PFI bid has been put forward for appraisal.

European Funding

	Total grant (£)	Number of projects supported
Objective 2 1997 to 1999 (ERDF)	5,702,602	21
Rechar II (ERDF)	4,438,927	14
Objective 3 2000–06 (ESF)	151,114	2

These grants have been allocated to a range of regeneration, social inclusion, environmental and transport improvement projects. Under the new Objective 2 programme 2000–06, parts of North-East Derbyshire will continue to have direct access to regeneration funding from the ERDF and also transitional funding under the new Objective 2 programme.

Single Regeneration Budget

SRB 5 An Alliance for Action: DETR contribution is £24 million

Based on the vision that the Coalfield area is a strong, prosperous and forward-looking sub-region, projects will be aimed at improving competitiveness, job creation, building community capacity and promoting a culture of lifelong learning.

SRB 6 Positioned for Prosperity: DETR contribution is £15 million[1].

Two main themes are Housing and Skills and Learning.

[1] These schemes include a number of districts, one of which is North East Derbyshire. It is not possible to provide a separate figure for the area.

SRB 1 and 4: DETR contribution is £11.5 million

Four programmes targeted on sites in Chesterfield/ North-East Derbyshire and a fifth area-wide programme involving job creation, business support, education and training, community empowerment, and crime reduction measures. Approximately 50 per cent. of the funding for this scheme is allocated to North-East Derbyshire.

Coalfields Programme and Partnership Investment Programme

Avenue Coking Works, Wingerworth—£6,969,000 spent up to 31 December 2000.

Coney Green Business Park, Clay Cross—£2,289,300 spent up to 31 December 2000.

Coney Green Business Centre, Clay Cross—£339,778 spent up to 31 December 2000.

Plot 19, Clay Cross—£102,000 spent to date.

Rural Programme

£947,922 (from May 1997 to date).

Local Transport Plans

Year	£ million
1997–98	[1]3.0
1998–99	[1]3.0
1999–2000	[2]4.6
2000–01	[2]5.6
2001–02	[3]18.4

[1] Derbyshire county council's Transport Policies and Programmes allocation.
[2] From Derbyshire county council's provisional Local Transport Plan settlement.
[3] From Derbyshire county council's full Local Transport Plan settlement.

The increase in settlement for the year 2001–02 represents the first instalment of the massive investment programme, promised in the 10-Year Plan (Transport 2010). It is money to be spent on local transport priorities. It is not possible to determine exactly how much of these amounts have been spent on the North-East Derbyshire constituency. However, the constituency has benefited from Derbyshire county council's integrated transport policies.

Local Government Finance Settlement

£ million

	North-East Derbyshire district council	Derbyshire county council
1997–98	4.868	307.918
1998–99	4.802	321.511
1999–2000	4.909	341.383
2000–01	5.064	360.961
2001–02	5.262	375.573

This information is for general grant (Revenue Support Grant, National Non Domestic Rates and damping grants). It is not possible to determine the exact amount allocated by the county council to North-East Derbyshire.

Derbyshire Energy and Environment Group

The group includes North-East Derbyshire district council and received from DETR administrative help, the expertise of an energy adviser estimated at £7,000 and £3,000 for publicity. Two Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 Action Scheme projects were granted £148,500 by DETR to improve residential energy efficiency.

Spending Assessments (Bury)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the annual increase in *(a)* standard spending assessment and *(b)* education standard spending assessment for Bury Metropolitan Council, for each of the last eight financial years and for 2001–02. [150976]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The information requested is given in the table:

£ million

Year	Education SSA increase[1]	Total SSA increase[1]
1993–94	0.605	1.718
1994–95	2.648	5.479
1995–96	1.873	1.711
1996–97[2]	3.789	3.400
1997–98[2]	2.107	0.922
1998–99	4.081	6.157
1999–2000	3.652	6.497
2000–01	3.875	6.471
2001–02	2.932	5.237

[1] All increases are calculated against the adjusted figures for the previous year to ensure a like-for-like comparison
[2] Figures supplied for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are based on the Local Government Finance Report (England) Amending Reports dated February 1999 and February 2000 respectively

Fats & Proteins UK Ltd.

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the report of the public inquiry into the appeal by Fats & Proteins UK Ltd. of Nightingale Hall Farm, Lancaster, against their environmental authorisation will be published. [151240]

Mr. Meacher: The parties to the Fats and Proteins appeal will shortly be issued with a copy of the Inspector's report into the appeal hearing in the light of the revision last year of the Secretary of State's Process Guidance Note PG6/1(00)—Animal By-Product Rendering. They will be invited to comment on how any changes in circumstances since the hearing or any changes in policy, outlined in the revised guidance note, may affect the appeal. Following consideration of their comments, the Secretary of State should be in a position to announce a decision.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if each of the bids for the NATS PPP enjoys full confidence on the question of safety of *(a)* NATS management, *(b)* the safety regulation group of the Civil Aviation Authority and *(c)* advisers appointed to assess the quality of safety management of the three bidders. [151325]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Government received three bids for the NATS PPP on 31 January 2001. The Government are currently evaluating the bids, which include proposals with regard to safety and will take advice or comments from all those mentioned. We will make an announcement on the outcome of that evaluation in due course.

Endangered Species

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on plans to implement fully EC regulation 338/97. [151139]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Council Regulation (EC) No. 338–97 sets out the requirements on member states to implement the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The United Kingdom fully implements these Regulations, under which all commercial trade in critically endangered species is prohibited and trade in less endangered species is strictly regulated.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* planned to reduce the international trade in animals caught in the wild. [151138]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The United Kingdom is a Party to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES), which is implemented within the EU by Council Regulation (EC) No. 338/97 and Commission Regulation (EC) No. 939/97. These Regulations are enforced in the UK by the Customs and Excise Management Act 1979 and the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 (S. I. No. 1372). The Regulations currently protect over 30,000 species of animals and plants, and trade is permitted only where we are satisfied that this will not be detrimental to the wild populations of the species concerned. Traders are also encouraged to make use of captive bred sources of animals, and artificially propagated sources of plants, where these can be shown to be produced in a sustainable manner.

The United Kingdom plays an active role within CITES. We are currently taking forward several initiatives aimed at reducing illegal trade in endangered species. These include publicity campaigns aimed at tourists and traditional medicine users and practitioners, and advising them of the constraints on buying wildlife souvenirs and on using endangered species in medicines. The Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime, a coalition of DETR, HM Customs and Excise, police and interested NGOs, has also been set up to address illegal trade in the UK. On the international front we are providing financial and practical support for a number of initiatives, including a CITES working group addressing unsustainable trade in bushmeat (mainly primates but also other endangered species) and a Tiger Enforcement Task Force which aims to provide all CITES Parties with technical advice and intelligence support on illegal trade in tigers and tiger products.

Dangerous Wild Animals Licences

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many dangerous wild animals licences are held by private individuals in the United Kingdom. [151131]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: This information is not normally held centrally as the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 is administered by local authorities. However, as part of a review of the Act's effectiveness, contractors have discovered that approximately 370 licences were issued last year covering nearly 12,000 animals. The contractors are due to report their findings in April.

Local Government Act

Mr. Neil Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made in preparing a draft order under section 16 of the Local Government Act 1999 to liberalise local authorities' powers to engage in trading activities; and when such an order will be published. [150732]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We expect to publish next month a consultation paper on the use of powers in Section 16 of the Local Government Act 1999 to provide new and amended powers to promote and facilitate the achievement of best value through partnership working. This will include proposals for best value authorities to provide a wider range of goods and services to partners, both in the public and private sectors. Draft Orders will be laid before Parliament following the conclusion of the consultation exercise.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Levy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the expenses that Lord Levy has claimed while acting as his personal envoy. [146619]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 22 January 2001]:* Lord Levy has claimed no expenses.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if Lord Levy is provided with an office allowance by Her Majesty's Government for his work as his personal envoy. [148515]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* No.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister what diplomatic status Lord Levy holds for protocol purposes. [148517]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* Lord Levy does not have diplomatic status. The countries Lord Levy visits accord him the courtesies they consider appropriate.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the statements issued by British embassies in *(a)* South American countries, and *(b)* Middle Eastern countries in relation to visits made by Lord Levy. [148518]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 390W.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will provide a breakdown of the costs of interpreters used to assist Lord Levy in his role as personal envoy during his visits to the Middle East and South America. [148512]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* In the Middle East, most of Lord Levy's meetings have been conducted in English. Where there has been interpretation, it has been provided by host countries at no cost to the United Kingdom.

In South America interpreters were used when necessary as usual on such visits. The costs to the Government are estimated as £1,141.71.

Personal Envoy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will advertise the post of personal envoy for future appointments to the post. [148514]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* No. I shall continue to ask people to travel as my personal envoy when that seems appropriate and desirable.

Higher Education

Dr. Harris: To ask the Prime Minister what information he received on the contents of the Education and Employment Committee's report on access to higher education, and the proceedings of the Committee prior to the publication of the report. [150054]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Employment on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 162W.

Quintain Estates

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met representatives of Quintain Estates. [151428]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations it is not my practice to provide details of such meetings.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what steps he took at the time the Hammond Inquiry was established to ensure that the Cabinet Secretary made public his meetings with the Hinduja brothers. [150835]

(2) if he will make a statement on the meeting between the Cabinet Secretary and the Hinduja brothers in July 1998; [150832]

(3) what criteria are applied to determine whether it is appropriate for the Cabinet Secretary to meet persons external to Government. [150834]

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of the Cabinet met the Hinduja brothers through a speech which he gave about diversity in the Civil Service. He accepted their subsequent invitation to lunch because he was advised that to do so would be beneficial to British commercial interests in India. He was accompanied at the lunch by a private secretary who circulated a note of the discussion afterwards to the Departments concerned. The Secretary of the Cabinet has made no secret of the fact that the lunch took place. Passports were not discussed at the lunch, and nothing about the lunch was relevant to the Inquiry. Sir Anthony Hammond QC has been given full access to the papers in case he wishes to satisfy himself on the point. I am satisfied that the Secretary of the Cabinet acted entirely properly at every stage.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the occasions between 1 January 1989 and 30 April 1997 when senior civil servants met the Hinduja brothers; and if he will make a statement. [150830]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) on 31 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 224W.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what factors underlay his decision not to ask the Cabinet Secretary to lead the inquiry into the passport applications by the Hinduja brothers. [150829]

The Prime Minister: I asked Sir Anthony Hammond QC to undertake this inquiry because I wanted his independent judgment on the matters covered by his terms of reference. It would not be appropriate to ask the Secretary of the Cabinet to carry out such a full and lengthy investigation.

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if *(a)* he and *(b)* the Cabinet Secretary (i) have given and (ii) will be giving evidence to the Hammond Inquiry. [150836]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) on 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 70W (in reply to questions UIN 147716 and 147717).

Mr. Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what independent mechanisms exist to ensure that those with responsibility for the Hammond Inquiry are not in a position to influence the content of the final report in respect of their roles. [150831]

The Prime Minister: As usual with inquiries of this sort, Sir Anthony Hammond QC has complete independence in preparing his final report. I have made it clear that I will publish the report.

Hospitality (Chequers)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public expenditure incurred on the provision of hospitality for the Prime Minister's *(a)* official guests, *(b)* private guests other than family members and *(c)* family members at Chequers in each of the last 10 years. [151431]

The Prime Minister: In respect of non-official hospitality at Chequers, as under previous Administrations, all costs for private guests, including family members, are at my own expense with no cost falling to the public purse.

For expenditure on official hospitality at Chequers, I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 970W. The figure for the first three quarters of 2000–01 was £6,981. This information was not recorded separately before 1997–98 and therefore it is not possible to give comparable figures for the years prior to 1997.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Opposition Policies (Costings)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of the Minister for the Cabinet Office of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 48W (1) what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative Party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) co-ordinated in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings and relevant background documents in the Library; [146668]

(2) what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative Party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) advised upon in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings and relevant background documents in the Library; [146665]

(3) if special advisers in his Department have been involved in *(a)* co-ordinating, *(b)* costing and *(c)* presenting costings of policies of opposition parties; and if he will make a statement. [146667]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 183W.

Truancy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many school truancies were recorded during the last 12 months in each local education authority area; and if he will make a statement. [148311]

Jacqui Smith: The number of half-days missed as a result of unauthorised absence (truancy) by pupils; and the percentage of those half-days missed, for each local authority area in England in 1999–2000 (the latest figures available) are shown in the table.

Although there has been some significant improvement in attendance levels, too many children are still missing school without good reason. Over half of these are primary school children, most of whom will be absent with their parents' consent. That is why, last autumn, we announced a renewed drive to tackle truancy including extra resources available to schools and LEAs to tackle poor behaviour, with truancy the top priority. £174 million will be available in 2001–02—10 times the level in 1996–97. We have also begun a co-ordinated nationwide programme of truancy sweeps to pick up youngsters who should be in school. In addition, our Excellence in Cities programme is being expanded to provide more on-site learning mentors in schools to support children with barriers to attending school and learning. We are also asking schools with above average truancy records to set new targets for attendance. On 28 February, I am giving "Truancy Buster" awards of up to £10,000 to up to 50 schools in the country which have done the most to reduce truancy. From 1 March, the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 will come into effect with higher fines for the parents of persistent truants. And from 1 April, the first Connexions Service Partnerships will start, and will give priority to improving attendance at school for all young people aged 13 and over. All these measures are designed to help schools improve attendance and learning.

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary and secondary schools 1999–2000

	Primary schools		*Secondary schools*		*Primary and secondary schools*	
	Number of half days missed	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*
Barking and Dagenham	60,889	1.4	51,301	1.7	112,190	1.5
Barnet	34,489	0.5	58,244	1.1	92,733	0.8
Barnsley	43,025	0.8	73,675	1.9	116,700	1.3
Bath and North East Somerset	11,887	0.3	18,651	0.6	30,538	0.5
Bedfordshire	18,651	0.3	49,049	0.5	67,700	0.4
Bexley	17,859	0.3	47,779	1.1	65,638	0.7

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary and secondary schools 1999–2000

	Primary schools		Secondary schools		Primary and secondary schools	
	Number of half days missed	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*
Birmingham	186,730	0.7	294,411	1.6	481,141	1.1
Blackburn with Darwen	20,386	0.5	38,810	1.4	59,196	0.9
Blackpool	27,928	0.8	43,581	1.9	71,509	1.3
Bolton	16,947	0.2	62,595	1.2	79,542	0.6
Bournemouth	16,373	0.6	20,435	0.8	36,808	0.7
Bracknell Forest	5,538	0.2	14,518	0.9	20,056	0.5
Bradford	95,943	0.9	215,869	2.0	311,812	1.4
Brent	32,672	0.6	38,519	1.0	71,191	0.8
Brighton and Hove	27,442	0.6	30,683	1.0	58,125	0.8
Bristol, City of	71,390	0.9	109,706	2.2	181,096	1.4
Bromley	25,339	0.4	30,357	0.6	55,696	0.5
Buckinghamshire	22,132	0.2	43,218	0.5	65,350	0.3
Bury	18,277	0.4	17,644	0.5	35,921	0.4
Calderdale	16,945	0.3	28,219	0.7	45,164	0.5
Cambridgeshire	46,618	0.4	67,452	0.8	114,070	0.6
Camden	33,948	1.2	39,395	1.5	73,343	1.4
Cheshire	52,539	0.3	88,581	0.7	141,120	0.5
Cornwall	36,915	0.3	36,779	0.4	73,694	0.4
Coventry	27,671	0.4	72,408	1.3	100,079	0.8
Croydon	38,308	0.5	27,778	0.6	66,086	0.5
Cumbria	16,335	0.1	50,995	0.6	67,330	0.3
Darlington	5,893	0.2	28,063	1.6	33,956	0.8
Derby City	39,697	0.7	32,464	0.8	72,161	0.7
Derbyshire	49,783	0.3	122,584	0.9	172,367	0.6
Devon	39,947	0.3	108,419	1.0	148,366	0.6
Doncaster	35,533	0.5	130,278	2.3	165,811	1.3
Dorset	20,982	0.3	41,879	0.5	62,861	0.4
Dudley	23,145	0.3	43,310	0.7	66,455	0.5
Durham	13,060	0.1	96,285	1.1	109,345	0.5
Ealing	29,720	0.5	44,899	1.2	74,619	0.7
East Riding of Yorkshire	15,019	0.2	52,312	0.9	67,331	0.5
East Sussex	44,406	0.4	87,624	1.1	132,030	0.7
Enfield	70,278	1.1	88,221	1.7	158,499	1.4
Essex	101,118	0.3	200,408	0.9	301,526	0.6
Gateshead	18,252	0.4	44,244	1.3	62,496	0.8
Gloucestershire	32,413	0.3	47,315	0.5	79,728	0.4
Greenwich	69,301	1.4	70,953	1.9	140,254	1.6
Hackney	62,469	1.5	44,246	2.2	106,715	1.7
Halton	21,724	0.7	40,320	1.6	62,044	1.1
Hammersmith and Fulham	29,917	1.2	34,337	2.2	64,254	1.6
Hampshire	89,534	0.3	166,787	0.8	256,321	0.5
Haringey	88,807	2.0	69,291	2.3	158,098	2.1
Harrow	24,764	0.5	18,796	0.7	43,560	0.6
Hartlepool	17,207	0.7	31,726	1.6	48,933	1.1
Havering	8,750	0.2	23,433	0.5	32,183	0.3
Herefordshire	9,444	0.2	18,132	0.6	27,576	0.4
Hertfordshire	70,934	0.3	123,502	0.6	194,436	0.5
Hillingdon	55,578	0.9	59,554	1.4	115,132	1.1
Hounslow	42,307	0.9	37,871	0.9	80,178	0.9
Isle of Wight	3,120	0.2	23,585	0.7	26,705	0.5
Isles of Scilly	59	0.1	23	0.1	82	0.1
Islington	47,329	1.2	40,597	2.0	87,926	1.5
Kensington and Chelsea	11,936	0.8	16,946	1.8	28,882	1.2
Kent	113,697	0.4	139,685	0.6	253,382	0.5
Kingston upon Hull, City of	49,597	0.8	136,544	2.9	186,141	1.7
Kingston upon Thames	9,432	0.3	19,896	0.9	29,328	0.6
Kirklees	56,235	0.6	94,521	1.2	150,756	0.9
Knowsley	28,188	0.7	91,945	3.1	120,133	1.6
Lambeth	47,382	1.1	20,350	1.0	67,732	1.1
Lancashire	99,490	0.3	181,547	0.8	281,037	0.6
Leeds	85,130	0.5	249,839	2.0	334,969	1.2
Leicester City	38,711	0.5	92,160	1.9	130,871	1.1
Leicestershire	22,544	0.2	140,758	1.2	163,302	0.6
Lewisham	81,270	1.5	96,545	2.9	177,815	2.1
Lincolnshire	42,390	0.3	95,001	0.8	137,391	0.5
Liverpool	67,499	0.6	138,857	1.6	206,356	1.0
London, City of	1,024	1.9	0	–	1,024	1.9
Luton	25,802	0.5	29,957	0.9	55,759	0.7
Manchester	94,704	0.9	125,859	1.9	220,563	1.3

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary and secondary schools 1999–2000

	Primary schools		Secondary schools		Primary and secondary schools	
	Number of half days missed	Percentage of half days missed	Number of half days missed	Percentage of half days missed	Number of half days missed	Percentage of half days missed
Medway	24,487	0.4	52,977	1.0	77,464	0.7
Merton	21,164	0.6	38,336	1.7	59,500	1.0
Middlesbrough	20,005	0.5	42,628	1.6	62,633	1.0
Milton Keynes	21,588	0.4	15,988	0.5	37,576	0.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	24,397	0.5	61,491	1.3	85,888	0.9
Newham	112,799	1.7	138,744	2.7	251,543	2.1
Norfolk	81,321	0.4	111,608	0.9	192,929	0.6
North East Lincolnshire	13,357	0.3	61,350	1.8	74,707	1.0
North Lincolnshire	7,559	0.2	34,017	1.1	41,576	0.6
North Somerset	12,289	0.3	23,256	0.7	35,545	0.5
North Tyneside	3,907	0.1	23,362	0.6	27,269	0.3
North Yorkshire	18,933	0.2	48,373	0.5	67,306	0.3
Northamptonshire	60,425	0.4	101,031	0.8	161,456	0.6
Northumberland	6,545	0.1	32,956	0.4	39,501	0.3
Nottingham, City of	64,112	0.9	121,271	2.9	185,383	1.7
Nottinghamshire	65,448	0.4	198,475	1.3	263,923	0.8
Oldham	31,354	0.5	70,778	1.4	102,132	0.9
Oxfordshire	38,426	0.3	131,774	1.3	170,200	0.8
Peterborough, City of	29,298	0.7	30,768	0.9	60,066	0.8
Plymouth, City of	21,594	0.4	27,565	0.6	49,159	0.5
Poole	14,347	0.5	11,589	0.6	25,936	0.5
Portsmouth	31,589	0.8	54,904	1.8	86,493	1.2
Reading	26,231	0.9	12,116	0.8	38,347	0.9
Redbridge	41,755	0.8	28,671	0.6	70,426	0.7
Redcar and Cleveland	7,970	0.2	37,027	1.1	44,997	0.6
Richmond upon Thames	8,031	0.3	43,129	1.8	51,160	0.9
Rochdale	24,480	0.4	55,914	1.4	80,394	0.8
Rotherham	42,593	0.6	64,038	1.2	106,631	0.9
Rutland	510	0.1	4,045	0.6	4,555	0.3
Salford	34,118	0.6	49,408	1.3	83,526	0.9
Sandwell	34,569	0.5	86,784	1.5	121,353	0.9
Sefton	16,017	0.2	38,403	0.7	54,420	0.4
Sheffield	113,920	1.0	152,458	1.8	266,378	1.3
Shropshire	8,019	0.1	27,593	0.6	35,612	0.3
Slough	25,687	0.9	22,578	1.1	48,265	1.0
Solihull	11,321	0.2	23,330	0.5	34,651	0.4
Somerset	23,354	0.2	39,978	0.5	63,332	0.3
South Gloucestershire	18,155	0.3	58,487	1.4	76,642	0.7
South Tyneside	5,051	0.1	14,009	0.4	19,060	0.3
Southampton	36,341	0.8	38,365	1.1	74,706	0.9
Southend	24,865	0.7	40,652	1.4	65,517	1.0
Southwark	84,689	1.6	55,399	1.9	140,088	1.7
St. Helens	9,109	0.2	35,031	1.0	44,140	0.6
Staffordshire	39,798	0.2	86,304	0.5	126,102	0.4
Stockport	32,670	0.5	50,048	1.0	82,718	0.7
Stockton on Tees	6,311	0.1	23,333	0.6	29,644	0.3
Stoke on Trent	29,378	0.5	50,435	1.2	79,813	0.8
Suffolk	25,476	0.2	80,462	0.6	105,938	0.4
Sunderland	12,809	0.2	57,674	1.0	70,483	0.6
Surrey	50,539	0.2	108,267	0.7	158,806	0.5
Sutton	14,316	0.4	13,892	0.4	28,208	0.4
Swindon	16,281	0.4	26,873	0.8	43,154	0.5
Tameside	13,743	0.2	51,592	1.1	65,335	0.6
Telford and Wrekin	18,481	0.5	28,057	1.0	46,538	0.7
Thurrock	21,849	0.6	32,237	1.3	54,086	0.9
Torbay	7,226	0.3	21,494	1.0	28,720	0.6
Tower Hamlets	77,542	1.5	97,731	2.5	175,273	2.0
Trafford	12,377	0.2	31,455	0.7	43,832	0.5
Wakefield	46,449	0.6	41,679	0.7	88,128	0.6
Walsall	44,614	0.7	42,750	0.8	87,364	0.7
Waltham Forest	36,280	0.7	52,773	1.4	89,053	1.0
Wandsworth	26,960	0.6	20,973	0.8	47,933	0.7
Warrington	13,082	0.3	20,231	0.5	33,313	0.4
Warwickshire	20,301	0.2	61,075	0.7	81,376	0.4
West Berkshire	7,525	0.2	10,884	0.4	18,409	0.3
West Sussex	37,578	0.2	80,898	0.7	118,476	0.4
Westminster, City of	19,135	0.9	63,464	3.1	82,599	2.0
Wigan	25,307	0.3	64,573	1.0	89,880	0.6
Wiltshire	30,471	0.3	46,427	0.6	76,898	0.5

Unauthorised absence in maintained primary and secondary schools 1999–2000

	Primary schools		Secondary schools		Primary and secondary schools	
	Number of half days missed	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*	*Number of half days missed*	*Percentage of half days missed*
Windsor and Maidenhead	9,608	0.4	14,908	0.6	24,516	0.5
Wirral	29,395	0.4	37,838	0.6	67,233	0.5
Wokingham	10,007	0.3	10,284	0.4	20,291	0.3
Wolverhampton	42,545	0.7	55,442	1.3	97,987	0.9
Worcestershire	32,772	0.3	84,509	0.8	117,281	0.6
York, City of	12,444	0.3	23,224	1.1	35,668	0.6
England	5,223,695	0.5	9,164,962	1.0	14,388,657	0.7

New Deal for Disabled People

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the respective roles of the *(a)* Employment Service, *(b)* Disability Employment Adviser and *(c)* job broker in delivering the New Deal for Disabled People. [148936]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* The Employment Service, in partnership with the Benefits Agency, Department of Social Security and my Department, has responsibility for the delivery of the New Deal for Disabled People. Later this year, the Employment Service and the working age elements of the Benefits Agency will merge to form the new Working Age Agency. Disability Employment Advisers (DEAs) will continue to provide advice about job opportunities to all disabled people whatever their benefit status who are looking for work, providing access to specialist ES programmes aimed at securing a return to work and, in appropriate cases, provide details of local job brokers. The job broker will provide help to people claiming incapacity benefits in preparing for, finding and keeping paid work. Job brokers will work closely with DEAs to meet the individual needs of their clients. For example, where a client is eligible and requires support under Access to Work, this will be provided through the DEA. The job broker will also work with employers to match their requirements to the abilities and potential of their clients.

Departmental Policies (Staffordshire, Moorlands)

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to Staffordshire, Moorlands constituency, the effects on Staffordshire, Moorlands of his Department's policies and actions *(a)* since 2 May 1997 and *(b)* in the 12 months ending on 1 May 1997. [149190]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effect on the Staffordshire, Moorlands constituency and Staffordshire LEA of a range of the Department's policies since 2 May 1997.

Sure Start

Cannock Chase—£2.5 million

Telford and Wrekin—£1.8 million

Cannock Chase

The catchment area covers Broomhill, Chadsmoor, Huntingdon and part of Cannock Chase south. The partnership places strong emphasis on parental involvement and includes eight parents on its board. It has incorporated new activities which offer a series of initiatives that impact family lives. These include the Library and Information Project and Holiday Play schemes. The programme was allocated £2.5 million over three years from 2000–01.

Telford & Wrekin

The programme aims to enhance existing provision in the area such as outreach services, pre-school services, primary community healthcare and improve support to teenage parents. The catchment area covers the Lawley and Overdale ward in Telford. There are plans to create innovative work with families in the travellers site based in the area. The programme was allocated £1.8 million from 1999–2000 over three years.

Beacon Schools

Staffordshire has six beacon schools: Barnfields Primary School, Blackfriars School, Oakridge Primary School, Painsley RC High School, St. Joseph and St. Teresa Primary School and The Willows Primary School.

Specialist Schools

Staffordshire has three specialist schools: Wilncote High School (Arts), Clough Hall Technology School (Technology) and Thomas Alleyne's School (Technology).

Performance Results

Key Stage 2: Percentage of pupils achieving level 4

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
English				
LEA	76	72	66	66
England	75	71	65	63
Maths				
LEA	72	70	60	65
England	72	69	59	62
Science				
LEA	87	82	73	72
England	85	78	69	69

GCSE and GNVQ results

Percentage

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
5+ A-C*				
LEA average	48.1	48.1	45.0	45.0
England	49.2	47.9	46.3	45.1
5+ A-C*				
LEA average	91.7	91.5	90.1	88.7
England	88.9	88.5	87.5	86.0
No passes				
LEA average	4.3	4.6	5.1	6.5
England	5.6	6.0	6.6	7.7
Average point score				
LEA average	38.5	38.3	36.4	n/a
England	38.9	38.1	37.0	n/a

Capital funding

£000

	2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99	1997–98
ACG	10,251	11,442	7,740	5,978	4,368
SCA	—	515	300	508	987
NDS	—	10,368	4,421	3,975	1,387
VA grant	804	843	670	576	456
Seed	—	459	—	—	—
PPP	—	—	—	14,000	—
Capital formula	—	6,279	—	—	—
NgFL	—	3,000	3,000	2,500	—
Science labs	464	464	—	—	—
SSLU	156	178	—	—	—
Access at 85 per cent.	813	—	—	—	—
Security	—	387	292	278	223
Class size	—	312	671	350	—
Outside toilets	—	—	—	176	—
Energy efficiency	—	—	—	245	—
Assistance with AMPs	—	—	123	—	—
Nursery provision	—	—	—	—	—

PPP

£13.7 million—PPP project to rebuild Sir Graham Balfour High School and the extensive refurbishment of Cooper Perry Primary.

Examples of New Deal for Schools projects in Staffordshire, Moorlands

NDS1—Total Allocation £1,387,000

Included within an 11 school package: Replacement of felt roofing—Meadows School

NDS2—Total Allocation £3.975 million

The LEA bid for, and was allocated funds for, numerous smaller type projects.

St. Edward's CE First—external fabric maintenance—£19,800

Werrington Primary—external fabric maintenance—£19,800

Biddulph High—external fabric maintenance—£49,500

Springfield—major extension—£36,800

NDS3—Total Allocation £4.421 million

Maryhill High—refurbish science, technology and prep area—£206,245

St. Filumena's RC Primary—Replacement of defective boiler plant—£11,391

NDS4—Total Allocation £10.368 million

Leek High School—ICT development—£11,865

Moorside High School—ICT Improvements—£28,072

Moorside High was included within a two school package: Technology refurbishment—£243,397

Included within a 13 school package: Electrical works—£239,905

Leek High, Park Middle and Woodhouse Middle Schools.

Included within a 14 school package: Water hygiene works—£250,805

Moorside High, Leek High, Westwood High and Cicely Haughton Schools.

Infant class size

£

	Revenue	Capital
1998–99	0	350,000
1999–2000	1,243,000	883,180
2000–01	2,426,602	283,800

The September 2000 figure shows that there are now only 249 (1.0 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant class sizes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1997 was 11,254 (28.6 per cent.).

Further education

Student numbers at all FEFC-funded institutions where home postcode is in the Staffordshire, Moorlands local authority district—1996–97 to 1999–2000—excludes with invalid/missing postcodes

Students at FE colleges and external institutions

	Council funded				Non Council funded				
	16–18		19+		16–18		19+		Grand
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	total
1996–97	829	454	509	5,642	35	221	82	625	8,397
1997–98	772	436	425	5,801	55	281	33	480	8,283
1998–99	741	407	373	6,148	42	301	34	510	8,556
1999–2000	770	347	377	6,018	34	325	35	722	8,628

FE students at higher education institutions

	Council funded				Non Council funded				
	16–18		19+		16–18		19+		Grand
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	total
1996–97	1	1	1	19	—	—	—	2	24
1997–98	6	4	2	15	—	—	—	—	27
1998–99	1	2	3	36	—	—	—	—	42
1999–2000	Data for higher education institutions not yet available								

Modern Apprenticeships

Since 2 May 1997, we know of 1,084 starts on Modern Apprenticeships in the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency (as at 31 October 2000). Broken down by financial year these are:

Financial year	Foundation modern apprenticeships[1]	Advanced modern apprenticeships[2]	Total
1997–98	23	135	158
1998–99	119	159	278
1999–2000	158	189	347
2000–01 (to date)	151	150	301
Total	451	633	1,084

[1] Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as National Traineeships, were introduced nationally in September 1997.
[2] Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships, were introduced nationally in September 1995.

Source:
WBTYP trainee database.

Notes:

1. The Trainee Database System (TDS), from which these data are taken, is less complete than Management Information supplied to the Department by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) (around 95 per cent.).

2. In addition, the postcode information on the TDS, from which parliamentary constituency data are compiled, are 95 per cent. complete.

3. TEC Management Information does not provide information at parliamentary constituency level.

New deal statistics

In the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency to the end of November 2000, 454 young people have joined the New Deal, with 254 finding employment. Of these, 183 have entered sustained employment.

Labour market

The working age employment rate in Staffordshire UA in Autumn 2000 was 79.0 per cent., above the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 77.9 per cent. and in autumn 1999 78.9 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 4.0 per cent. in December 1997 to 2.6 per cent. in December 2000 in the Staffordshire Moorlands constituency.

Departmental Policies (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tooting, Wandsworth parliamentary constituency, the effect of his Department's policies and actions since 1 May 1997 on this constituency. [149865]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effect on the Tooting constituency and Wandsworth LEA of a range of the Department's policies.

Sure Start

Wandsworth is one of the second wave Sure Start programmes. The programme is based in Battersea and covers Latchmere, St. Johns and St. Mary's Park wards. Sure Start Battersea was approved on 6 October 2000 and will receive revenue funding of £1,829,000 and capital funding of £705,000, until March 2003.

Infant class size

The LEA has made good progress towards reducing infant class sizes to 30.

	Number of pupils in classes over 30
January 1998	1,228
January 2000	636
September 2000	158

Key stage 2 results

Pupils achieving level 4 and above:

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998	1997
English				
LEA	72	65	64	61
England	75	71	65	63
Maths				
LEA	68	63	56	59
England	72	69	59	62
Science				
LEA	80	70	64	63
England	85	78	69	69

GCSE/GNVQ results

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998	1997
5+A-C*				
LEA average	41.6	35.6	34.7	35.0
England Average	49.2	47.9	46.3	45.1
5+A-G*				
LEA average	86.5	84.6	83.0	82.4
England average	88.9	88.5	87.5	86.4
No passes				
LEA average	3.0	5.0	6.7	6.6
England average	5.6	6.0	6.6	7.7

Beacon schools

There are nine Beacon schools in Wandsworth:

Allfarthing Primary School

Burntwood Foundation School for Girls

Elliott Secondary School

Fircroft Primary School

Graveney School

High View Primary School

Our Lady of Victories Catholic Primary School

Sir James Barrie Primary School

West Hill Primary School.

Specialist schools

In the Tooting constituency there are two specialist schools:

Chestnut Grove School (Arts), designated in September 1997; and

Ernest Bevin School (Sports), designated in September 2000.

Education Action Zone (EAZ)

There is one Small EAZ in Wandsworth LEA called "Achieving Excellence in Battersea EAZ". The zone started in April 2000 and is made up of eight schools, comprising one secondary, six primary and one special school. The schools are:

Battersea Technology College

Garrett Park Special School

Bolingbroke Primary

Chesterton Primary

Falconbrook Primary

John Burns Primary

John Milton Primary

Shaftesbury Park Primary

There are no large EAZs in Wandsworth LEA.

Excellence in Cities (EiC)

Wandsworth is included in Phase 1 of the Excellence in Cities programme, which started in September 1999. All of Wandsworth's nine secondary schools are involved in the EiC programme, as well as 26 of its 57 primary schools.

Learning Mentor strand in Wandsworth

19 learning mentors have been appointed at secondary level, and half of the planned amount of 29 full time equivalent primary learning mentors have been appointed.

Learning Support Units (LSU)

Secondary—four funded by EiC at:

Southfields Community College

Ernest Bevin College

Salesian College

John Paul II School

Primary—two LSUs which are used by four schools.

Gifted and Talented in Wandsworth

Gifted and Talented strand coordinators are in place. All nine secondary schools are involved in the Gifted and Talented strand, along with eight primary schools.

Secondary Gifted and Talented

In the last academic year the EiC in Wandsworth brought about 148 early entries for GCSE. 725 were involved in out of school activities. Last summer 93 attended HE summer school.

Capital allocations (£000)

	2001–02	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*
ACG	407	1,166	1,614	274	50
SCA	—	124	26	98	212
NDS	—	2,635	1,016	865	135
VA Grant	2,659	715	142	229	428
Seed	151	133	—	—	—
PPP	—	—	—	—	—
Formula Capital	—	[1]659	—	—	—
NgFL	—	580	455	292	—
Science Labs	124	124	—	—	—
SSLU	—	—	—	—	—
Access at 85 per cent.	232	16	26	3	—
Security	—	59	59	45	36
Class size	—	108	115	—	—
Outside toilets	—	—	—	66	—
Energy Efficiency	—	—	—	25	—
Assistance with AMP	—	—	23	—	—
Nursery Provision	—	68	—	—	—

[1] Plus 593 additional FC

Note:

The allocation for 2001–02 also includes £551,000 for NDS Devolved Formula Capital and £385,000 NDS Condition Funding

New Deal For Schools

Allocation for schools in the Tooting constituency

Year/school	*Project*	*Grant awarded (£)*
1997–98		
Chestnut Grove Secondary	New roof and temporary accommodation	[1]135,000
1998–99		
22 School LEA wide package	Safety of chimney/flues renewal	[2]379,500
1999–2000		
Included within a 12 school package:		
Ravenstone Primary Holy Ghost RC Primary Wandle Primary	Renewal of mechanical and electrical services	[2]1,946,000
2000–01		
Included within a 12 school package:		
Burntwood Girls School Chestnut Grove Secondary Ernest Bevin College Franciscan primary Wandle Primary	Renewal of roofs and associated drainage works	[2]1,621,017
Saint Boniface RC Primary	Removal of outdoor toilets and proposal for replacement within school building	101,265

[1] Local education authorities were not required to specify total project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme. Wandsworth Local Education Authority holds this information.

[2] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. Wandsworth Local Education Authority will be able to advise the value of projects at schools

City Learning Centre (CLC)

There is one CLC in operation, which was opened last November by Estelle Morris, and currently there are no more planned.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

EMA statistical data for Wandsworth:

	Number
EMA applications received	625
Fully processed	324
Awaiting Learning Agreement/more information	166
Refused (don't meet criteria)	133
Number in receipt of EMA payments	141

Further education

Student number at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the Local Authority District of Wandsworth—1996–97 to 1999–2000

	Council funded				Non council funded				
	16–18		19+		16–18		19+		Grand
Year	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	total
1996–97	1,678	452	1,948	9,803	40	74	168	381	14,544
1997–98	1,617	474	1,600	11,845	40	78	173	819	16,646
1998–99	1,532	547	1,488	11,880	36	87	222	1,114	16,906
1999–2000	1,544	482	1,410	10,767	41	100	247	1,242	15,833
Grand Total	6,371	1,955	6,446	44,295	157	339	810	3,556	63,929

Student number at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the Local Authority Ward of Tooting—1996–97 to 1999–2000

	Council funded				Non council funded				
	16–18		19+		16–18		19+		Grand
Year	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time	Total
1996–97	114	30	134	632	2	3	16	25	956
1997–98	105	30	118	668	4	5	17	36	983
1998–99	106	27	99	733	4	5	22	54	1,050
1999–2000	108	34	88	636	2	7	22	66	963
Grand total	433	121	439	2,669	12	20	77	181	3,952

Modern Apprenticeships

Information about the number of Modern Apprenticeships in South West London is unreliable because of the inaccuracy of some postcodes on the Department's database. The inaccuracies are being corrected and information on Modern Apprenticeship starts for all parliamentary constituencies in England will be made available in the Library of the House in March.

Labour market statistics

The working age employment rate in Wandsworth UA in autumn 2000 was 79.9 per cent., above the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 72.3 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 11.0 per cent. in December 1997 to 6.8 per cent. in December 2000 in the Tooting constituency

New Deal statistics

In the Tooting constituency to the end of November 2000, 1,029 young people have joined the New Deal, with 413 finding employment. Of these, 317 have entered sustained employment.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150550]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Bristol, East constituency and on the City of Bristol LEA.

Beacon Schools

St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple School is located within the Bristol, East constituency and became a Beacon school on 1 September 2000. There are two other Beacon schools within Bristol local education authority, Hotwells Primary and Ilminster Avenue Specialist Nursery School.

Performance Results

Bristol LEA Key Stage 2 test results: pupils achieving level 4 or above:

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998	1997
English				
Bristol LEA	66	62	55	54
England Average	75	71	65	63
Maths				
Bristol LEA	63	59	47	52
England Average	72	69	59	62
Science				
Bristol LEA	78	71	59	56
England Average	85	78	69	69

Bristol LEA GCSE and GNVQ results:

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998	1997
5+ A-C Passes*				
Bristol LEA	31.2	31.0	29.0	32.1
England Average[1]	49.2	47.9	46.3	45.1

Percentage

	2000	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*
5+ A-G Passes*				
Bristol LEA	81.1	80.5	80.4	81.2
England Average[1]	88.9	88.5	87.5	86.4
No Passes				
Bristol LEA	10.4	10.7	10.9	10.9
England Average[1]	5.6	6.0	6.6	7.7

[1] Includes Independent schools

Education Action Zone

Seven primary schools (Bannerman Road, Barton Hill, Hannah More, Whitehall, Millpond, St. Nicholas of Tolentine, Barton Hill Nursery and Infants) and one secondary school (St. George Community College) located within the Bristol, East constituency are among a group of 17 schools included in the Bristol Education Action Zone formed in September 2000.

Key activities:

Teaching and learning.

Pupil engagement—setting up groups within schools to support young people in establishing their cultural and gender identity.

Children as effective communicators.

Parental engagement—developing groups to support parents from minority ethnic backgrounds.

Participation and progression.

Developing effective urban leaders and managers.

ICT—providing networked computers, free training for teachers, out of hours access for community use.

Support from the Arts Council of England means that arts will form part of each of the above strands.

Infant Class Size

£

	Revenue	*Capital*
1998–99	0	203,000
1999–2000	231,000	303,256
2000–01	675,178	180,000

The September 2000 figures show that there are now only 96 (0.9 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant classes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1997 was 3,708 (29 per cent.)

Sure Start

Bristol was one of the successful areas in the Sure Start initiative with a trailblazer project in the Hartcliffe, Highridge and Withywood areas of the city. £3,161,682 has been allocated up to March 2002 towards offering increased play and family learning opportunities. The Knowle West area of Bristol also has a scheme to enable a comprehensive care and education service for children aged 0 to 4 to be created, with £1,835,838 already approved, and a further £710,000 approved in principle up to March 2003.

Bristol LEA Capital allocations:

£000

	2001–02	*2000–01*	*1999–2000*	*1998–99*	*1997–98*	*Total*
Credit Approvals						
ACG	3,952	2,914	1,422	437	174	8,899
SCA	—	1,283	1,712	3,357	162	6,514
Grants						
NDS	1,155	4,457	2,026	355	620	8,613
NGfL	—	1,099	1,229	764	—	3,092
VA Grant	256	827	251	351	165	1,850
Schools Formula Capital	1,322	2,417	—	—	—	3,739
Science labs	177	177	—	—	—	354
Nursery provision	—	75	—	—	—	75
Energy	—	—	—	99	—	99
AMP support	—	—	46	—	—	46
SEED challenge	234	207	—	—	—	441
Class Size Initiative	—	5	298	203	—	506
Schools Access Initiative at 85 per cent.	349	—	—	—	—	349
Schools Security at 75 per cent.	—	116	119	117	94	446
Early Excellence Centre	—	210	—	—	—	210
Outside toilet removal	—	—	—	40	—	40
Total	7,445	13,787	7,103	5,723	1,215	35,273

Excellence in Cities (EiC)

Bristol LEA was included in the second phase of Excellence in Cities, announced on 23 March 2000. All 22 maintained secondary schools in Bristol are involved in the EiC programme, and special schools have been involved in the partnership planning process too.

There are four EiC secondary schools in the Bristol, East constituency:

St. George Community College;

St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple school (a Beacon school designated through EiC);

Whitefield Fishponds Community School;

Brislington School and 6th Form Centre.

These have all benefited proportionately from Excellence in Cities but individual school allocations are determined within local partnerships. The table shows the resourcing of EiC strands across all Bristol's secondary schools.

Key strand	*EiC status in Bristol*
Learning Mentors	37.2 full-time equivalent—43 in total
Learning Support Units	4
City Learning Centres	2 planned for January 2002
Beacon and Specialist schools	3 in total—1 Secondary ; 1 Primary; 1 Nursery
Small Education Action Zones	2 approved, starting March and September 2001

Key strand	EiC status in Bristol
Extended opportunities for gifted and talented pupils	All schools have a EiC co-ordinator with a laptop; 5 to 10 per cent. cohorts identified in every school and year group; subject departmental policies being written in schools; cluster work on talented programmes; Easter schools targeting KS3 in English, maths and science, and KS4 maths; summer schools with Bristol and Exeter University; training for co-ordinators including a Thinking Skills day on 9 March; links with Learning Mentors.

Public Private Partnerships (PPP)

Bristol LEA has no PPP/PFI projects to date. The LEA has submitted a bid in the current allocation round (to be announced in March) for an £85 million PFI project covering eight secondary schools. However, the LEA's review of secondary provision will not be complete until July 2001, and DfEE has asked the LEA to reconsider the timing of its bid, as the investment needs of its secondary schools will not be known until the review is completed. As a result, Bristol LEA is considering whether to resubmit their bid as part of next year's schools capital allocation.

New Deal for Schools

Allocations for schools in the Bristol, East constituency

Year	School	Project	Grant awarded (£)
1997–98	Bannerman Road primary	Replace classrooms	[1]620,000
	Holymead Infants	Replace classrooms	
	Holymead Junior	Refurbishment/redecoration	
	St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple school	Learning resource centre	
1998–99	Bannerman Road primary	Resurface playground	20,000
	St. Mary Redcliffe and Temple school	Refurbish toilets	30,000
1999–2000	Bannerman Road primary	Replace school	2,026,000
2000–01	Holymead Infants	Replace school	670,000
	Included within a four school package: Brislington School and 6th Form College	Refurbish science labs	[2]1,602,000
	Included within a five school package: Broomhill Juniors	Remodelling and/or provision of ICT suites	[2]671,000

[1] Local education authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the LEA. Bristol LEA holds project level information.
[2] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. Bristol LEA will be able to advise the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

Modern Apprenticeships data

Since 2 May 1997, we know of 1,033 starts on Modern Apprenticeships in the Bristol, East constituency (as at 30 November 2000). Broken down by financial year these are:

Financial year	Foundation Modern Apprenticeships[1]	Advanced Modern Apprenticeships[2]	Total
1997–98	13	136	149
1998–99	99	180	279
1999–2000	241	154	395
2000–01 (to date)	127	83	210
Total	480	553	1,033

[1] Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as National Traineeships, were introduced nationally in September 1997.

[2] Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships, were introduced nationally in September 1995.

Notes:

1. The Trainee Database System (TDS), from which these data are taken, is less complete than Management Information supplied to the Department by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) (around 95 per cent.).

2. In addition, the postcode information on the TDS, from which parliamentary constituency data are compiled, are 95 per cent. complete.

3. TEC Management Information does not provide information at parliamentary constituency level.

Source:

WBTYP trainee database

New Deal for Young People

In the Bristol, East constituency to the end of November 2000, 1,229 young people have joined the New Deal, with 566 finding employment. Of these, 442 have entered sustained employment.

Labour market statistics

The working age employment rate in Bristol UA in autumn 2000 was 77.6 per cent. above the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 72.7 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 8.6 per cent. in January 1997 to 3.8 per cent. in January 2001 in the Bristol, East constituency.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150720]

Mr. Wills: Outlined are details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency and on Blackpool LEA.

Background

Blackpool, formerly part of Lancashire LEA, achieved unitary status on 1 April 1998 following local government reorganisation.

Sure Start

The programme is centred on Mereside. There is a strong emphasis on community capacity building, particularly through training both to increase self-confidence and to promote

self-sufficiency. Parents and grandparents are involved in providing some of the services, such as running storytelling and rhyme clubs. Total funding up to £1,950,070.

Beacon Schools

Anchorsholme County Primary School and Christ the King Catholic Primary School.

Specialist Status Schools

Bispham High School (Arts) and Montgomery High School (Language). Both have gained their specialist school status since May 1997.

Excellence in Cities (EiC)

Blackpool is included in Phase 3 of the Excellence in Cities programme and will be submitting plans for implementation to begin in September 2001. Under EiC Blackpool is expected to receive allocations of some £3.7 million over the next three years.

Performance Results

Kay Stage 2 test results: pupils achieving level 4 or above

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998
English:			
LEA	72	64	60
England	75	71	65
Maths:			
LEA	66	64	56
England	72	69	59
Science:			
LEA	79	70	62
England	85	78	69

GCSE and GNVQ results

Percentage

	2000	1999	1998
5+ A -C:*			
LEA average	36.1	36.5	34.6
England average	49.2	47.9	46.3
5+ A -G:*			
LEA average	85.3	84.7	83.8
England average	88.9	88.5	87.5
No passes:			
LEA average	6.3	7.3	6.9
England average	5.6	6.0	6.6

Infant class size

£

	Revenue	Capital
1998–99	73,000	414,500
1999–2000	351,000	278,125
2000–01	588,710	171,200

The September 2000 figure shows that in Blackpool there are now only 192 (4.1 per cent.) pupils remaining in infant classes of 31 or more. The figure in January 1997 was 2,369 (45.4 per cent.).

Partnership Programme for Independent and State Schools

Langdale Preparatory School (ind) and Claremont Primary School (maintained), Blackpool, received Independent/State School Partnerships grant of £17,000 in 1999–2000 for one year. The schools worked together to explore "The Development of Blackpool and its Relationship to Tourism". The project involved most areas of the curriculum with emphasis on history, geography, science, art, mathematics and English.

Capital

£000

	2001–02	2000–01	1999–2000	1998–99
ACG	3,117	3,437	2,124	642
SCA	—	70	50	624
NDS	—	1,863	1,259	661
NDS condition	258	—	—	—
VA grant	251	226	93	69
SEED	124	115	—	—
Nursery grant	—	58	—	—
PPP	—	—	—	—
Capital formula	—	805	—	—
NGfL	—	371	376	234
NDS devolved formula	437	—	—	—
Science labs	103	103	—	—
SSLUs	31	35	—	—
Assistance with AMP	—	—	14	—
Access at 85 per cent.	116	—	—	9
Security	—	37	37	36
Outside Toilets	—	—	—	47
Energy	—	—	—	41

PPP

Collegiate High School—This project (supported by NDS) was signed during summer 2000 between the School, LEA and Uforia (private contractor). Work commenced on 11 September and is expected to be completed by 7 May 2001. The project is to construct an indoor sports centre on the school grounds, which will also be available to another special school. The private sector partner will contribute capital and be granted a lease to operate the upgraded facilities out of school hours. The school currently pays rent for indoor sports facilities. Total value of the project is £1,200,000 (£750,000 NDS and £450,000 private sector contribution).

New Deal for Schools (NDS): Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency

	School	Cost
NDS 1 (1997–98)	14 school package for improvements to toilet facilities. Some schools in the constituency may have been included in package	Lancashire LEA NDS 1 allocation £2,006,000
NDS 2 (1998–99)	Anchorsolme Primary—Treatment of flat felt roof surfaces with liquid plastics	£58,200
	Claremont Primary—Re-roofing of ground floor teaching area	£21,500
	Moor Park Junior—Completion of over roofing	£21,500
NDS 4 (2000–01)	Montgomery High	Part of three school package for replacement of temporary classrooms totalling £570,688
	Montgomery High	Part of four school package for replacement of windows totalling £220,000

Beacon FE College

Blackpool and the Fylde College.

Modern Apprenticeships

Since 2 May 1997, we know of 1,122 starts on Modern Apprenticeships in the Blackpool, North constituency (as at 30 November 2000). Broken down by financial year these are:

Financial year	Foundation modern apprenticeships[1]	Advanced modern apprenticeships[2]	Total
1997–98	0	166	166
1998–99	17	157	174
1999–2000	193	205	398
2000–01 (to date)	197	187	384
Total	407	715	1,122

[1] Foundation Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as National Traineeships, were introduced nationally in September 1997.
[2] Advanced Modern Apprenticeships, formerly known as Modern Apprenticeships, were introduced nationally in September 1995.
Note:
1. The Trainee Database System (TDS), from which these data are taken, is less complete than Management Information supplied to the Department by Training and Enterprise Councils (TECs) (around 95 per cent).
2. In addition, the postcode information on the TDS, from which parliamentary constituency data are compiled, are 95 per cent. complete.
3. TEC Management Information does not provide information at parliamentary constituency level.
Source:
WBTYP trainee database

Further Education

Student numbers at all FEFC funded institutions where home postcode is in the local authority district of Blackpool 1996–97 to 1999–2000

	FEFC funded				Non-FEFC funded			
	16–18		Adult		16–18		Adult	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
1996–97	1,488	479	489	6,747	150	191	178	198
1997–98	1,488	551	528	7,387	112	239	183	261
1998–99	1,432	550	490	7,565	162	236	272	725
1999–2000	1,511	571	545	7,577	124	291	338	848

New Deal for Young People

In the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency to the end of November 2000, 833 young people have joined the New Deal, with 419 finding employment. Of these, 303 have entered sustained employment.

Labour market statistics

The working age employment rate in Blackpool UA in autumn 2000 was 77.8 per cent., above the UK rate of 74.7 per cent. The rate in autumn 1997 was 68.9 per cent.

The claimant unemployment rate has fallen from 7.9 per cent. in January 1997 to 5.8 per cent. in January 2001 in the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149319]

Mr. Wills: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Prader-Willi Syndrome

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what funding is available for the education of children with Prader-Willi Syndrome; and if he will make a statement. [149683]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Funding is not made available for specific categories of special educational need. Rather, funding is allocated and distributed via local education authorities (LEAs), who have a duty to provide appropriately for all children in their area. This includes the duty to identify children's individual special educational needs and to deliver the most appropriate provision to meet those needs.

More than £21.5 billion is available annually for the education of school children, including children with special educational needs. Over £1 billion of this is used by LEAs to provide additional support for children with special educational needs. We are increasing Education Standard Spending by over £1 billion in 2001–02 and we expect LEAs to passport extra resources to education in full. It will be for individual LEAs and schools to decide what to spend on particular areas of the service.

We have also made £82 million of supported expenditure available for special educational needs in next year's Standards Fund (2001–02). This compares to £55 million this year. The fund can be used for a range of activities including training for staff in special educational needs, improvements in speech and language therapy provision for children with communication difficulties, the provision of information and advice to parents, and the greater inclusion of children with SEN in the mainstream. This latter includes early intervention for pupils with SEN, training on child development and behaviour management, and improved links between special and mainstream schools.

At the individual pupil level we are also working to promote better and more consistent practice, towards all pupils with special educational needs. In particular the revised SEN Code of Practice should promote more consistent practice by schools and LEAs. While individual pupils with SEN will vary in their needs it is important that schools and others adopt a consistent and rigorous approach in identifying and providing for these needs.

Music and Ballet Scheme

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many families with children currently in receipt of state assistance with fees with the music and ballet scheme will *(a)* benefit and *(b)* lose from the proposed restructuring of fee scales for Autumn 2001; what the maximum annual amount of this loss is; and for how many there will be no effect. [149752]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The music and ballet scheme helps exceptionally talented children who could not otherwise afford the full cost of intensive tuition. The amount of assistance with fees is based on a sliding scale linked to family income. In the academic year 2001–02, around 23 per cent. of families, those on low incomes, will get free places and make no contribution towards fees. We estimate that 85 per cent. of all families will benefit (or in some cases at least be no worse off) from the proposed restructuring of the parental contribution scales. A middle income family on £30,000 a year will be over £530 better off.

Supported Employment

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the results of the consultation carried out in connection with his Workstep proposals, with specific reference to target-setting. [149755]

Ms Hodge *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The consultation sought views on how progression might be measured and how it could be increased to allow more people to participate in the Supported Employment Programme—to be known as Workstep from 1 April. The "Summary of Responses" to the public consultation exercise was published in May 2000 and were placed in the House of Commons Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the percentage of higher education students *(a)* in England and *(b)* from North Somerset who discontinued their studies citing financial hardship/debt as the main reason in each of the past five years. [149902]

Mr. Wicks: The Department does not have data on the reasons given by higher education students who discontinue their studies. The non-completion rate in the UK has remained broadly steady at 17–18 per cent. since 1991–92.

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much money the Government estimate they have saved by abolishing the maintenance grant and introducing tuition fee contributions in higher education; and if he will make a statement. [149924]

Mr. Wicks: We estimate that continuing with the previous Government's student support policies for undergraduates normally resident in England and Wales, rather than replacing them with our new ones, would have led to an additional cost to the Government of £1.5 billion over the three years 1998–99 to 2000–01 on a resource basis (this is the full economic cost taking account of loan repayments in future years). The extra resources thus available through our policies, which share the cost of higher education more fairly between students, their families and taxpayers, have enabled us to invest substantially in higher education. Over the period 1998–99 to 2003–04, the increase in resources available to the HE sector will be 18 per cent. in real terms.

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the capital value of the endowment that would be required to enable higher education institutions to generate an income sufficient to equal the total amount of public funding currently received on an annual basis. [150105]

Mr. Blunkett: The value of the required endowment is uncertain. Assuming a gross return of 6–7 per cent., of which some 2.5 per cent. points is used to maintain the real value of the capital, an endowment of over £80 billion is likely to be required in England to meet the costs of teaching currently funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Including the costs of research funded through the Higher Education Funding Council for England, an endowment of over £110 billion is likely to be required.

Research Assessment Exercises

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women (i) are serving as panel members in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and (ii) served in this capacity in the 1992 and 1996 Research Assessment Exercises; [150089]

(2) (i) are serving as panel chairpersons in the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise and (ii) served in this capacity in the 1992 and 1996 Research Assessment Exercises. [150090]

Mr. Wicks: The information requested is in the tables. Information about the gender of panel members for the 1992 Research Assessment Exercise is not available centrally. Some 10 per cent. of professors are women.

Number of male and female panel members for the 2001, 1996 and 1992 Research Assessment Exercises

	Men	*Women*
2001	544 (80%)	134 (20%)
1996	437 (83%)	88 (17%)
1992	[1]—	[1]—

[1] Not available

Number of male and female panel chairs for the 2001, 1996 and 1992 Research Assessment Exercises

	Men	*Women*
2001	50 (83%)	10 (17%)
1996	54 (91%)	5 (9%)
1992	56 (93%)	4 (7%)

Source:
Higher Education Funding Council for England

Childminders

Dr. Brand: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many responses to the consultation on National Standards for the Regulation of Day Care and Childminding in England published in July 2000 were received; how many of the responses received were

included in the sample considered in the process of reaching the decision not to ban childminders from smoking in front of children in their care; what method was used to select the sample of responses considered in reaching this decision; and how many respondents whose responses were considered in making the assessment (i) opposed the proposal that parents should be allowed to decide whether childminders should be allowed to smoke, (ii) supported the proposal and (iii) neither supported nor opposed the proposal. [150130]

Ms Hodge: The Government have made clear that smoking will be prohibited in all group day care settings not based in the home, and in all childminding settings unless parents give their explicit consent. In addition the draft standards state that childminders must promote the good health of children in their care.

We received approximately 6,000 responses to our consultation exercise on the draft national standards for the regulation of day care. Of these, an initial analysis of 1,069 was carried out, of which 335 related directly to our proposals for national standards for childminders. The selection of responses for the initial analysis was done on the basis of a random sample, although we made sure that we also considered the responses of key organisations in the early years sector, including the National Childminding Association.

In answering the question "Do you agree with the criteria set down for this standard?", which contained the proposal to allow childminders to smoke in front of children in their care with parents' consent, 37 per cent. disagreed while 63 per cent. agreed.

Having completed our consultation on the national standards we were concerned that the views of parents had not been adequately represented. That is why the Government commissioned an independent opinion poll of over 1,000 parents to ask them whether parents or the Government should decide on whether childminders should be permitted to smoke in the presence of children in their care. A significant majority (74 per cent.) agreed with our view that this is a matter on which parents rather than the Government should decide.

Staffing Costs

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proportion of *(a)* teaching and *(b)* non-teaching staff are covered by national pay scales in each local education authority in England. [150190]

Ms Estelle Morris: Qualified and unqualified teachers in maintained schools are covered by national pay scales, except for agency teachers, and teachers in the four former grant-maintained schools that opted out of national pay arrangements under the School Teachers Pay and Conditions Act 1991. The number of agency teachers employed in each local authority is not known.

Schools in Education Action Zones have the right to opt out of national pay arrangements, but DfEE has not been informed of any doing so. Independent schools, including City Technology Colleges and city academies, are not covered by national pay arrangements.

Information on pay scales of non-teaching staff is not held centrally.

The number of regular teachers in maintained schools in England increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000.

There was a growth of more than 2,000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–00 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

Mr. Michael J. Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the average cost is of employing a teacher in each local education authority in England. [150193]

Ms Estelle Morris: The average cost (including National Insurance contributions and superannuation) of employing a full-time qualified teacher in the maintained schools sector at March 1999, the latest date for which information is available is as follows:

Area	£
City of London	30,300
Camden	32,100
Greenwich	30,800
Hackney	—
Hammersmith and Fulham	31,100
Islington	30,800
Kensington and Chelsea	34,300
Lambeth	31,400
Lewisham	31,500
Southwark	30,700
Tower Hamlets	33,000
Wandsworth	30,600
Westminster	30,300
Barking and Dagenham	29,900
Barnet	29,200
Bexley	28,900
Brent	31,300
Bromley	29,500
Croydon	29,100
Ealing	29,800
Enfield	29,500
Haringey	30,500
Harrow	29,500
Havering	29,500
Hillingdon	29,200
Hounslow	29,200
Kingston upon Thames	29,400
Merton	29,500
Newham	29,800
Redbridge	29,200
Richmond upon Thames	29,200
Sutton	29,300
Waltham Forest	29,700
Birmingham	28,000
Coventry	28,300
Dudley	27,700
Sandwell	27,500
Solihull	27,500
Walsall	27,800
Wolverhampton	28,100
Knowsley	27,600
Liverpool	28,100
St. Helens	28,000
Sefton	27,700
Wirral	28,400
Bolton	27,700
Bury	27,600
Manchester	26,400
Oldham	27,600
Rochdale	27,600
Salford	27,900
Stockport	27,800
Tameside	27,400
Trafford	27,800

Area	£
Wigan	28,000
Barnsley	27,900
Doncaster	27,700
Rotherham	27,800
Sheffield	27,700
Bradford	27,700
Calderdale	27,600
Kirklees	27,800
Leeds	28,000
Wakefield	27,200
Gateshead	27,400
Newcastle upon Tyne	27,700
North Tyneside	27,700
South Tyneside	27,700
Sunderland	27,500
Isles of Scilly	26,600
Bath and North East Somerset	[1]—
City of Bristol	27,800
North Somerset	28,000
South Gloucestershire	27,600
Hartlepool	27,300
Middlesbrough	27,500
Redcar and Cleveland	27,300
Stockton on Tees	27,400
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	27,800
East Riding of Yorkshire	27,700
North East Lincolnshire	27,700
North Lincolnshire	27,600
North Yorkshire	28,000
York	27,600
Bedfordshire	27,800
Luton	28,400
Buckinghamshire	27,900
Milton Keynes	27,700
Derbyshire	27,900
City of Derby	27,600
Dorset	27,800
Poole	27,300
Bournemouth	27,700
Durham	27,300
Darlington	27,400
East Sussex	27,800
Brighton and Hove	28,000
Hampshire	27,500
Portsmouth	27,300
Southampton	27,400
Leicestershire	27,600
Leicester City	27,900
Rutland	28,400
Staffordshire	27,700
Stoke-on-Trent	27,600
Wiltshire	27,900
Swindon	27,300
Bracknell Forest	28,300
Windsor and Maidenhead	28,600
West Berkshire	27,500
Reading	27,400
Slough	27,500
Wokingham	28,000
Cambridgeshire	27,600
City of Peterborough	27,500
Cheshire	27,800
Halton	27,500
Warrington	27,400
Devon	27,900
City of Plymouth	27,700
Torbay	27,600
Essex	28,200
Southend	27,900
Thurrock	28,300
Herefordshire	27,600
Worcestershire	27,700
Kent	28,000
Medway	27,700
Lancashire	27,800
Blackburn with Darwen	27,800
Blackpool	27,300
Nottinghamshire	28,600
City of Nottingham	27,900
Shropshire	27,900
Telford and Wrekin	28,100
Cornwall	28,200
Cumbria	28,000
Gloucestershire	27,500
Hertfordshire	28,000
Isle of Wight	27,400
Lincolnshire	27,800
Norfolk	27,800
Northamptonshire	27,500
Northumberland	28,000
Oxfordshire	27,600
Somerset	28,200
Suffolk	27,700
Surrey	27,500
Warwickshire	27,600
West Sussex	27,600
England	28,100

[1] Salaries for Hackney and Bath and North East Somerset are not available because of incomplete annual returns from the authorities for March 1999.

Note:
All costs have been rounded to the nearest £100.

The average pay cost per teacher has been estimated by taking the average salary of full-time qualified teachers (including heads and deputy heads) in each local authority and adding 14.8 per cent. for National Insurance contributions and superannuation.

It is estimated that the average pay of a full-time qualified teacher (including heads and deputy heads) in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector at April 2001 will be £27,900 (including the post threshold pay scale).

From April 2001 new graduate recruits can expect to earn £17,000 a year (up 6 per cent. from the previous year) and starting salaries in Inner London will rise to £20,000 (up 9 per cent. from the previous year).

An estimated 250,000 classroom teachers in England are eligible for the post-threshold pay scale, of whom 81 per cent. have applied. Teachers moving to the new scale will receive a £2,000 pay increase from 1 September 2000 and can progress on the basis of their performance up to the scale maximum of over £30,000 excluding allowances.

The number of regular teachers in maintained schools in England increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000.

There was a growth of more than 2,000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–00 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

Fast Track Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 580W, how many of the fast track applicants were for *(a)* primary positions and *(b)* secondary positions; and if he will provide a breakdown of the secondary positions by subject. [150389]

Ms Estelle Morris: The total number of fast track applications now stands at 1,574. This includes 13 applications received since my answer of 7 February, which had been delayed in the post. The information requested is set out in the table.

Subject	*Number*
Primary	390
Art	38
Design and Technology	24
English	198
Geography	55
History	116
IT	49
Maths	137
Modern Foreign Languages	125
Music	24
Physical Education	16
Religious Education	32
Science	301
Not Stated[1]	69
Total	1,574

[1] Applicant did not indicate on fast track application whether Secondary or Primary

Visual Classroom Testing

Mr. Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment his Department has made of visual classroom testing; what school trials his Department has planned for visual classroom testing; what school trials have been completed of visual classroom testing; what the results indicated; and if he will make a statement. [150435]

Ms Estelle Morris: The Department for Education and Employment does not carry out trials of commercial educational products. It is for schools and teachers to decide what if any use to make of such products.

Leeds LEA

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the capital investment in schools in Leeds local education authority was from 1996 to 1999 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by funding stream; and what his forecast is for the next three years. [150451]

Jacqui Smith: Leeds local education authority has received some £45 million of funding from central Government for capital investment in schools between 1996–97 and 1999–2000 as shown in table A. Table B shows the forecast investment over the next three years.

Nationally, investment in school buildings has tripled from £683 million a year in 1996–97 to over £2 billion in 2000–01. It will be £3.2 billion in 2003–04, including grant, credit approvals and Private Finance Initiative credits. There will be central Government investment of £7.8 billion in school buildings in total from 2001–02 to 2003–04.

Table A: Central Government capital investment in schools in Leeds local education authority

£000

Funding stream	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Basic Credit Approvals	6,914	7,046	5,052	3,036	5,219
Supplementary Credit Approvals	925	196	294	2,518	1,578
Grant to Voluntary Aided Schools	163	376	315	1,089	2,095
New Deal for Schools	—	1,402	1,909	4,112	9,094
PFI Credits	—	—	—	4,100	39,800
Schools Renewal Challenge Fund Grant	600	—	—	—	—
School Security Grant	—	180	226	229	228
Outside Toilets Grant	—	—	348	—	—
Energy Efficiency Initiative	—	—	220	—	—
Key Stage 1 Class Size Initiative	—	—	200	437	569
National Grid for Learning Grant	—	—	1,700	1,350	2,316
Assistance with Asset Management Plans	—	—	—	90	—
Seed Challenge Funding	—	—	—	—	401
Devolved Formula Capital for Schools	—	—	—	—	4,928
Renewal of School Laboratories	—	—	—	—	386
Schools Access Initiative Grant	—	—	—	—	17
Early Excellence Centre Grant	—	—	—	90	257
Nursery Provision	—	—	—	—	95
Total	8,602	9,200	10,264	17,051	66,983

Table B: Forecast investment in schools in Leeds local education authority

£000

Funding stream	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Basic Credit Approvals	3,226	[1]—	[1]—
Grant to Voluntary Aided Schools	1,020	[1]—	[1]—
Private Finance Initiative Credits	—	[1]—	[1]—
New Deal for Schools Devolved Formula	2,619	3,523	6,806
New Deal for Schools Condition Funding	1,973	5,569	7,073
Seed Challenge Funding	460	833	833
Renewal of School Laboratories	386	[1]—	[1]—
Schools Access Initiative	697	[1]—	[1]—
National Grid for Learning	[2]3,274	[2]1,924	[2]1,924

[1] 'Future years' allocations shown in the above table are those already announced as being attributable to Leeds local education authority.

In addition to the amounts shown above, schools in the authority will also benefit from a share of other programmes where allocations have not yet been made. These include over £1 billion of credit approvals, mainly to provide new pupil places; £440 million of grant to governors of voluntary aided schools; £555 million funding through the NDS Modernisation programme and £170 million worth of funding under the Schools Access Initiative. Funding under the National Grid for Learning (NGfL) in 2002–03 and 2003–04 is a partial allocation based on a formula. Figures are provisional and confirmed levels of NGfL funding for 2002–03 and 2003–04 will be published in due course.

This funding will be augmented by capital receipts and other contributions from local education authority sources, and the

contribution which governors of voluntary aided schools make to their building work. In addition, more than £1 billion is available nationally through private finance initiative credits for projects which will sign in 2002–03 and 2003–04.

Funding specifically ring fenced for the renewal of school laboratories and secondary learning support units is ending in 2001–02. Local authorities will be able to prioritise their other increased funding for this purpose, if they wish.

[2] Provisional figures, they also include a small proportion of revenue funding. (Also see [1]).

Learning and Skills Councils

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on the readiness of the Learning and Skills Council for the assumption of its responsibilities in April. [150456]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* Good progress is being made with the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), which is on track to assume its responsibilities from 1 April 2001. We are grateful to the support that staff in Training and Enterprise Councils and the Further Education Funding Council are giving with this process. At national level, all members of the National Council, and Adult and Young People's Learning Committees have been appointed; the council has met three times, the Young People's Learning Committee will meet on 15 February and the Adult Learning Committee will meet on 5 March. All 47 local LSCs have in place local chairs, local boards and executive directors and most local councils have met on at least one occasion. The process for appointing staff is well under way. The matching of staff with transfer rights to posts is on track. Some resulting vacancies have been advertised already and others will follow. Contracts have been concluded with IT suppliers and the first part of the IT systems that the LSC will need has been installed in every local LSC.

In November, we published "The Learning and Skills Council Remit Letter", which set out the Government's vision for the LSC and the priorities for its first corporate plan. The LSC plans to begin consultation on this corporate plan in March.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many representatives of schools with sixth forms sit on local Learning and Skills Councils. [151243]

Mr. Wicks: Eleven head teachers of schools with sixth forms have so far been appointed as council members to the local Learning and Skills Councils. Action is also in hand in a further six areas to fill local council member vacancies specifically left for school heads. In addition, further experience of schools matters will be brought by the 29 local council members appointed from a local education authority (LEA) background (typically directors of education), by the six local executive directors who have previous LEA officer or head teacher experience, and by a number of local council members who are school governors.

In April 2002, the LSC assumes responsibility for school sixth form funding, and in recognition of this we will encourage the LSC to appoint further school heads as vacancies arise on local councils.

Employment and Youth Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the outcome was of the Employment and Youth Council held in Brussels on 12 February; and if he will make a statement. [150525]

Mr. Wicks: Nicol Stephen MSP, Minister for Higher Education, represented the UK at the Council of EU Education Ministers in Brussels on 12 February.

Education Ministers adopted a report on the concrete future objectives of education and training systems, which will be presented to the Stockholm European Council on 23 and 24 March. The report will also be submitted to the European Parliament for information. There will be a discussion about the work programme arising from the report at the next Education Council meeting in May.

There was a discussion on strategies for lifelong learning, which included consideration of the Commission's memorandum on lifelong learning and the implementation of the lifelong learning aspects of the 2001 employment guidelines. It was noted that member states were currently in the process of undertaking national consultations on the memorandum on lifelong learning and that the Commission will draw up an action plan, based on the responses from member states, for discussion by the Council on 29 November.

Ministers received reports from the Commission on: the evaluation report on the first phase of the Community action programme, Leonardo da Vinci; progress on the European Year of Languages 2001; and the opening of the third phase of the trans-European co-operation scheme for higher education (Tempus III) to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The Presidency also provided information on the informal conference of Ministers of Education and Research, which will take place in Uppsala on 1–3 March.

Burma

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what steps he has taken in response to the recent ILO resolution condemning the Burmese regime for its use of forced labour. [150586]

Ms Jowell: We have written to national employer and worker groups, asking them to draw their members' attention to the ILO resolution; and have discussed how best to give effect to its recommendations with other EU member states and the European Commission. The European Union has already taken a number of measures in response to the abuses of human rights including the practice of forced labour in Burma. The situation is being closely monitored and, should the authorities in Burma fail to take the necessary steps to effectively end the practice of forced labour, the EU stands ready to take further measures. We will shortly be writing to the Director General of the ILO setting out the Government's position.

Computers for Teachers

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to continue the Computers for Teachers initiative in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools. [150709]

Mr. Wills: The first phase of the Computers for Teachers initiative was very successful with nearly 28,000 teachers now owning a computer as a result of the scheme. Phase 2 of the scheme is currently under way and is focused on Key Stage 3 maths teachers. This scheme is part of an on-going commitment and although not all teachers will benefit from this phase, there will be similar opportunities for other teachers in the future. We are committed to continually exploring ways of widening teachers' access to computers and will continue to seek resources to do so.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what assessment he has made of the impact of the Computers for Teachers initiative. [150708]

Mr. Wills: The first phase of the Computers for Teachers initiative was very successful with nearly 28,000 teachers now owning a computer as a result of the scheme. Informal feedback from teachers has confirmed earlier research and indicates that key benefits of personal ownership of a computer are:

improved teacher confidence and competence in their personal use of ICT

enhanced professional development

improvements in teaching and learning

increases in teacher enthusiasm for their work

better efficiency.

The second phase of the scheme is currently under way and we are currently setting up an external evaluation covering both phases of the scheme. The results of this evaluation will be made available in due course.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement about the availability of the Computers for Teachers initiative. [151359]

Mr. Wills: The first phase of the Computers for Teachers initiative was very successful with nearly 28,000 teachers now owning a computer as a result of the scheme. Phase 2 of the Computers for Teachers scheme was launched on 10 January 2001. The second phase of the initiative is focused on Key Stage 3 mathematics teachers who teach in the maintained secondary sector (including non-maintained special schools) in England. The decision to focus funds available in this phase on mathematics at Key Stage 3 reflects the Government's drive to improve standards at Key Stage 3. This scheme is part of an ongoing commitment and although not all teachers will benefit from this phase, there will be similar opportunities for other teachers in the future. We are committed to continually exploring ways of widening teachers' access to computers and will continue to seek resources to do so.

Learning Mentors

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans he has to fund Learning Mentors in all secondary schools. [150711]

Ms Estelle Morris: Learning Mentors are school staff who work with pupils to help them overcome barriers to learning such as bullying, truancy or disaffection. Learning Mentors help raise standards by re-engaging pupils with learning, and by freeing up teachers to concentrate on teaching. Learning Mentors are currently being introduced in secondary schools through the Government's Excellence in Cities programme, and through new Excellence Clusters. These two policies aim to raise standards in city schools and in other deprived and low-performing schools. By the end of the next school year, nearly a third of all secondary schools will have learning mentors as a result of these policies. Last year, Excellence in Cities schools saw an increase of 2.3 per cent. in the proportion of students getting five good GCSEs, compared to a 1.3 per cent. improvement in other schools.

An estimated 1,500 Learning Mentors will be working in secondary schools by the end of this school year, in addition to some 900 in primary schools. This will rise to over 2,300 in secondary schools by the beginning of 2004. Learning Mentors are popular with head teachers, with parents and with pupils. The formal evaluation has just begun, but we have already seen dramatic changes in attitude, behaviour, school attendance and motivation in some individual pupils who have worked with a Learning Mentor.

We announced in the "Schools: Building on Success" Green Paper on 12 February that a further four Excellence Clusters would begin in September 2001 and that more areas would be included over the next three years. This will bring the benefits of Learning Mentors to more schools in the primary and secondary sectors.

Schools and LEAs outside the areas covered by Excellence in Cities and Excellence Clusters may fund Learning Mentors from the extra money that they receive to reduce truancy and exclusion. In addition, the Connexions Service will bring in a universal service for all young people aged 13–19, including individualised support from Personal Advisers for those young people who need it most, wherever they live. Over time, the full Connexions Service will be delivered to young people aged 13–19 in a variety of settings, including in secondary schools.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many extra classroom assistant positions have been created since 1997 *(a)* nationally *(b)* in Nottinghamshire. [150713]

Ms Estelle Morris: An additional 24,000 education support staff have been recruited in schools in England since 1997, including over 18,000 full-time equivalent teaching assistants.

Following the local government re-organisation on 1 April 1998, Nottinghamshire split into two—Nottinghamshire and Nottingham City.

In 1997 there were 1,289 teaching assistants in Nottinghamshire, compared to 1,065 in Nottinghamshire and 559 in Nottingham City in 2000.

Education Welfare Officers

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) how many education welfare officers he assumes Essex County Council has for the purpose of his Department's plan for the delivery of the Government's policy on education; [150805]

(2) how many education welfare officers he assumes each local authority on average has for the purpose of his Department's plan for the delivery of the Government's policy on education. [150811]

Jacqui Smith: Further to my reply of 12 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 46W, the number of education welfare officers employed in a local education authority is a matter for each authority to determine, bearing in mind the need to secure attendance of children at school. Numbers employed will depend on the size of the authority and the level of non-attendance at school. Essex local education authority employs 51 education welfare officers.

School Funding (Cambridgeshire)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the SSA per *(a)* primary school and *(b)* secondary school pupil was, in real terms, for Cambridgeshire in each year since 1990–91. [150812]

Ms Estelle Morris: The first table shows for 1990–91 to 1997–98 primary and secondary SSA per pupil for Cambridgeshire prior to local government reorganisation. The second table shows for 1997–98 to 2000–01 primary and secondary SSA per pupil and grants per pupil for Cambridgeshire after local government reorganisation. All figures are in real terms at 2000–01 prices.

Cambridgeshire (before LGR)

£

	Primary SSA	*Secondary SSA*
1990–91	1,950	2,770
1991–92	2,100	3,040
1992–93	2,150	3,140
1993–94	2,140	3,110
1994–95	2,170	3,030
1995–96	2,140	2,860

Cambridgeshire (before LGR)

£

	Primary SSA	*Secondary SSA*
1996–97	2,170	2,890
1997–98	2,170	2,850

Cambridgeshire (post LGR)

£

	Primary			*Secondary*		
	SSA	*Grants*	*Per pupil*	*SSA*	*Grants*	*Per pupil*
1997–98[1]	2,140	30	2,170	2,800	30	2,830
1998–99	2,200	40	2,230	2,850	30	2,890
1999–2000	2,270	120	2,390	2,900	80	2,980
2000–01	2,310	220	2,540	2,960	160	3,130
Increase since:						
1997–98	180	190	370	160	130	300

[1] 1997–98 figures in this table are estimates

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the amount of capital made available to schools in the Cambridge constituency through the New Deal for Schools since May 1997. [150813]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows those schools in the Cambridge constituency which are benefiting from investment through the New Deal for Schools programme, allocated over the four years from 1997–98 to 2000–01. These allocations form part of the total £10.7 million investment made in schools in Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority under the New Deal for Schools programme over the same period. In that period, Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority has received some £56.9 million of funding in total for capital investment in schools.

In January this year, we announced that the New Deal for Schools would be extended over the next three years to 2003–04. Allocations benefiting schools in Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority announced in January under the New Deal for Schools total £19.8 million over three years. This amount will be increased later this year when allocations to local authorities of the new £550 million New Deal for Schools Modernisation programme are announced.

It will be for Cambridgeshire and its schools, working within guidelines provided by the Department, to allocate this new funding to individual projects.

New deal for schools (NDS)—Allocation for schools in the Cambridge constituency

Year/School	*Project*	*Grant awarded (£)*
1997–98		
Included within an LEA wide package: St. Matthew's County Primary	Structural improvements	[1]598,000
1998–99		
Chesterton Community College	Replacement of two condemned timber framed classroom blocks and condemned Horsa kitchen/dining block	266,418
1999–2000		
Included within a 14 school package: The Lady Adrian Special St. Bede's Inter-Church Comprehensive CE/RC VA	Mobile replacements	[3]2,208,978
Included within 8 school package: Chesterton Community College	Asbestos removal	[2]157,886

New deal for schools (NDS)—Allocation for schools in the Cambridge constituency

Year/School	Project	Grant awarded (£)
2000–01		
Included within a 17 school package: Brunswick Nursery, Chesterton Community College, Manor Community College, Sedley Infant	Asbestos removal	[2]229,153
Included within a 13 school package: The Lady Adrian Special	Replacement of temporaries	1,542,906
Included within a 27 school package: Chesterton Community College, Ditton Fields Nursery, Mayfield Primary	Replacement of temporaries	[2]734,693
St. Bede's Inter-Church Comprehensive	Refitting science laboratories	140,908
Chesterton Community College	Refurbishment of laboratories	42,162

[1] Local Education Authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the LEA. Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority holds project level information
[2] Denotes total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. Cambridgeshire Local Education Authority will be able to advise the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what proposals he has to amend the departmental expenditure limit and gross running costs limit for 2000–01. [151370]

Mr. Wills: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates for Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services) and Vote 3 (the Employment Service), the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2000–01 (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £1,538,000 from £18,996,375,000 to £18,997,913,000.

This overall increase is made up of a DEL decrease on Vote 1 and an increase on Vote 3 of £5,530,000 and £31,068,000 respectively and a decrease of £24,000,000 in non-voted expenditure. As a result, the Voted element of the Departmental Expenditure Limit (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £25,538,000 from £17,470,053,000 to £17,495,591,000. The non-Voted element will be decreased by £24,000,000 from £1,526,322,000 to £1,502,322,000.

The changes in Vote 1 are the result of the take up of £6,000,000 of the end-year flexibility entitlement announced by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury in Table 7 of the 1999–2000 Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper (Cm 4812); a switch from non-voted credit approvals of £24,000,000 to capital support for former grant maintained schools; transfers of: £50,000 from Class IV, Vote 1 (Home Office: administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) as a contribution towards developing Connexions Direct; £99,000 to Class IV, Vote 1 (Home Office: administration, police, probation, immigration and other services, England and Wales) for Drug Awareness Teams; £455,000 from Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health: administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) to support the Drug Advisers Project; £67,000 to Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health, administration, miscellaneous health and personal social services, England) for Child Protection Tribunals; £750,000 from Class II, Vote 1 (Department of Health: hospital, community health, family health and related services, England) for the Institute of Psychiatry, Kings College; £1,761,000 to Class XII, Vote 1 (Department of Social Security: Central Government administered benefits and other payments for Intercalating Students and to cover additional hardship payments to young people who would normally be receiving bridging allowance; £189,000 to Class IV, Vote 1 (Ministry of Defence: operational and support costs, logistic services and systems procurement and research) in respect of an intake of Modern Apprentices at MOD training centres; £5,014,000 from the Scottish Executive in connection with Open University students; £288,000 from Class I, Vote 3 (Employment Service) for a Modernise to Save project, contribution towards consultation events and for work undertaken by the University for Industry; £39,971,000 to Class I, Vote 3 (Employment Service) as support for Rover redundancies, modernising the ES, Access to Work and other smaller miscellaneous transfers.

The increase in the provision on Vote 3 is the result of the take up of £5,700,000 of end-year flexibility entitlement; £39,683,000 net transfers with Class 1, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services); the transfer of £14,315,000 to Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) to cover expenditure on ONE.

The departmental running costs limit (excluding Welfare to Work) will be increased by £32,220,000 from £1,092,394,000 to £1,124,614,000. This is made up of changes to Vote 1, Vote 3 and Vote 5 of £4,984,000, £26,736,000 and £500,000 respectively. The changes on Vote 1 are as a result of the take up of £6,000,000 EYF, the net transfer of £1,016,000 to Class I, Vote 3 (Employment Service). The changes on Vote 3 are the result of the take up of £5,700,000 of end-year flexibility entitlement, the transfer of £14,315,000 to Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) and the transfer of £35,351,000 from Class I, Vote 1 (Department for Education and Employment: programmes and central services). The change on Vote 5 (Sure Start) is as a result of a virement of £500,000 from programme provision.

The Department's Welfare to Work provision is being increased by £176,304,000 from £1,255,695,000 to £1,431,999,000. The increase is made up of changes on Votes 1 and 3 of £173,034,000 and £3,270,000 respectively. The change on Vote 1 is as the result of the take up of £167,000,000 New Deal for Schools additional funding and £5,000,000 for the National E-Learning Foundation as announced in the pre-Budget statement and the draw down of new provision of £1,034,000. The change on Vote 3 is as a result of the draw down of £3,420,000 of Windfall Tax provision to fund additional expenditure on the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners and net transfers of £150,000 with Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) for New Deal for Partners and New Deal for Disabled People.

The departmental Welfare to Work running costs limit will be increased by £4,012,000 from £196,876,000 to £200,888,000. The change on Vote 1 is as a result of the take up of £78,000 of new provision. The change on Vote 3 is as a result of the draw down of £2,170,000 of Windfall Tax for the extension of New Deal for Disabled People, the virement of £2,070,000 from programme provision into running costs for New Deal for Partners and a transfer of £306,000 to Class XII, Vote 3 (Department of Social Security: administration) for the New Deal for Partners.

The decrease in non-Voted expenditure within DEL arises from the switching of £24,000,000 from non-voted credit approvals to capital support for former grant maintained schools.

The increases are the result of transfers or will be charged to the Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149260]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The Department's expenditure in these categories was:

£

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	[1]*2000–01*
Public opinion research	520,850	862,912	1,408,908	1,687,050	1,989,179
Television	2,185,994	3,509,611	6,980,488	1,806,788	7,520,727
Radio	1,354,273	1,123,727	1,966,919	1,838,680	1,741,209
Press	2,647,915	2,250,110	4,385,368	4,253,847	4,983,668
Direct mail	[2]—	227,013	112,921	163,454	[3]118,342
Total	6,709,032	7,973,373	14,854,604	9,749,819	16,352,125

[1] Estimated
[2] Comparable information not available
[3] To 31 January 2001

Recent research projects undertaken in support of publicity campaigns include research on the best ways of communicating the benefits of parents getting more involved in their children's education; of employers recruiting disabled people; and of people taking up jobs in child care occupations.

Expenditure on advertising in 2000–01 includes £1,958,111 to raise awareness among young people of the benefits of staying on in learning; £2,116,779 to increase participation in New Deal 50+; £1,815,141 to encourage those out of work to take up taster courses in ICT and £2,178,120 to encourage recruitment into the child care sectors.

Pupil Expenditure

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list for *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* each local authority real terms expenditure per pupil in (i) 1979, (ii) 1990 and (iii) each year since 1992 for which figures are available. [147252]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested on local education authority real terms expenditure per pupil is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Library. The tables cover England, for which I have ministerial responsibility. Information based on net institutional expenditure is given for each local education authority for 1979–80, 1990–91 and each year from 1992–93 to 1998–99, the latest year for which this information is currently available. In addition, further tables for each local education authority based on funding per pupil, through the education standard spending assessment and central government grants, have been provided for the years 1997–98 to 2000–01.

Graduates (Starting Salaries)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the average starting salary for graduates in each employment sector in each year since 1974. [148710]

Mr. Wicks: Information on the average starting salary for each employment sector is not available. The table shows the median of the starting salaries paid by employers to graduates from 1974 to 2000 from the Association of Graduate Recruiters' Annual Graduate Salaries and Vacancies Surveys. 50 per cent. of employers in the sample pay less than this and we do not have figures for the lowest starting salary or the statistical mean. Members of the Association of Graduate Recruiters tend to be large employers recruiting graduates to professional and fast track managerial jobs and probably pay higher starting salaries than the overall average, but information on the latter is not available. A more detailed breakdown by sector than industrial and non-industrial is not available from this survey. I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him on 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 403W, for figures on the starting pay for honours

graduate teachers which from April will be £20,000 in inner London. Figures for other sectors are not collected centrally.

£

Year	New graduate median starting salaries	Employment sector: Industrial	Employment sector: Non-industrial
1974	1,905	n/a	n/a
1975	2,423	n/a	n/a
1976	2,735	n/a	n/a
1977	3,000	n/a	n/a
1978	3,435	n/a	n/a
1979	3,970	n/a	n/a
1980	4,745	n/a	n/a
1981	5,240	n/a	n/a
1982	5,690	n/a	n/a
1983	6,125	n/a	n/a
1984	6,680	n/a	n/a
1985	7,300	n/a	n/a
1986	8,000	n/a	n/a
1987	8,500	n/a	n/a
1988	9,300	n/a	n/a
1989	10,327	10,500	10,000
1990	11,500	11,500	11,250
1991	12,500	12,500	12,000
1992	12,800	13,000	12,500
1993	13,004	13,225	12,950
1994	13,600	13,697	13,600
1995	14,362	14,000	14,000
1996	14,750	15,000	14,500
1997	15,500	15,500	16,000
1998	16,600	16,500	17,000
1999	17,400	17,250	17,850
2000	[1]18,000	[1]18,100	[1]18,000

n/a = not available
[1] These figures are provisional (from 2000 survey)
Source:
Institute for Employment Studies/Association of Graduate Recruiters

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment, pursuant to the answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 33W, what the average salary has been, including relevant threshold payments, for *(a)* primary teachers, *(b)* secondary teachers, *(c)* graduates in other sectors and *(d)* all non-manual employees in each year since 1974. [148921]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* It is estimated that the average pay of a full-time qualified teacher (including heads and deputy heads) in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector at April 2001 will be £27,900 (including the post-threshold pay scale). There is nothing further to add to the previous answer about teacher salaries.

Average gross weekly earnings for full-time non-manual adults in Great Britain, whose pay in the survey pay period was not affected by absence, in April each year, are as follows:

Year	£
1970	28.2
1971	30.9
1972	34.4
1973	38.1
1974	43.5
1975	56.3
1976	67.6
1977	73.7
1978	82.7
1979	92.4
1980	115.7
1981	133.8
1982	146.0
1983[1]	159.4
1983[1]	159.1
1984	172.2
1985	184.6
1986	200.9
1987	217.4
1988	240.7
1989	264.9
1990	291.2
1991	312.5
1992	334.6
1993	349.5
1994	359.5
1995	371.6
1996	389.3
1997[2]	406.8
1998[2]	425.2
1999	433.1
2000	452.4

[1] 1970 to first row for 1983 compiled on basis of men aged 21+ and women aged 18+, second row for 1983 onwards compiled on basis of employees on adult rates.
[2] 1997 and 1998 data include late receipts.
Source:
New Earnings Survey.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many press releases were issued by his Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what his estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149253]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The number of press releases issued by my Department is as follows:

Financial year	Number
1996–97	382
1997–98	538
1998–99	582
1999–2000	596
2000–01 (to end January 2001)	523

It is not possible at this time to give an estimate of what the final figure will be for the financial year 2000–01.

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when his strategy division was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the division on a full-time basis. [150367]

Mr. Wills: The strategy division was originally created in 1996 to provide the Department with the capability to identify and plan for the external changes, developments and potential challenges that education, training and employment policy would need to take account of in coming years. One of its first tasks was to co-ordinate and produce the document: "Learning and Working together for the future—A strategic framework to 2002", which was published by the Department in November 1998. This was given a wide public circulation and remains available.

No special advisers participate in the division's work, through freelance consultants are occasionally used to provide specialist knowledge and support. Currently 25 full-time staff work in the division.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when his policy innovation unit was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150368]

Mr. Wills: The policy innovation unit in the DfEE was established in January 2000. Staff have been recruited from a variety of private, voluntary and public sector backgrounds to work alongside a core civil service team, looking at new policy ideas for Ministers and senior officials. Strategy and policy units typically provide internal advice to Ministers. Any resulting reports will be published by the Department, and not the unit. No departmental or non-departmental special advisers work in the unit. The unit currently has 13 externally recruited team members. Of these, four are on casual civil service contracts (all full-time), two are on secondment (both part-time) and seven are working as consultants (two full-time and five part-time). The unit also has five departmental staff, all of whom are full-time.

Teachers

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the wastage rate for teachers in each of the last five years was; what the average earnings of teachers in each of the last five years were; and how many days on average were lost per teacher due to sickness in each of the last five years. [150473]

Ms Estelle Morris: The statistics on full-time and part-time teachers leaving the maintained schools sector in England for the last five years for which data are available are as follows:

Financial year	*Leavers*[1,2]	*Rate*[3]
1994–95	32,510	7.8
1995–96	31,150	7.4
1996–97	33,150	7.9
1997–98	34,250	8.2
1998–99[4]	27,570	6.6

[1] Teachers leaving the maintained nursery, primary, secondary, special and PRU sector including those moving to the FE, HEE or the independent schools sector.
Teachers retiring but then rejoining the maintained nursery, primary, secondary, special and PRU sector have not been included in the figures. Teachers retiring and then joining the FE, HE or the independent schools sector are included.
Teachers barred from service and dying in service are included

[2] The number of teachers leaving on early or ill-health retirement has now stabilised at a lower level, following the reform of the Teachers Pensions Scheme in 1997.

[3] Leavers expressed as a percentage of teachers in post at the start of the year shown.

[4] Provisional.

Average salaries of full-time teachers in the maintained schools sector in England for the last five years were as follows:

	£
March 1996	22,180
March 1997	22,920
March 1998	23,570
March 1999	24,460
March 2000	25,320

Note:
The March 2000 salary is estimated by increasing the March 1999 figure by the 1 April 1999 pay rise of 3.5 per cent.

It is estimated that the average pay of a full-time qualified teacher (including heads and deputy heads) in the maintained nursery, primary and secondary sector at April 2001 will be £27,900 (including the post threshold pay scale).

From April 2001 new graduate recruits can expect to earn £17,000 a year (up 6 per cent. from the previous year) and starting salaries in Inner London will rise to £20,000 (up 9 per cent. from the previous year).

In calendar year 1999, full-time and part-time teachers in maintained schools in England took an estimated average of five days' sick leave. This is the only year for which data are available.

The number of regular teachers in maintained schools in England increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000,

There was a growth of more than 2,000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of qualified supply teachers and *(b)* the number of these that were in post in schools on 17 January for each of the last five years. [150091]

Ms Estelle Morris: The number of qualified supply teachers is not collected centrally.

The number of qualified short-term supply teachers on contracts of under one month employed in maintained schools in England for the whole day, on the third Thursday in January over the last five years, is as follows:

Year	
1996	12,600
1997	13,600
1998	13,100
1999	14,100
2000	16,700

Note:
All numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100

A number of factors may have affected the demand for short term supply teachers in January 2000 including the requirement for schools to give teachers in their induction year a 10 per cent. reduction in timetable, and the flu epidemic that some LEAs reported at the time.

Supply, temporary and agency teachers on a contract of at least one month cannot be separately identified from teachers in regular service.The number of regular teachers (ie excluding short term supply) in maintained schools in England increased by 6,900 between January 1998 and January 2000.

There was a growth of more than 2000 in the number of people training to be teachers between 1999–2000 and 2000–01, the first such increase since 1992–93.

Universities (Early Leavers)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many 18 to 25-year-olds left university without finishing their courses in the last three years. [150651]

Mr. Wicks: The latest "Performance Indicators in Higher Education", published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England, give an overall non-completion rate for students starting full-time first degree courses in the UK in 1997–98 of 17 per cent., a figure which has stayed roughly constant since 1991–92. It is not possible to disaggregate the relevant data by age.

Disability Discrimination Act

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment when he will next review his policy in respect of the employer threshold provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [150820]

Ms Hodge: The Disability Rights Task Force has made recommendations about reducing and removing the threshold below which small employers are exempted from Part II of the Disability Discrimination Act. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 20 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 39W. I confirm that we will be responding shortly to the Task Force's recommendations.

Camden LEA

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list his funding allocations to Camden Local Education Authority for each year since May 1997. [150961]

Ms Estelle Morris: I refer my hon. Friend to the letter of 16 February from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, which sets out the increases in funding that the Government have made available to her local education authority since 1996–97, and the increased funding for 2001–02. My right hon. Friend has written in similar terms to all hon. Members. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01 funding per pupil in Camden has increased by £470 in real terms. Under the last Government funding per pupil in Camden fell by £170 in real terms between 1995–96 and 1997–98.

Ministerial Visits

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151023]

Mr. Wills: Two Ministers from the Department have visited constituencies in the Peterborough unitary authority between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Employment, Welfare to Work and Equal Opportunities visited North-West Cambridgeshire on 16 November 2000; she did not meet the local Member. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities visited the constituencies of Peterborough and North-West Cambridgeshire on 9 February 2001 and met my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton).

In accordance with departmental guidance, hon. Members are informed, in advance, of all ministerial visits to their constituencies.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on progress in the establishment of centres of vocational excellence in further education. [151160]

Mr. Wicks: On 21 November 2000 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced Centres of Vocational Excellence at the Association of Colleges annual conference. Centres of Vocational Excellence are central to our vision of modern further education sector in which colleges are more sharply focused on meeting the skills needs of employers at local and sectoral levels. By 2005, we want half of all general further education colleges to have a Centre of Vocational Excellence. We are allocating £100 million in support of the centres.

We will consult employers, general FE colleges and other key partners in education and employment in March to develop the operational detail of the centres. We plan to have the first pathfinder Centres of Vocational Excellence up and running in the autumn with most centres opening for business from April 2002 onwards.

School Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of schools with sixth forms which *(a)* have not received funding for the revised sixth form curriculum in the current financial year and *(b)* will not receive funding for the next financial year. [151241]

Ms Estelle Morris: £35 million was included in Education Standard Spending for 2000–01 and a further £60 million was included for 2001–02. This funding is unhypothecated: it is for local education authorities to decide, in consultation with their schools, how much should be allocated to each of their schools for the Qualifying for Success reforms of the sixth form curriculum. Information on this is not collected centrally. All secondary schools received £40,000, £50,000 or £60,000 in direct grants in 2000–01, and will receive £50,000, £60,000 or £70,000 in 2001–02.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what estimate he has made of the net change in revenue funding for each former grant maintained school for each of the last three academic years and for the next academic year; [151242]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of maintained schools for which the revenue funding per capita will be less *(a)* for the current academic year than for the last academic year and *(b)* for the next academic year than for the current academic year. [151245]

Ms Estelle Morris: No such estimates can be made on the basis of the information available to the Department. Nationally, however, funding per pupil has increased by over £300 in real terms under the present Government, and it will increase by a further £150 per pupil for 2001–02. Under the last Government, funding per pupil fell by £60 in real terms between 1994–95 and 1997–98. There will be further increases in funding following the year 2000 Spending Review, with a further £370 per pupil over the three-year period, taking the total increase to nearly £700 between 1997–98 and 2003–04.

Former grant maintained schools are entitled to minimum levels of funding per pupil, derived from the amounts of annual maintenance grant per pupil which they received in 1998–99, with an adjustment for inflation. They have further benefited from the introduction of direct grants to schools in 2000–01: a typical primary school receives £9,000 and a typical secondary school £40,000, rising in 2001–02 to £20,000 and £60,000 respectively.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what estimate he has made of the number of local education authorities which will be unable to access standards fund money as a result of an inability to supply match funding. [151244]

Ms Estelle Morris: We expect over 99 per cent. of the match funded allocations to be taken up. However, final information is not yet available.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will indicate for each local education authority the dates on which *(a)* profit-related pay funds were paid to the local education authority by his Department and *(b)* those funds were passed on by the local education authority to schools. [151246]

Ms Estelle Morris: There are no profit-related pay funds. However, the Government are providing special grant to cover the additional salary costs of classroom teachers being paid on point 1 of the upper pay scale having crossed the performance threshold. Under Special Grant Report (No. 70), local education authorities were paid monthly instalments of grant on 6 December 2000, 12 January 2001 and 14 February 2001. The December instalment represented four months of grant backdated to September 2000.

Further instalments of grant will be made under Special Grant Report (No. 74) which requires that we pay local education authorities by the 15th of each month.

We do not hold data centrally of when local education authorities pass these funds on to schools. We have given clear guidance that local education authorities should adjust teachers' salaries or, where the authority is not the payroll provider, schools' budgets as soon as administratively possible following receipt of the results of assessments in individual schools.

Schools Green Paper

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if graduate teachers in the qualifying subjects detailed in the recent schools Green Paper will have their tutorial fees reimbursed if they choose to teach in Scotland or Northern Ireland. [151270]

Ms Estelle Morris: The recently published Green Paper "Schools: Building on Success" in which this scheme is proposed relates to England only. However, the eligibility criteria for the repayment of student loans are still being worked up in detail. We have indicated that the scheme will apply in Wales, and DfEE officials are currently discussing the proposals with colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A consultation document outlining how the scheme might work in detail will be published in due course.

Schools (Crosby and Sefton)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how much direct grant was received by each school in the Crosby constituency in each year since 1996. [151292]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the amount of school standards grant payable to each school in the constituency for the 2000–01 financial year. This is the first year in which this grant was payable. The total is estimated to rise to £807,000 in 2001–02, and grants will increase by 2.75 per cent. in each of the following two years.

Name of school	£
Sand Dunes Nursery School	3,000
Pinefield Pupil Referral Unit	3,000
Waterloo Primary School	9,000
Forefield Junior School	9,000
Forefield Infant School	9,000
Rawson Road Primary School	6,000
Woodlands Primary School	9,000
Freshfield Primary School	9,000
Redgate Primary School	6,000
Valewood Primary School	6,000
William Gladstone Church of England Primary School	9,000
St. Luke's Church of England Primary School	9,000
St. John's Church of England Primary School	6,000
St. Luke's Halsall Church of England Primary School	9,000
St. Nicholas Church of England Primary School	9,000
Holy Trinity Primary School	6,000
St. Peter's Church of England Primary School	9,000
Great Crosby Catholic Primary School	9,000
St. Mary's Catholic Primary School	6,000
St. Edmund's Catholic Primary School	9,000
Our Lady of Compassion Catholic Primary School	9,000
St. William of York Catholic Primary School	9,000
Ursuline Catholic Primary School	9,000
St. Jerome's Catholic Primary School	9,000
Formby High School	40,000
Manor High School	40,000
Chesterfield High School	50,000
Range High School	40,000
Sacred Heart Catholic High School	50,000
Ronald House School	15,000
Newfield School	15,000
Total	436,000

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the annual increase has been in the Standards Fund since 1996; and how much standards funds have been spent in *(a)* the constituency of Crosby and *(b)* the Borough of Sefton in each year since 1996. [151295]

Ms Estelle Morris: The following table shows the annual cash increase in the Standards Fund since 1996–97:

£ million

Year	Total allocations	Increase on previous year	DfEE contribution	Increase on previous year
1996–97	265	14	163	12
1997–98	320	55	211	48
1998–99	620	300	395	184
1999–2000	1,260	640	862	467
2000–01	2,490	1,230	1,913	1,051

Note:
The total allocation figures include both Government and local authority contributions.

Figures for the amount of grant spent in an individual constituency cannot be provided, but the following table shows the Standards Fund grant spent in Sefton local education authority since 1996–97. The figures include all grants paid through the Standards Fund payment system excluding New Deal for Schools capital, which is not part of the Standards Fund programme.

Amount of standards fund spent in the borough of Sefton

£ million

	Total expenditure	DfEE contribution
1996–97	1.3	0.8
1997–98	1.5	1.0
1998–99	3.5	2.2
1999–2000	6.0	4.2
2000–01	12.9	9.7

Note:
1. The total expenditure figures include both Government and local authority contributions.
2. The figures for 1996–97, 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are audited outturn expenditure figures.
3. The figures for 2000–01 are the total expenditure currently expected to be incurred in this financial year.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what average funding was allocated per school-age child in the Borough of Sefton in each year since 1996. [151333]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is in the tables. Since 1996–97 funding has increased by £410 per pupil in real terms. Grant figures have not yet been finalised for 2001–02, so no comparable figure is available for that year.

Per pupil funding—Sefton

£

	SSA	Grants	Per pupil
Cash—(schools pupils ages 5–15)			
1996–97	2,240	20	2,260
1997–98	2,320	30	2,340
1998–99	2,440	40	2,480
1999–2000	2,560	90	2,650
2000–01	2,690	210	2,900
2001–02	2,790	—	—
Change 1997–98 to 2000–01			560

Note:
Figures rounded to the nearest £10. Figures may not sum due to rounding.

Per pupil funding—Sefton

£

	SSA	Grants	Per pupil
Real terms 2000–01 prices schools (pupils ages 5–15)			
1996–97	2,480	20	2,500
1997–98	2,490	30	2,520
1998–99	2,550	40	2,590
1999–2000	2,610	90	2,700
2000–01	2,690	210	2,900
2001–02	2,720	—	—
Change 1997–98 to 2000–01			390

Notes:
1. Figures rounded to the nearest £10. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
2. Real terms calculated using GDP deflators published 21 December 2000.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what percentage of its local schools budget Sefton council has delegated to schools in each year since 1996. [151334]

Ms Estelle Morris: The information requested is as follows:

Financial year	Percentage of schools budget delegated
1996–97	79.3
1997–98	79.6
1998–99	79.0
1999–2000	80.2
2000–01	86.4

Note:
For 1998–99 and previous years, the figures represent the percentage of Sefton's General Schools Budget (less capital expenditure and capital financing costs) delegated to schools in accordance with the LEA's school funding formula.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will make a statement on trends in numeracy and literacy among children in junior schools in the borough of Sefton since 1996. [151335]

Ms Estelle Morris: In the 2000 Key Stage 2 tests, 80 per cent. of Sefton's 11-year-olds achieved the expected standard for their age in English, an increase of 15 percentage points since 1996. In mathematics, 77 per cent. of pupils achieved the expected standard, a 16 percentage point increase since 1996. These results are clear evidence of the success of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCo and the Department, its

executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151352]

Mr. Wills: There are currently no contracts in existence between SERCo and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies. Contracts which have existed in the last three years are listed as follows:

From 1 April 1994 to 31 July 1999—a contract existed for facilities management services for the Department's Head Office site in Runcorn, which was formerly part of the Employment Department estate.

From 1 April 1994 and 30 September 1998—a contract existed for facilities management services for the Department's Head Office site in London, which was formerly part of the Employment Department estate.

Resuscitation Policies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will instruct Ofsted to inspect all establishments for which it is responsible to ensure that *(a)* resuscitation policies which respect the rights of all pupils and students for whom they are responsible are in place, *(b)* such policies are understood by relevant staff and accessible to them and *(c)* such policies are subject to robust audit and monitoring arrangements. [151439]

Ms Estelle Morris: It is for schools, colleges and others to develop their own first aid policies and procedures based on an assessment of local need. My Department has issued "Guidance on First Aid for Schools: a good practice guide" which provides advice for schools on drawing up first aid policies and ensuring that they are meeting their statutory duties. It specifically advises that first aid training should include resuscitation techniques for children. I have asked HM Chief Inspector, Mike Tomlinson, to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

National Lottery Funds

9. **Mr. Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he is taking to ensure national lottery funds are distributed in a way that targets areas with the greatest social needs. [149393]

Mr. Chris Smith: Following the 1998 reforms to the National Lottery, distributors are required to take into account the need to ensure that all areas have access to funding and the scope for reducing economic and social deprivation. Since then, distributors have increasingly targeted funding on areas of need, on people and activities rather than just capital projects, and on smaller grants to community groups. All of this means that, more than ever, the communities with the greatest needs are experiencing the positive effects of National Lottery funding.

23. **Mr. St. Aubyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the amount of national lottery proceeds not yet disbursed in favour of good causes. [149409]

Mr. Chris Smith: All the money raised by the National Lottery for good causes has been allocated to one of the 15 National Lottery distributing bodies. As at 31 December 2001, the distributors' balances totalled £3.45 billion, all but £125 million of which has been committed to specific projects.

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has for the investment of capital reserves arising from the National Lottery into a National Endowment for Sport and Arts Coaching for young people between the ages of seven and 21 years; and if he will make a statement. [148852]

Kate Hoey: The overwhelming majority of the balance of the National Lottery Distribution Fund has already been committed. The Government and Lottery distributors are, however, working to ensure children and young people have access to high-quality sports and arts education. In sport, for example, Sport England and the New Opportunities Fund are using Lottery funds to establish a network of 1,000 co-ordinators across the country to facilitate better PE and sporting opportunities within schools. In the arts, the Government are working with partners on a range of policies, including Creative Partnerships, Artsmark, the National Foundation for Music and the Department for Education and Employment's Music Standards Fund, to deliver high quality arts education.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the fees paid by *(a)* successful and *(b)* unsuccessful applicants for lottery funding to consultants in each of the last three years. [150540]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 15 February 2001]*: None. I have, however, asked the Quality, Efficiency and Standards Team (QUEST) to investigate the costs of applying for lottery grants. Their first report, published in August 2000, investigated these costs in relation to grants of up to £100,000 and concluded that the main difficulties for these applicants related to administrative burden rather than cost. QUEST is currently carrying out an examination of the costs to applicants of applying for grants over £100,000. This study will establish how feasible it is to quantify the costs incurred by recent applicants (both successful and unsuccessful), including any fees paid for consultants and other professional services. If this study, which will conclude in May, demonstrates that such a quantification of costs is feasible, QUEST may undertake a full-scale investigation.

National Minimum Wage

15. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had with the Department of Trade and Industry regarding abatements to the national minimum wage to take account of board and lodging in the tourist trade. [149401]

Janet Anderson: My Department maintains a regular dialogue with the Department of Trade and Industry over the application of the national minimum wage to the tourism industry. For example, we discussed the Government's recent evidence to the Low Pay Commission. Our discussions have included the level of the weekly offset allowed to recognise the benefit of the provision of accommodation. The Government have asked the Low Pay Commission to consider whether there is a case for making any change to the maximum accommodation offset.

Museums and Galleries

16. **Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to strengthen collaboration between the national museums and galleries and the museums and galleries funded by his Department. [149402]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The national museums and galleries sponsored by my Department already have a good record for assisting their regional counterparts through, for example, tours and loans of their works and the provision of curatorial advice.

In recent years the national museums and galleries have established direct liaison with their regional counterparts involving closer interaction. We will be encouraging the further development of such interaction.

Currently, a number of directors of our national museums and galleries are involved with a task group created by the Secretary of State and chaired by Lord Evans, Chairman of Resource, which is looking at issues facing regional museums and galleries and ways to help maximise their contributions to our cultural life.

Sport and Arts (Participation)

18. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures the Government have taken to encourage participation in sport and the arts in areas of deprivation. [149404]

Mr. Chris Smith: The opportunity to participate in the arts, sport and other culture and leisure activities is vital to building a decent quality of life in areas of deprivation. Promoting participation among those who may not have had their fair share in the past is central to the work of my Department. We are ensuring a better deal from the lottery for deprived communities through simplified application procedures and more small grants. Recently I have been able to announce proposals to invest £580 million in sport for deprived areas, and that the initial programme of Sport Action Zones will be extended to other deprived areas. In addition to the creative partnerships initiative outlined today in the answer to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Mr. Hughes), *Official Report*, column 571, the National Foundation for Youth Music is working to provide opportunities for young people to make music in areas where least opportunity exists. We are also providing £130 million to provide space for sport and arts in primary schools in areas of multiple deprivation and we will be announcing details of the schools shortly.

Football Facilities

19. **Mr. Bill Michie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to increase investment in grass-roots football facilities. [149405]

Kate Hoey: The creation of the Football Foundation—which uses 5 per cent. of money from TV rights—will make a significant difference to grass-roots football in England. The foundation has some £18 million to invest in grass-roots football this year.

Millennium Dome

21. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the sponsorship of the millennium dome. [149407]

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will make a statement on the sponsorship of the millennium dome. [149387]

Janet Anderson: The New Millennium Experience Company achieved a total sponsorship and donation income, including cash and value in kind, of £119.7 million. This figure excludes the direct funding by BT and Ford of the costs of their zones and the extra funding for marketing and promotion spent by a number of sponsors over and above the requirements of their contracts. Taken together the overall sponsorship and donations relevant to the dome is estimated at £150 million—the most ever raised for a single event in the UK.

26. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average monthly running costs of the millennium dome at Greenwich have been since its closure. [149412]

Janet Anderson: The current monthly running costs of the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) are between £2.5 million and £3.5 million excluding physical decommissioning costs. Monthly running costs are intended to reduce as the company moves towards solvent liquidation.

School Sports

22. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if funding from the new opportunities fund's sport in schools initiative will be targeted on schools with greatest need of new sports facilities. [149408]

Kate Hoey: New opportunities fund money under the Opportunities for Young People—PE and sport strand will be invested in strengthening the foundation of sport across England by building and refurbishing PE and sports facilities in and for schools.

Swimming

24. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to promote swimming lessons. [149410]

Kate Hoey: Swimming and water safety are an important part of the National Curriculum for Physical Education. Swimming remained compulsory when the non-core subjects were temporarily suspended to allow for the establishment of the national literacy and numeracy strategies. The Government want to ensure that, by Key Stage 2, children are able to swim unaided for 25 m. We are aware that, currently some children are not meeting this standard.

Outdoor Activities (Children)

25. **Maria Eagle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps he is taking to give schoolchildren greater opportunities to take part in outdoor activities, with particular reference to walking, climbing and canoeing. [149411]

Mr. Chris Smith: £50 million from the new opportunities fund will be devoted to programmes of activity for young people, based around challenging activities, aimed at those most at risk of losing contact with education and training opportunities. We also expect that up to £50 million of the £750 million of new opportunities fund money for school sport will fund the refurbishment of outdoor activity centres for use by school.

Space for Sport and Arts Scheme

27. **Mr. Corbett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many primary schools will receive new facilities under the space for sport and arts scheme. [149413]

Kate Hoey: Having considered around 500 outline proposals submitted in December by the 65 LEAs allocated funding under the Space for Sport and Arts (SSA) scheme, the project board recommended detailed applications should be developed on nearly 300 projects. Each LEA has been asked to confirm by 7 March 2001 its final portfolio of projects for which applications will be submitted by the end of October 2001. A final list of schools for which applications are being developed will be published in due course.

Access Radio

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the development of Access Radio on the revenues of existing commercial radio broadcasters; [150730]

(2) what plans he has to ensure that Access Radio does not compete unfairly with existing commercial radio broadcasters. [150731]

Mr. Chris Smith: The White Paper "A New Future for Communications" invited views on whether the benefits of community radio would justify greater public intervention, and, if so, on possible sources of funding. We are now considering the many responses on this issue, including those from commercial broadcasters.

"Seeing Salvation" Exhibition

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to his answer of 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 706W, on the "Seeing Salvation" Exhibition, what representations were made by his Department to the National Gallery regarding the content of the "Seeing Salvation" Exhibition, prior to its opening. [150878]

Mr. Chris Smith: None. The choice of theme and content of the exhibitions staged by DCMS's sponsored museums and galleries is entirely a matter for their trustees.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list all overseas visits made by ministers in his Department, together with the purpose of each visit and the cost to the public purse in each case, since 1 May 1997. [151520]

Mr. Chris Smith: This Government have given a commitment to publish an annual list of visits overseas by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 as well as an annual figure on spend by all Ministers on overseas visits. The list for the period 2 May 1997 to 31 March 1999 was published on 17 June 1999, *Official Report*, column 196W, and the list for 1999–2000 was published on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 969W. The list for 2000–2001 will be published in due course.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151021]

Janet Anderson: I visited Peterborough on 6 December 2000 and met my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton). We had a number of engagements including a visit to Peterborough Football Club which, I understand, is located in the North-West Cambridgeshire constituency. I was unaware of this at the time and I was therefore unable to give the right hon. Member advance notice of this visit. I have apologised to him since.

No other Ministers in this Department have visited the Peterborough unitary authority area in this period.

Television Licences

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 133W, on television licences, how many prosecutions for licence evasion were brought in *(a)* Northern Ireland, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* England in each of the last four years; and what action is being taken to reduce the evasion rate in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England. [151448]

Janet Anderson: Figures for England and Wales cannot readily be disaggregated because, in border areas, courts in Wales may try cases where the defendant's address is in England and vice versa. The number of prosecutions in each of the last four years was:

	Northern Ireland	*Scotland*	*England and Wales*
1997–98	2,966	2,120	94,714
1998–99	2,495	499	94,566
1999–2000	2,107	992	86,133
2000–01[1]	2,363	3,733	123,755

[1] Year to date

Statutory responsibility for the administration and enforcement of the television licensing system rests with the BBC. The BBC and its agent, TV Licensing, have adopted a range of measures to reduce evasion, including advertisements, correspondence and occasional telephone reminders to remind people of the television licensing requirements, followed up if necessary by visits from TV Licensing inquiry officers.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCo and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151341]

Mr. Chris Smith: No contract exists directly between SERCO and my Department. We have contacted the non-departmental public bodies and the Royal Parks Agency to request the information required in relation to their activities, and I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it is available, placing copies of my letter in the Libraries of both Houses.

Tourism

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many tourists he estimates visited the north-west in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999 and *(c)* 2000. [151304]

Janet Anderson: Estimates for the number of tourists visiting the North West Tourist Board region from the UK, staying at least one night, and from overseas in 1998 and 1999 are shown in the table. Estimates for tourists visiting the North West Tourist Board region in 2000 are not yet available. Figures for the number of day visits by UK residents to the North West Tourist Board region are available only for 1998 and show an estimated 118 million visits in that year.

Source:

Leisure Day Visits Survey

Number of tourists visiting the North West Tourist Board region, 1998 and 1999

Million

Year	*UK residents*	*Overseas visitors*
1998	8.4	1.2
1999	10.8	1.3

Sources:

UK Tourism Survey (domestic tourism) and International Passenger Survey (tourism from overseas)

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* single parents and *(b)* people over the age of 50 are employed in the tourism industry in the North-West. [151305]

Janet Anderson: Estimates from the Labour Force Survey for the quarter September to November 2000 show that 13,000 single parents and 27,000 people aged 50 and over were employed in tourism related industries in the North-West Tourist Board region.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans he has to encourage the tourism industry to develop training programmes for employees. [151306]

Janet Anderson: Our tourism strategy, Tomorrow's Tourism, contains several recommendations for action to develop a trained and motivated workforce. In particular, we are working with those National Training Organisations (NTOs) which cover the tourism industry to develop training products and qualifications which are of high quality and meet the training needs of the industry. The NTOs in turn work closely with employers in the industry and training providers to identify skills gaps and provide the training to fill those gaps. We also plan to work closely with the new local Learning and Skills Councils to ensure that tourism's training needs are provided for at the regional level.

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the average annual wage paid to *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees in the tourism industry was during (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000. [151296]

Janet Anderson: Estimates for the average annual wage paid to full-time and part-time employees in tourism related industries during 1999 and 2000 are shown in the table. For 1998, only full-time employees' earnings are shown, as a reliable figure for part-time employees is not available.

Gross average annual earnings for tourism related industries, at April each year

£

	Full-time	*Part-time*
1998	15,056	not available
1999	15,960	4,489
2000	17,219	5,080

Source:

New Earnings Survey, National Statistics

Regional Arts Boards

Mr. Fearn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which regional arts boards experienced a standstill in their arts grant from central Government funding between 1992–93 and 1998–99; and for what reasons. [151297]

Mr. Alan Howarth: The regional arts boards are not directly funded by central Government but from the allocation of grant in aid made to the Arts Council of England. Fluctuations in funding to individual arts boards reflect the increases and decreases in grant in aid to the Arts Council, these being a matter for its decision. The following table drawn from ACE's annual reports and accounts details both the grant in aid to the Arts Council between 1992–93 and 1998–99 and for each of the regional arts boards.

RAB funding from ACE, 1992–93 to 1995–96

	1992–93	*Percentage change*	*1993–94*	*Percentage change*	*1994–95*	*Percentage change*	*1995–96*	*Percentage change*
East England Arts	4,020	0.4	4,035	16.7	4,842	1.0	4,892	–5.9
East Midland Arts Board	2,672	1.4	2,709	35.3	4,184	3.6	4,341	–4.7
London Arts Board	10,304	2.0	10,510	22.8	13,621	1.8	13,867	–2.7
Northern Arts Board	5,105	1.5	5,184	6.0	5,513	4.2	5,752	–4.4
North West Arts Board	4,977	1.3	5,040	34.7	7,713	0.3	7,733	–3.8

RAB funding from ACE, 1992–93 to 1995–96

	1992–93	*Percentage change*	*1993–94*	*Percentage change*	*1994–95*	*Percentage change*	*1995–96*	*Percentage change*
Southern Arts Board	2,782	2.0	2,838	16.4	3,394	3.8	3,529	–6.8
South East Arts Board	2,584	2.0	2,636	–1.6	2,594	1.9	2,644	–5.1
South West Arts Board	2,826	1.9	2,880	32.3	4,254	3.0	4,384	–5.7
West Midlands Art Board	3,631	3.8	3,774	31.7	5,524	2.8	5,683	–4.9
Yorkshire Arts Board	4,579	1.3	4,639	27.8	6,423	4.7	6,743	–4.0
Total	43,480	1.7	44,245	23.8	58,062	2.5	59,568	–4.3
Grant-in-aid from DCMS to ACE	185,801	2.0	189,564	–1.9	185,990	2.7	191,133	–2.7

Source:
ACE annual report and accounts

RAB funding from ACE, 1996–97 to 1998–99

	1996–97	*Percentage change*	*1997–98*	*Percentage change*	*1998–99*
East England Arts	4,621	0.8	4,658	0.3	4,670
East Midland Arts Board	4,147	2.7	4,260	1.0	4,301
London Arts Board	13,508	0.8	13,613	–0.1	13,604
Northern Arts Board	5,508	3.5	5,705	0.3	5,722
North West Arts Board	7,448	1.2	7,541	0.2	7,556
Southern Arts Board	3,303	2.1	3,375	1.3	3,418
South East Arts Board	2,515	–1.0	2,489	3.1	2,569
South West Arts Board	4,148	3.2	4,284	0.6	4,310
West Midlands Art Board	5,418	2.2	5,541	0.6	5,574
Yorkshire Arts Board	6,484	1.9	6,610	0.6	6,652
Total	57,100	1.7	58,076	0.5	58,376
Grant-in-aid from DCMS to ACE	186,133	0.0	186,100	1.8	189,600

Source:
ACE annual report and accounts

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the IT projects his Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if he will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151475]

Mr. Chris Smith: The IT projects currently being planned by the Department for the next year are as follows:

Redevelopment of the Department's website—start date May 2001, end date October 2001.

Review the functionality of the Government Art Collection website—start date September 2001, end date February 2002.

Replacement of remainder of desktop PCs—start date December 2001, end date April 2002.

Development of communications management processes—start date July 2001, end date February 2002.

Redevelopment of Department's intranet—start date June 2001, end date December 2001.

Development and implementation of e-business strategy—on-going.

The individual cost of each project is currently budgeted at less than £100,000, save for the replacement of desktop PCs, where the cost will be of the order of £300,000.

Alongside these projects the Department will be taking forward a number of major initiatives including the development of Culture Online, e-tourism pilots and, with funding provided through the New Opportunities Fund, the rollout of the UKOnline Learning Centres which will see all public libraries connected to the internet.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151516]

Mr. Chris Smith: The IT projects currently being undertaken by the Department with expected completion dates are as follows:

Development of a database for recording export licensing requests for works of art—May 2001.

A website for the Government Art Collection—April 2001.

Replacement of desktop PCs—April 2001.

Implementation of the Knowledge Network—April 2001.

Conversion of internal systems to support web access—March 2001.

Review of communications—June 2001.

Development and implementation of e-business strategy—next key milestone July 2001.

The individual cost of each project is less than £100,000, save for the replacement of desktop PCs, where the cost is currently under discussion with potential suppliers.

In addition we are supporting additional development work on the 24 Hour Museum.

Arts Council Salaries

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions he has had regarding proposed salary levels at the Arts Council; and if he will make a statement. [150545]

Mr. Chris Smith *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* None.

Olympic Games

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations he has made to the Greek authorities about possible development of a sports complex for the 2004 Olympics on the site of the Battle of Marathon. [150271]

Kate Hoey *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not made any representations to the Greek authorities on the matter of the development of the Battle of Marathon site for the 2004 Olympics. This is purely a matter for the Greek authorities.

Sporting Activities (Deprived Children)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government are taking to encourage children from deprived areas to take up sporting activities. [150628]

Kate Hoey: The Government have a number of initiatives—including School Sports Co-ordinators, Sport Action Zones, Space for Sport and Arts—aimed at improving sport in schools and for communities which have the needs of people living in deprived areas at their heart. We will also ensure that the mechanism for distributing New Opportunities Fund Round 3 money will include some weighting to take account of deprivation.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are to amend his Department's departmental expenditure limit and running costs limit for 2000–01. [151193]

Mr. Chris Smith: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XI, Vote 1, the DCMS Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2000–01 will be reduced by £9,839,000 from £1,030,565,000 to £1,020,726,000 and the running costs limit will be reduced by £4,400,000 from £35,256,000 to £30,856,000.

The changes are to provide for the use of £5,700,000 of the proceeds from the sale by the British Library of 25 Southampton Buildings for meeting the costs of a new conservation and digitisation studio, a further amount of £9,840,000 from the sale proceeds is being surrendered to the Consolidated Fund as Extra Receipts; to provide for the use of £3,000,000 of the proceeds from the sale of 6 Burlington Gardens to assist English Heritage with the purchase of land for the construction of a new visitor centre at Stonehenge, and for use by the Department of £2,000,000 of the sale proceeds for capital works at its headquarters buildings; to provide for a reduction of £4,400,000 in the gross running costs of the Royal Parks offset by an increase of the same amount in their other current expenditure to reflect the reclassification of the expenditure of the Royal Parks Constabulary out of running costs; and to provide for increased expenditure of £630,000 on DCMS gross running costs offset by an increase in recoveries of eligible deductible input VAT.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Third Archbishopric

31. **Mr. Fabricant:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what calculation has been made of the impact on the budget of the Commission of the establishment of a third archbishopric. [149417]

Mr. Stuart Bell: No such calculation has been made.

Employment Relations

32. **Mr. Quinn:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will make a statement on employment relations within the Church of England. [149418]

Mr. Stuart Bell: The great majority of clergy in the Church of England are office holders rather than employees. Clergy with the freehold enjoy greater job security than many employees. As to the Church of England's administrative staff, the national organisations of the Church together employ about 600 staff on lines broadly comparable with the Civil Service, with which they have a pay and employment conditions analogue. Others throughout the Church of England are employed by Diocesan Boards of Finance, Boards of Education, parishes and so on.

Clergy Recruitment

33. **Mr. Loughton:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps they are taking to increase recruitment to the clergy and shorten periods between incumbents in parishes. [149419]

Mr. Stuart Bell: My hon. Friend will recall from my answer in December that the Archbishops Council, within whose responsibility matters such as clergy vocations fall, confirms that although the total number of stipendiary clergy in the Church of England is projected to decline on present trends the number of candidates coming forward for ordination training has risen over the last five years.

The length of time between incumbencies will depend in part upon the policy of individual dioceses. Some will wish to allow time for parishes to reflect on local pastoral needs before a new incumbent arrives.

Church Pensioners/Church Attendance

34. **Mr. Flynn:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what his calculation is, based on current trends, on the probable numbers of *(a)* church pensioners and *(b)* people attending Anglican churches in 2030. [149420]

Mr. Stuart Bell: No authoritative forecast exists to 2030, whether for church pensioners or people attending Anglican churches. As to the latter, I understand from the Statistics Unit of the Archbishop's Council that the way church attendance is counted is being changed from a Sunday-only basis to an average weekly attendance, in order to take fuller account of actual patterns of attendance.

Conditions of Service (Clergy)

35. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on clergy conditions of service. [149421]

Mr. Stuart Bell: My hon. Friend will know from the answer given to him in January, conditions vary slightly from diocese to diocese, but the national average stipend for clergy of incumbent status as at July 2000 was £16,480. In addition, clergy receive free accommodation or a housing allowance, membership of a non-contributory pension scheme and should receive full reimbursement of all working expenses.

House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill

36. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the impact of the provisions of the House of Commons (Removal of Clergy Disqualification) Bill on pensions and stipends. [149422]

Mr. Stuart Bell: No assessment has been made. We would expect that any priest or deacon elected as an MP and wishing to continue his or her ministry as a priest would have to become a non-stipendiary minister. Stipend would cease and the years as an MP would not count as pensionable service under the clergy pension scheme. Comparatively few people will be in this position and the impact of this Bill upon stipends and pensions costs for the Church of England as a whole is likely to be negligible.

Redundant Churches

37. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how many redundant churches were disposed of in the last year; and what covenants relating to subsequent use were agreed. [149423]

Mr. Stuart Bell: During 2000 the future of 25 churches was settled by appropriation to alternative uses—nine for residential use, four for community purposes, four for use by other Christian congregations, four for use for offices or for retail purposes, two for educational purposes, one for use by another faith body and one as a monument. The Commissioners usually impose covenants on the new owner of a redundant church restricting its use to that approved and prohibiting unauthorised architectural changes, the disturbance of any human remains or memorials, and demolition.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next General Election is called. [149308]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Export Credits

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many credits have been supplied by the Export Credits Guarantee Department for *(a)* renewable energy projects, *(b)* demand site energy efficiency projects and *(c)* civil nuclear projects, including nuclear fuel cycle projects, in each of the last 10 years; what the (i) value and (ii) use of each credit was; when each was supplied; and when the work was completed. [149614]

Mr. Caborn: ECGD does not hold its information on cases on a basis which would enable it to answer this question readily in the detail requested. Due to these limitations a complete answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

However, from information available on ECGD's systems we have been able to identify a list of guarantees that meet the criteria of the question.

10 April 2002

Financial year	*No.*	*Case*	*Market*	*Value £ million*	*Guarantee date*	*Project completion date*
1990–91	1	Hydro Electric Power project (Ewaso Ngiro)	Kenya	21	21 December 1990	30 September 2000
1991–92	3	Design and Construct 600 MW Hydro-electric power Plant 'Pergau'	Malaysia	328	31 July 1991	30 April 2001
		As above	Malaysia	119	15 April 1991	30 April 2001
		As above	Malaysia	153	15 March 1992	30 April 2001
1993–94	1	Muela Hydropower Project (phase 1A)	Lesotho	1	17 February 1994	31 March 2000
1994–95	2	Hydro Electric Plant and Sub Stations	Thailand	17	13 September 1994	31 March 2002
		Muela Hydropower project (phase 1A)	Lesotho	7	14 April 1994	31 March 2000
1995–96	4	Design and Equipment for Guangdong Ling Ao Nuclear Power Station	China	576	20 December 1995	30 August 2003
		Goods and Services for Qinshan Phase II Nuclear Power Station	China	37	11 January 1996	30 April 2001
		Muela Hydropower	Lesotho	4	15 December 1995	31 March 2000
		Muela Hydropower	Lesotho	1	15 December 1995	31 March 2000
1996–97	2	Muela Hydropower Project Contract LHDA 129A	Lesotho	3	24 January 1997	30 April 1999
		Qinshan Phase 11 Nuclear Power Plant	China	17	15 May 1996	15 February 2002
1999–2000	1	Weir Westgarth/Flash Thermal Plant at Ghubrah	Oman	10	2 November 1999	—

Steel Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the arrangements established to transfer the steel industry to private ownership contained provisions that excluded the new owners from liability to implement the decontamination of contaminated areas of steel plant sites. [149660]

Mr. Byers: No such provisions were introduced. Private owners have full liability in respect of decontamination of contaminated areas.

The Government will vigorously enforce their powers in this area.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the decision of Corus plc not to allow an employee buy-out of Llanwern Steel Works to the *(a)* Office of Fair Trading and *(b)* Competition Commissioner. [150205]

Mr. Byers: Under UK competition law, in the first instance it is the responsibility of the Director General of Fair Trading to investigate any possible breaches of competition law and only then can cases be referred to the Competition Commission.

I have no formal powers to refer competition issues to the Office of Fair Trading, but I have drawn this case to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will refer the decision of Corus plc not to allow an employee buy-out of the Llanwern Steel Works to the European Union Competition Commissioner. [150206]

Mr. Byers: I have no formal powers to refer competition issues to the European Union Competition Commissioner, but I have drawn the matter to his attention.

Manufacturing (Wales)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the prospects for the manufacturing sector in Wales. [150233]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* I have been particularly encouraged by recent announcements. Ford are investing £240 million at their Bridgend plant, creating over 600 new jobs, Toyota have invested £100 million at their Deeside plant and Wireless Systems International are currently creating over 260 new jobs in Cwmbran. These are major coups for Welsh industry, underlining the high regard in which the Welsh work force and economy are held and a welcome sign that manufacturing investment is back on track after a very difficult period.

Mineshafts

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he expects to publish the Heriot Watt paper on mineshafts. [150434]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 281W.

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Wigley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what definition he uses of rural in relation to post offices. [150522]

Mr. Alan Johnson: A rural post office is defined as one serving a community of up to 10,000 inhabitants.

Arms Deals

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the extent of arms trafficking and brokering activities conducted *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* by UK nationals abroad; what countries are buying arms by such arrangements; and if the countries involved are on the UN Embargo List. [150472]

Dr. Howells: It is already a legal requirement for persons in the UK and UK nationals to obtain a licence in order to traffic in or broker arms to any country subject to a binding United Nations embargo. However, such licences are granted only in exceptional circumstances (for example, to supply UN peacekeeping forces). The Government do not have powers under existing legislation to control trafficking and brokering in arms to countries not subject to binding UN embargoes, and the Government therefore have no powers to require information to be submitted to them about other arms trafficking and brokering activities.

However, as part of the review of the White Paper on Strategic Export Controls we have examined information available from both public sources and internal Government sources about arms trafficking and brokering activities conducted in the UK or by UK nationals abroad. As a result of the review, the Government have decided to introduce a system of licensing for arms trafficking and brokering. Full details of the Government's proposals on trafficking and brokering will be set out when the draft Export Control Bill is published. The introduction of the new licensing regime will of course result in information on the arms trafficking and activities subject to control being submitted to the Government.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the arms deals that have been brokered by *(a)* brokers based in the UK and *(b)* UK nationals to (i) Angola, (ii) Congo Brazaville, (iii) the Democratic Republic of Congo, (iv) Eritrea and (v) the Sudan in each of the years (1) 1997, (2) 1998, (3) 1999 and (4) 2000. [150468]

Dr. Howells: Arms deals brokered by UK nationals or brokers based in the UK do not normally require a licence issued by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

At present controls on brokering only apply to destinations subject to binding United Nations arms embargoes. A binding UN arms embargo against UNITA in Angola was imposed in 1993 and against Eritrea in 2000. No licences covering brokering have been issued under these embargoes since 1997.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the number of private military and security companies operating from the United Kingdom and providing *(a)* combat personnel, *(b)* training personnel and *(c)* operational support for foreign Governments, militias or irregular armed groups. [150470]

Dr. Howells: My Department has made no such assessments of private military and security companies operating from within the UK.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150551]

Mr. Caborn: Since May 1997 my Department has introduced and developed a variety of initiatives which will help regenerate the more disadvantaged areas of Bristol. Those in my hon. Friend's constituency include: £7.6 million in total from the EC URBAN programme used to fund projects such as Bristol East Traders—an innovative scheme which has brought together under common aims trading communities previously separated by physical and cultural barriers; a £300,000 grant to the Easton Business Centre towards a £741,000 project to provide 19 enterprise workshops on derelict land in the heart of the area; nearly £100,000 to the Black Development Agency for a scheme dedicated to providing a major resource centre giving black-led voluntary organisations the opportunity to co-locate in accessible serviced premises; and under the Estate Action programme over £1 million has recently been used to continue the improvements being made to tower blocks and estates in east Bristol.

Regional Selective Assistance

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list those businesses in the north-east which have received regional selective assistance in the last year. [150631]

Mr. Caborn: Twenty five companies received and accepted offers of regional selective assistance in the last year. For reasons of commercial confidentiality, details of offers are not routinely published until after the first payment of grant. Information on such offers (of £75,000 or more) can be found in Labour Market Trends. However, two companies have received payment of grant and these are Appleyard Plastics Ltd. and Marine & General Engineering Services and Supplies Ltd.

Motor Vehicle Licences

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the feasibility of increasing the number of post offices able to issue motor vehicle licences. [150851]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Post Office acts as agent for the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) in issuing motor vehicle licences through 4,000 post offices. In order to safeguard the interests of taxpayers, DVLA has to ensure that the relicensing service is cost effective. Increasing the number of post offices offering the facility increases the costs without increasing the total revenue collected.

Trent 900/600 Aero Engines

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what EU approvals were obtained or have been applied for in respect of the launch aid loan for Rolls-Royce to develop the Trent 600 and 900 aero engines. [150668]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The appropriate information has been made available to the European Commission, which has discretion concerning any necessary EU approval procedures.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the Government's launch aid criteria for the proposed loan to Rolls-Royce plc for the development of the Trent 600 and 900 aero engines. [150669]

Mr. Alan Johnson: Like other launch investments, the investment for the development of the Trent 600 and 900 aero engines was subject to rigorous appraisal on a number of different counts covering:

(a) Technical viability.

(b) An assessment of the market.

(c) The financial viability.

(d) The extent to which Government's investment was necessary for the project to proceed.

(e) Wider economic benefits to the UK.

Government investment is subject to stringent appraisal by the DTI with external advice from independent financial advisers, MOD and DERA.

Launch investment is not a loan, but is a repayable investment in a public-private partnership which is expected to secure a real rate of return for the taxpayer as well as securing wider economic benefits for the UK. This arrangement is very similar to a Risk and Revenue Sharing Partnership Partnerships (who co finance and/or produce specific programmes. The Government share the market and technical risks and revenues from engines sold.

It is available only to the aerospace sector and stems from the provisions of the Civil Aviation Act 1982.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rate of return the Government expect to receive on the launch aid loan to Rolls-Royce plc to develop the Trent 900 and 600 aero engines including the *(a)* applicable royalty rate, *(b)* interest rate and *(c)* repayment schedule. [150671]

Mr. Alan Johnson: We expect to receive a substantial real rate of return. However the conditions of the investment are commercially confidential under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he took to establish whether private finance would be available for development of the Trent 900 and 600 aero engines; and what reasons were given for it not being forthcoming. [150670]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government took advice on this issue from independent financial advisers, who confirmed that Launch Investment was necessary for the project to go ahead. Details of their advice are confidential to Government under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many miners are claiming compensation under the medical assessment procedures for chest disease, in each region. [150905]

Mr. Hain: To date, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered over 134,000 compensation claims for respiratory disease. Of these, almost 66,000 claimants have been tested and the results have generated 11,500 expedited offers. In terms of payments, the Department has been able to make over 30,900 individual payments, including bereavement awards, interim settlements and full and final payments amounting to £113.7 million.

The number of miners claiming compensation under the medical assessment procedures for chest disease broken down by region is as follows:

Respiratory Disease

Postal region	*Total number of claims*
Wales	
South Wales	26,788
Other	1,129
Scotland	
Fife	2,254
Other	8,384
England	
Nottinghamshire	15,776
Yorkshire	35,405
North East	18,985
North West	7,644
Midlands	13,742
South	3,454
Other	781
Total	134,342

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was paid out to miners, in each region, *(a)* for vibration white finger and *(b)* for chest disease from January 2000. [150906]

Mr. Hain: In total, the Department has now made around 74,500 individual payments, including bereavement awards, interim settlements and full and final settlements to claimants in respect of compensation for respiratory disease and vibration related disease, totalling over £334 million. The Department continues to pay out around £1 million per day in compensation.

The amount paid out to miners, broken down by region for Vibration White Finger, and respiratory disease is as follows:

£

Postal region	*Vibration white finger*	*Respiratory disease*
Wales		
South Wales	28,016,362	25,566,345
Other	458,683	958,183
Scotland		
Fife	2,501,118	2,006,834
Other	13,063,472	6,100,425
England		
Nottinghamshire	31,237,276	12,322,057
Yorkshire	68,142,657	30,821,716
North East	55,325,465	15,733,786
North West	6,098,231	5,852,241
Midlands	13,369,646	11,881,276
South	2,317,047	2,388,273
Other	87,532	80,401
Total	220,617,490	113,711,838

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many medical assessment procedures were conducted under the miners' compensation for chest disease agreement from January 2000 to date in each region. [150907]

Mr. Hain: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Mr. Williams) on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 553–56W.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what efforts he is making in speeding up compensation payments to miners in the North East Region for *(a)* chest disease and *(b)* vibration white finger. [150904]

Mr. Hain: To date, IRISC, the Department's claims handlers, have registered over 134,000 claims for respiratory disease of which almost 19,000 are from claimants in the North East region. In relation to Vibration White Finger, around 19,000 claims of the 116,000 claims received are from claimants in the North East region.

With regard to claims for respiratory disease, there have been problems getting the Medical Assessment Process, MAP, up to speed. One of the most significant problems affecting the UK as a whole, is the limited number of respiratory specialists who are able to assess claimants to the degree for which the Department was found liable. Healthcall, the company contracted to undertake the Medical Assessment Process, MAP, continues to actively recruit respiratory specialists and lung function technicians. We are considering with them how to increase specialist resources for the North East centres. In addition, the Department has been continuously streamlining the process to maximise the efficiency of these scarce resources.

Currently, there have been over 3,900 individual payments, including bereavement awards, interim and full and final settlements, to claimants in the North East region for respiratory disease amounting to £15.7 million. With regard to progress in the North East region for Vibration White Finger, I would point out that the centre catering for this area is one of the three centres with the greatest testing capacity overall in the UK. To date, the Department has made over 9,200 individual payments, including interim settlements and full and final payments amounting to £55.3 million in this region.

RR Spey Turbofan Engines

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many RR Spey turbofan engines have been sold to China; and if he will make a statement. [150533]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* Licences to export arms and other goods whose export is controlled for strategic reasons are issued by the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry acting through DTI's Export Control Organisation (ECO). Any export from the UK of RR Spey turbofan engines would normally require a licence under ML10 of the Military List (Part III of Schedule 1 to the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994). Information about a particular company's commercial transactions is commercial in confidence under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information and the company concerned should be approached for such information.

Departmental Polices (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150716]

Mr. Caborn: The Department does not maintain statistical information at constituency level.

My hon. Friend's constituents, like many others throughout Lancashire, will have benefited from my Department's employment rights policies which include national minimum wage, working time directive, part time working regulations and improved maternity leave.

In addition, all wards in the borough of Blackpool are eligible for the Enterprise Grant Scheme.

In the North West region, my Department's policies have contributed to growth in employment by 107,000 and a fall in unemployment by 63,000; reductions in youth unemployment by 75 per cent. and long-term unemployment by 54 per cent.

Ilisu Dam

Mr. Liwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the *(a)* Environmental Impact Assessment

Report and *(b)* Resettlement Action Plan on the Ilisu Dam project will be published; and if he will make a statement. [150646]

Mr. Caborn: We expect that a presentation on the Environmental Impact Assessment Report will be made to the export credit agencies shortly, and that the Environmental Impact Assessment Report will be made publicly available after this presentation, and before any decision is taken regarding export credit support from the UK. As we are not the owners of the reports we cannot be more specific about timing.

We do not know whether the owners of the Resettlement Action Plan will make it publicly available, although we have advocated that they do so. However, we expect the Environmental Impact Assessment Report to cover resettlement issues.

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people will be affected by the construction of the Ilisu Dam; how many will need to be resettled; and if he will make a statement. [150673]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 466W.

Post Office Closures

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post office closures there were between *(a)* April 1999 to the end of March 2000 and *(b)* April 2000 to the end of December 2000. [150868]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I understand from the Post Office that the number of post office closures in the year ending March 2000 was 382 and between April and December 2000 was 434.

Mobile Phone Operators

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the frequency bands the Government have sold to mobile phone operators in the last 10 years. [150667]

Ms Hewitt: Frequency bands licensed exclusively to the mobile phone operators for which licence fees have been paid in the last 10 years are as follows:

MHz

872.0–888.0

890.0–915.0

917.0–933.0

935.0–960.0

1710.0–1785.0

1805.0–1880.0

1899.9–1979.7

2110.3–2169.7.

With the phasing out of analogue mobile the 872–888 and 917–933 MHz blocks are being reassigned for other radio uses including digital mobile services. Mobile operators also have access to some spectrum channels for network fixed links on a shared basis with other radio users.

World Trade Organisation (TRIPs Agreement)

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what his policy is on the reform of WTO's TRIPs Agreement to improve poor people's access to essential drugs and medicines. [150969]

Dr. Howells: The Government are actively involved in helping to improve poor people's access to health care, including essential drugs. However, the TRIPs Agreement does not concern 95 per cent. of the essential drugs recommended by the World Health Organisation since they are patent free.

The TRIPs Agreement requires WTO member states to provide minimum standards of intellectual property protection, including patents, in their domestic legislation. We believe the agreement provides WTO members with sufficient flexibility to develop domestic intellectual property rights regimes that enable access to on-patent medicines, while ensuring adequate intellectual property protection to encourage investment, research and innovation, including for future medicines.

The recent White Paper "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor" announced a Commission on Intellectual Property, to look at ways that intellectual property rules need to develop in the future to take greater account of the interests of developing countries and poor people.

In addition there are a range of policy ideas currently being examined as part of a Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) study which will address the twin problems of how to improve incentives to accelerate the development and availability of effective health interventions to tackle HIV-AIDS, TB and malaria; and how to ensure that new and existing health interventions are widely affordable in developing countries.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the implementation of the WTO's TRIPs Agreement. [150968]

Dr. Howells: The United Kingdom participated in reviews of developed country WTO Members' TRIPs implementing legislation carried out by the TRIPs Council throughout 1996 and 1997. Records of introductory statements made by the United Kingdom delegation, questions put to the United Kingdom delegation and the responses given were published by the WTO in four documents with references IP/Q/GBR/1, IP/Q2/GBR/1, IP/Q3/GBR/1 and IP/Q4/GBR/1. All of these documents are available to the public on the WTO website, www.wto.org.

Following the end in January 2000 of the transitional period for the implementation of the TRIPs Agreement by developing country WTO Members the TRIPs Council commenced reviews of those Members' implementing legislation in June 2000. In two sessions the Council has reviewed the legislation of 21 developing country Members who had volunteered for early consideration. In three further sessions during 2001 the remaining developing country Members' legislation will be reviewed.

Least developed country Members have a further transition period ending in 2006 in which to implement the terms of the TRIPs Agreement.

Japanese Electricity Industry (MOX Fuel)

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he received a statement of intent of Japanese electricity utilities relating to the fabrication of mixed oxide fuel; and if he will place a copy of the statement in the Library. [151563]

Mr. Hain: HM Government support BNFL in its efforts to secure MOX business with Japanese electricity utilities. Such business is, however, a commercial matter for BNFL and those utilities. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has not received, nor given the commercial relationship of the companies would expect to receive, a statement of intent from the Japanese utilities.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* short term and *(b)* long term projects the Export Credits Guarantee Department estimates it will underwrite in the current financial year; and what are the values of each project. [150950]

Mr. Caborn: The table summarises this information in relation to guarantees issued by ECGD in the current financial year. The table excludes business covered under the Overseas Investment Insurance which does not readily meet the criteria of the question.

2000–01 to 16 February

Value range	*Number of guarantees*	*Total value (£ million)*
Short Term		
Less than £10 million	37	54
£10 million-£20 million	3	43
£20 million-£30 million	1	24
£30 million-£40 million	1	31
£40 million-£50 million	0	0
£50 million-£100 million	0	0
+ £100 million	0	0
	42	153
Long Term		
Less than £10 million	55	260
£10 million-£20 million	27	401
£20 million-£30 million	13	319
£30 million-£40 million	7	227
£40 million-£50 million	2	87
£50 million-£100 million	3	208
+ £100 million	6	1,384
	113	2,886
Total for Year (excluding OII)	155	3,038

ECGD estimates that it will issue guarantees in support of approximately a further £1 billion of Cash and Credit business by the end of the current year but is unable to provide the detail requested, partly on grounds of commercial confidentiality and partly on grounds of uncertainty as to which business in the pipeline will be the subject of a guarantee by 31 March.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which 10 countries have received the highest level of Export Credits Guarantee Department cover; and what was the value of credit attached to each country in 1999–2000. [150952]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested, which is included in ECGD's Annual Report, is as follows:

	£ million
Saudi Arabia	1,000.0
Malaysia	884.7
USA	254.1
Turkey	240.6
Oman	217.7
South Africa	217.6
United Arab Emirates	191.4
Switzerland	146.8
Taiwan	130.9
Bahrain	115.4

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many contracts that were due to be settled in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01 for the Export Credits Guarantee Department are still outstanding; and if he will make a statement. [150949]

Mr. Caborn: ECGD estimate that the position is as follows:

Year	*Number of payments*	*Number of contracts*	*Amount (£ million)*
1999–2000	210	105	278
2000–01	139	70	202

The majority of these payments have either been rescheduled or are eligible for rescheduling via the Paris Club.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* short term and *(b)* long term projects in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99, (iii) 1999–2000 and (iv) 2000–01 the Export Credits Guarantee Department underwrote; and what was the total value of each project in each year. [150951]

Mr. Caborn: The table provides the information requested. This information excludes business covered under the Overseas Investment Insurance which does not readily meet the criteria of the question.

FY/Value range	*Number of guarantees*	*Total value (£ million)*
1997–98		
Short term		
Less than £10 million	60	174
£10 million-£20 million	7	107
£20 million-£30 million	5	117
£30 million-£40 million	1	34
£40 million-£50 million	0	0
£50 million-£100 million	2	136
£100 million+	2	381
Total	77	774
Long Term		
Less than £10 million	71	289
£10 million-£20 million	32	508
£20 million-£30 million	13	288
£30 million-£40 million	7	243
£40 million-£50 million	1	48
£50 million-£100 million	6	474
£100 million+	3	719
Total	133	2,568

FY/Value range	Number of guarantees	Total value (£ million)
Total for year (excluding OII)	210	3,341
1998–99		
Short term		
Less than £10 million	40	102
£10 million-£20 million	5	70
£20 million-£30 million	2	45
£30 million-£40 million	3	100
£40 million-£50 million	0	0
£50 million-£100 million	0	0
£100 million+	2	1,580
Total	52	1,897
Long term		
Less than £10 million	66	295
£10 million-£20 million	29	391
£20 million-£30 million	15	358
£30 million-£40 million	2	69
£40 million-£50 million	2	83
£50 million-£100 million	2	114
£100 million+	1	193
Total	117	1,503
Total for year (excluding OII)	169	3,400
1999–2000		
Short term		
Less than £10 million	23	49
£10 million-£20 million	2	28
£20 million-£30 million	2	53
£30 million-£40 million	2	70
£40 million-£50 million	1	40
£50 million-£100 million	3	249
£100 million+	5	1,535
Total	38	2,024
Long Term		
Less than £10 million	77	341
£10 million to £20 million	27	376
£20 million to £30 million	18	467
£30 million to £40 million	9	292
£40 million to £50 million	2	89
£50 million to £100 million	6	407
£100 million+	3	915
Total	142	2,886
Total for year (excluding OII)	180	4,911
2000–01 year to date		
Short term		
Less than £10 million	37	54
£10 million-£20 million	3	43
£20 million-£30 million	1	24
£30 million-£40 million	1	31
£40 million-£50 million	0	0
£50 million-£100 million	0	0
£100 million+	0	0
Total	42	153
Long term		
Less than £10 million	55	260
£10 million-£20 million	27	401
£20 million-£30 million	13	319
£30 million-£40 million	7	227
£40 million-£50 million	2	87
£50 million-£100 million	3	208
£100 million+	6	1,384
Total	113	2,886
Total for year (excluding OII)	155	3,038

Dounreay

Mrs. Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the safety impact on residents in the North of Scotland of the decommissioning of Dounreay. [150938]

Mr. Hain: The United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) published last year a comprehensive plan for the decommissioning of the Dounreay site and its environmental restoration. A key objective of this plan is to remove the major hazards from the site as soon as practical.

UKAEA and its contractors are subject to strict safety procedures for the decommissioning process and are governed by the regulations and guidelines laid down by the independent regulators, the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate and the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Office of Gas and Electricity Markets

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will provide a more detailed breakdown of the £5,512,000 expenditure by Ofgem in 2000–01 on the regions. [151178]

Mr. Hain: Ofgem's budget for expenditure on regional activities in 2000–01 was £5,350,513 (the figure of £5,512,000 includes internal staff costs attaching to HQ staff responsible for the regions). Of this budget, Ofgem spent £2,771,592. Expenditure was principally divided between Ofgem's regional offices (£2,149,565), the Electricity Consumer Committees (£297,490) and a consumer helpline (£293,952). The remaining budget of £2,578,921 was transferred to the Gas and Electricity Consumer Council following its establishment in November 2000.

Trade Tariffs

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations his Department has made to the European Commission regarding the Everything but Arms proposal; and if he will make a statement. [150980]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 15 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 438.

Ultra-low Sulphur Fuel

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on his Department's policy on encouraging the provision of ultra-low sulphur fuel. [150688]

Mr. Hain: Ultra-low sulphur diesel is already widely available and my Department is monitoring the continued roll out of ultra-low sulphur petrol across the country. I have recently had a series of meetings with the industry to take this forward.

Vishakhapatnam Project

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what level of cover the Export Credits Guarantee Department has provided for the

Vishakhapatnam project in Andhra Pradesh; on what date this cover was provided; and if he will make a statement. [151205]

Mr. Byers: No cover has been provided by ECGD for the Vishakhapatnam project in Andhra Pradesh.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on which dates *(a)* he, *(b)* Ministers in his Department and *(c)* officials in the Export Credits Guarantee Department held meetings with (i) the HNP Corporation and (ii) International Power regarding the Vishakhapatnam project in Andhra Pradesh; if he will place the minutes of such meetings in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [151206]

Mr. Byers: ECGD was actively engaged in development of the Vishakhapatnam project from 1994 onwards, with a concentration of meetings and commercial negotiations with the Hinduja National Power Corporation Ltd. (HNPCL) and its legal advisers between December 1997 and December 1999. HNPCL is a joint venture consisting of the Hinduja Group and National Power. International Power evolved from National Power in October 2000.

It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies. Similarly, under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information it is not appropriate to place in the Library the minutes of such meetings which record positions given in confidence by commercial entities.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on what date and by which organisation the Export Credits Guarantee Department was first approached for export cover for the Vishakhapatnam project in Andra Pradesh; and if he will make a statement. [151207]

Mr. Byers: The Vishakhapatnam project was first proposed in 1993 and generated preliminary inquiries from National Power Plc, interested bankers and potential UK power equipment suppliers during 1994 and 1995.

National Power joined with the Hinduja Group to form Hinduja National Power Corporation Limited ("HNPCL"), sponsors of the project. HNPCL first approached ECGD for a formal indication of support for the UK element of the project on 8 September 1995.

White Paper (Leak Inquiry)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) who is heading the inquiry into the premature disclosure of the White Paper on Enterprise, Skills and Innovation; what are its terms of reference; and from whom evidence is to be sought; [151220]

(2) when, and by what means, he intends to report to the House on the outcome of his investigations into how the details of the White Paper on Enterprise Skills and Innovation appeared in the press before the White Paper had been published. [151216]

Mr. Byers: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North East (Dr. White) on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 283–84W.

Near Earth Objects Taskforce

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will respond to the report of the Near Earth Objects Task Force headed by Dr. Harry Atkinson. [151266]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's response to this report was published on Saturday 24 February. The Government are broadly in agreement with the majority of the Task Force's recommendations. The Government endorse the view of the Task Force that since the possible dangers posed by Near Earth Objects are not limited to any one nation, an international approach is essential. At a European level, the European Space Agency is to work to devise a European Strategy on Near Earth Objects. The Government are investigating with the OECD their offer to set up an international forum for discussion of and action on the threat to earth from Near Earth Objects. The British National Space Centre will continue to act as lead unit within Government on Near Earth Object policy.

Copies of the Government's response to the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Employment Relations Act (Clergy)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has declared that clergy can be deemed to be employees under section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999; and if he will make a statement. [150992]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I intend to publish later this year a discussion paper on all the legal issues relating to employment status as they affect the coverage of statutory employment rights. I envisage that the position of members of the clergy will be one of the issues raised. Any future proposals for changes in the legislation in this regard will be considered in light of responses to the discussion paper.

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150883]

Mr. Caborn: The constituency of North-East Derbyshire has benefited from a range of initiatives since May 1997 including:

Regional Selective Assistance—a discretionary grant which provides assistance towards capital projects which would not otherwise go ahead and will create or safeguard employment in an Assisted Area. Grants of £2.001 million given to support capital expenditure of £21.589 million to create 385 new jobs and safeguard a further 146 jobs.

Enterprise Grants—new initiative introduced in 2000. A discretionary grant to SMEs investing in capital projects which would not otherwise go ahead. £162,000 in grant offered to support project costs of £1.389 million. Grants expected to safeguard or create approximately 35 jobs.

Smart—discretionary grant available to SMEs to help them develop technologically innovative products and processes. Six offers of grant made worth £475,000 in total.

Business Link—the Business Link network provides a wide range of business advice and support to SMEs. It is not possible to isolate Business Link data for the North-East Derbyshire constituency area. However, from 1997 to date, Business Link North Derbyshire, which includes the North-East Derbyshire constituency, has helped a total of 4,987 businesses and assisted 1,422 business start ups.

Invest UK—an initiative to help investors wishing to set up business in the UK. No inward investors have come to North-East Derbyshire under this scheme since 1997. However, five investors have been attracted to Chesterfield, providing access to jobs for people living within the Chesterfield Travel to Work Area.

Regional Supply Office—an initiative which provides a range of support for supply chain development. It is not possible to isolate data for the North-East Derbyshire constituency alone. However companies from the north Derbyshire area have actively benefited from this initiative. £70 million of business opportunities have been matched to north Derbyshire companies and 73 companies have benefited from a European Regional Development Fund backed project designed to improve supply chain performance and make them more competitive.

European Regional Development Fund—in addition to its domestic initiatives, the Department of Trade and Industry is also the lead Department for European Structural Funds in the UK. Under ERDF Objective 2 (1997–99) North-East Derbyshire has benefited from 70 projects totalling £11.617 million. Under RECHAR II, four projects totalling £120,000 have been supported. These projects have delivered a range of business support and vocational training activities. In some instances, where projects cover the whole of the eligible programme area in the East Midlands, not all of the grant will have been spent inside the North-East Derbyshire constituency.

Industrial Injuries Benefit

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment he has made of the costs and benefits to business and the wider economic implications of privatising industrial injuries benefit. [149600]

Mr. Rooker: I have been asked to reply.

As part of our wider programme of Welfare Reform, we have examined the costs and benefits of an option for the modernisation of the industrial injuries scheme by replacing it with a no-fault compensation scheme fully funded by employers through the use of compulsory private insurance.

We continue to keep the industrial injuries scheme under review. Under the Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, all employers (with specific exceptions) carrying out business in Great Britain are required to take out cover against liability for work-related bodily injury and disease. The cost of such insurance is a matter for employers and the insurance industry.

HEALTH

Nurses' Allowances

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his policy for awarding extra allowances to nurses in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* East Sussex. [143433]

Mr. Denham: The introduction of cost of living supplements for qualified nurses and professions allied to medicine is one of a targeted range of initiatives designed to tackle the most serious recruitment and retention problems linked to low participation rates. Health authorities have been included where they have a staff market forces factor (MFF) of 117 or higher.

Further details of the staff MFF are included in the National Health Service Executive document "Resource Allocation: Weighted Capitation Formulas", which is available in the Library.

Hospital Building Programme

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the applications he has received in respect of the hospital building programme. [145770]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 467–82.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97, *(f)* 1997–98, *(g)* 1998–99, *(h)* 1999–2000 and *(i)* 2000–01, (I) his Department's total spending on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces or other means and (II) the cost of each individual project. [146590]

Ms Stuart: Copies of research reports are not routinely placed in the Library although a list giving details of market and opinion research undertaken by my Department is made available. A list of research projects carried out by the Department in the financial year 1999–2000 was placed in the Library in May 2000. A list of research projects in 2000–01 will be placed in the Library. These lists may not include all research projects, as some information is not centrally available.

A list of the Department's total spending for quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces or other means and the cost of each individual project for the years 1992–2001 could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

We are committed to consulting and involving the public to help inform both policy formulation and the delivery of better quality public service. Responsive public services are an important part of the Modernising Government initiative.

We only conduct or commission market or opinion research when it is justified by the needs of the policy or programme and is the most economical, efficient and effective way to achieve the purpose.

Administrative Costs

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget for hospital and community health services of *(a)* health authorities and *(b)* PCGs/PCTs was spent on administrative costs in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [147263]

Mr. Denham: Figures for management costs are published annually in the individual accounts of health authorities and primary care groups. The national management cost expenditure for England as a percentage of the expenditure on hospital and community health services in health authorities and primary care groups are given in the table.

		Management costs	
Year	*Expenditure (£000)*	*(£000)*	*Percentage*
Health authorities			
1996–97	18,947,018	604,429	3.2
1997–98	19,725,339	571,257	2.9
1997–98[1]	19,725,339	542,289	2.7
1998–99	21,426,832	541,621	2.5
1999–2000	24,644,333	511,811	[2]2.1
Primary care groups			
1999–2000	14,645,108	121,322	[2]0.83

[1] 1997–98 out-turn was re-based to reflect a change in the HA management costs definition in 1998–99 and thus ensure a consistent time series for measuring management costs savings.

[2] For 1999–2000 the primary care group expenditure and HA management costs are included within the health authority totals. Final adjustments are being made to these figures but these will not materially affect the percentage given. The figures prior to 1999–2000 include the general practitioner fundholding practice management allowance.

Source:

Health authority annual accounts 1996–97 to 1999–99

Health authority summarisation forms 1999–2000

Cervical Screening

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he has received from the Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening; and what proposals he has with respect to the hydrolysised DNA test. [147248]

Yvette Cooper: The Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening (ACCS) discussed the hydrolysised DNA assay (HDA) test developed by Dr. Andrew Sincock of King's College, and funded by Quest Cancer Research, at its meeting on 24 January 2001. Dr. Sincock provided a further paper on the test for the meeting. The ACCS advised that there are a large number of emerging technologies in the cervical screening field, and there was not enough evidence for the HDA test to warrant further consideration at this time.

Chiropody and Podiatry

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans there are to issue guidance from the NHS Executive on NHS chiropody and podiatry services; and if he will make a statement. [147266]

Mr. Hutton: We have no immediate plans to issue guidance. The NHS Plan sets out our commitment to over 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals working in the National Health Service by 2004 and this includes chiropodists and podiatrists.

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the locations where podiatric surgery is available to NHS patients; and if he will make a statement on availability. [147267]

Mr. Hutton: We will shortly be publishing the names of trusts offering podiatric surgery.

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many podiatric surgeons work in the NHS; and if he will make a statement on their contribution to best practice in foot healthcare. [147264]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect this information routinely at national level as these are rewarded under the speciality of "general surgery". We recognise the excellent contribution of podiatric surgeons to foot health.

Wheelchairs

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria govern the granting of wheelchairs for *(a)* indoor use and *(b)* outdoor use only. [147834]

Mr. Hutton: Health authorities and trusts set local criteria for the provision of wheelchairs. For indoor/outdoor powered wheelchairs, the local criteria are determined within the broad national framework set out in Health Service Guidance (HSG (96)34), copies of which are available in the Library.

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health at what Civil Service grade level decisions are taken to determine the criteria for supplying wheelchairs. [147849]

Mr. Hutton: Criteria are determined by health authorities and trusts at local level according to local circumstances.

Abattoirs

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered working abattoirs there were in England and Wales on 1 January. [148050]

Ms Stuart: I am informed by the Food Standards Agency that in England and Wales on 1 January there were 351 licensed red meat abattoirs and 121 licensed white meat abattoirs. It is understood that of these, 315 red meat abattoirs and 118 white meat abattoirs were operating during the first week of January 2001.

A number of licensed abattoirs may not be operating at any one time for a variety of reasons, such as seasonal operation, refurbishment or if their licence is in the process of being revoked.

Genetic Information

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the benefit of allowing insurance companies to have access to genetic information about individuals. [147026]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* While individuals cannot be required to take a genetic test by an insurance company, they may be asked to divulge the results of certain specific genetic tests already taken. We recognise that there is widespread unease about the possible unfair use of genetic information in general. Because of this we have asked the Human Genetics Commission to look at the wider social and ethical issues involved in the use of genetic data in insurance and to report their recommendations to Ministers.

Nurses and Doctors

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors were working in the National Health Service in January. [149169]

Mr. Denham: The latest information available is in the table.

National Health Service nurses and doctors in England as at 30 September 2000

At 30 September 2000	Whole-time equivalents	Numbers/ headcount
All Nursing staff[1]	358,860	462,050
Of which:		
Qualified nurses	266,990	335,950
All NHS doctors[2,3]	90,640	97,440

[1] Hospital and community health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff including learners and general medical service practice nurses.
[2] Includes hospital medical and dental staff and general practitioners.
[3] Whole-time equivalent general medical practitioners are estimated using the results from the 1992–93 GMP workload Survey.
Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest ten.
Source:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics.

NHS Vacancies

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* nationally and *(b)* by health authority, the number of NHS vacancies for (i) doctors, (ii) nurses, midwives and health visitors and (iii) the professions allied to medicine, for each year since 1990 for which figures are available. [150900]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is shown in the table.

Vacancies[1] for medical and dental staff, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and the professions allied to medicine, within National Health Service trusts for each health authority area, in England, as at 31 March each year

		Medical and Dental		Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting		Professions allied to medicine	
	Health authority	1999	2000	1999	2000	1999	2000
Total Vacancies[1]		530	760	7,150	9,870	860	1,510
QA2	Hillingdon	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	10	[3]—	[4]—
QA3	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	10	[4]—	220	250	20	30
QA4	Enfield and Haringey	10	[4]—	60	80	10	10
QA5	Redbridge and Waltham Forest	10	10	150	100	20	30
QA6	Bedfordshire	[4]—	[4]—	20	40	20	[4]—
QA7	Berkshire	[3]—	[4]—	100	140	10	30
QA8	Buckinghamshire	10	[4]—	120	140	10	10
QA9	Cambridge and Huntingdon[2]	[3]—	[5]—	[4]—	[5]—	[3]—	[5]—
QAA	Bexley and Greenwich	10	10	150	110	10	10
QAC	Bromley	10	10	100	120	10	[4]—
QAD	Croydon	10	[4]—	120	70	20	10
QAE	East Kent	10	20	110	300	10	20
QAF	West Kent	[4]—	[4]—	30	130	20	40
QAG	Kingston and Richmond	[3]—	10	[3]—	130	[3]—	20
QAH	Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	[4]—	50	210	490	10	80
QAJ	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	[4]—	[3]—	230	200	20	30
QAK	East Surrey	10	[4]—	120	10	10	[3]—
QAL	West Surrey	[4]—	[4]—	260	200	10	30
QAM	East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	10	[4]—	140	60	10	[4]—
QAN	West Sussex	[4]—	[4]—	100	250	10	30
QAP	Barking and Havering	10	20	50	100	10	30
QAQ	Barnet	[3]—	[4]—	60	70	50	10
QAR	Brent and Harrow	10	[4]—	130	110	10	30
QAT	Camden and Islington	[4]—	20	370	590	10	40
QAV	Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	[4]—	10	40	320	[4]—	40
QAW	East London and the City	20	20	480	380	40	30
QAX	North Essex	[4]—	10	170	240	30	50
QAY	South Essex	10	[4]—	80	30	[4]—	[4]—
QC1	South Lancashire	10	[4]—	[4]—	10	[4]—	[4]—
QC2	Liverpool	10	20	70	80	20	20

Vacancies[1] for medical and dental staff, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and the professions allied to medicine, within National Health Service trusts for each health authority area, in England, as at 31 March each year

		Medical and Dental		Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting		Professions allied to medicine	
	Health authority	1999	2000	1999	2000	1999	2000
QC3	Manchester	10	10	210	150	20	30
QC4	Morecambe bay	[4]—	10	[3]—	10	[3]—	[4]—
QC5	St. Helens and Knowsley	10	10	20	30	20	10
QC6	Salford and Trafford	[3]—	[4]—	70	50	10	[4]—
QC7	Sefton	[4]—	[4]—	30	30	[4]—	10
QC8	Stockport	10	[4]—	60	20	[4]—	10
QC9	West Pennine	10	10	50	70	20	10
QCA	East Norfolk	[4]—	[5]—	30	[5]—	[4]—	[5]—
QCC	Northamptonshire	10	10	80	50	[4]—	30
QCD	North West Anglia[2]	10	[5]—	40	[5]—	[4]—	[3]—
QCE	Oxfordshire	[4]—	[4]—	80	190	[4]—	10
QCF	Suffolk	[4]—	20	10	50	20	20
QCG	Barnsley	10	[4]—	[4]—	10	[3]—	[4]—
QCH	North Derbyshire	[3]—	[4]—	20	10	[4]—	[4]—
QCJ	South Derbyshire	[4]—	[4]—	[3]—	60	[3]—	20
QCK	Doncaster	[3]—	[4]—	20	20	10	10
QCL	Leicestershire	10	10	40	130	10	10
QCM	Lincolnshire	[4]—	[3]—	20	[4]—	10	[4]—
QCN	North Nottinghamshire	10	[4]—	30	20	10	[4]—
QCP	Nottingham	[4]—	10	110	110	10	20
QCQ	Rotherham	[4]—	10	20	10	[4]—	[4]—
QCR	Sheffield	[4]—	[4]—	80	90	[4]—	10
QCT	Bury and Rochdale	10	10	30	40	[3]—	10
QCV	North Cheshire	10	[4]—	20	30	10	10
QCW	South Cheshire	[4]—	[4]—	30	30	[4]—	10
QCX	East Lancashire	10	10	40	10	[4]—	[4]—
QCY	North West Lancashire	10	[4]—	20	130	10	10
QD1	North and Mid Hampshire	[4]—	10	110	100	10	20
QD2	Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	10	10	50	100	10	20
QD3	Southampton and SW Hampshire	10	10	140	210	[4]—	30
QD4	Isle of Wight	[3]—	[4]—	[3]—	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—
QD5	Somerset	[4]—	10	30	30	[4]—	[4]—
QD6	South and West Devon	20	10	30	20	[4]—	20
QD7	Wiltshire	[4]—	10	140	120	10	[4]—
QD8	Avon	10	10	80	300	10	20
QD9	Birmingham	10	30	300	350	20	40
QDA	Wigan and Bolton	10	10	20	80	[3]—	[4]—
QDC	Wirral	[3]—	[4]—	10	20	10	20
QDD	Bradford	[4]—	20	100	80	[4]—	10
QDE	County Durham	10	10	20	30	[4]—	10
QDF	East Riding	[4]—	10	20	20	[3]—	10
QDG	Gateshead and South Tyneside	10	10	10	30	[4]—	10
QDH	Leeds	[4]—	10	230	240	20	30
QDJ	Newcastle and North Tyneside	[4]—	10	110	260	10	10
QDK	North Cumbria	[4]—	10	[3]—	10	[3]—	[4]—
QDL	South Humber	20	10	30	20	20	20
QDM	Northumberland	10	10	50	40	[4]—	20
QDN	Sunderland	[4]—	[4]—	[3]—	10	[4]—	[4]—
QDP	Tees	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	30	[4]—	10
QDQ	Wakefield	[4]—	10	20	20	10	10
QDR	North Yorkshire	[4]—	10	20	10	[4]—	[4]—
QDT	Calderdale and Kirklees	10	20	40	50	[4]—	10
QDV	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	10	[4]—	20	[3]—	[4]—	[3]—
QDW	Dorset	[4]—	[4]—	20	20	10	[4]—
QDX	North and East Devon	[4]—	10	[4]—	60	[4]—	10
QDY	Gloucestershire	[4]—	[4]—	30	60	[4]—	10
QEA	Coventry	[4]—	10	10	70	[4]—	10
QEC	Dudley	[4]—	[4]—	[4]—	60	10	10
QED	Herefordshire	[4]—	[4]—	20	[4]—	[4]—	[3]—
QEE	Sandwell	[4]—	[4]—	60	80	10	20
EF	Shropshire	[4]—	[4]—	10	30	10	20
QEG	Solihull	[4]—	[3]—	[3]—	30	[3]—	[4]—
QEH	North Staffordshire	10	10	80	120	20	10
QEJ	South Staffordshire	[4]—	[4]—	40	20	20	10
QEK	Walsall	10	10	20	50	[4]—	20
QEL	Warwickshire	[4]—	[4]—	10	50	[3]—	[4]—
QEM	Wolverhampton	[4]—	[4]—	80	80	10	10
QEN	Worcester and District	10	10	70	30	10	20

Vacancies[1] for medical and dental staff, nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff and the professions allied to medicine, within National Health Service trusts for each health authority area, in England, as at 31 March each year

		Medical and Dental		Qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting		Professions allied to medicine	
	Health authority	1999	2000	1999	2000	1999	2000
QEP	East and North Hertfordshire	[4]—	10	90	150	[4]—	30
QEQ	West Hertfordshire	[4]—	10	110	190	20	40
QER	Cambridge[2]	[5]—	20	[5]—	350	[5]—	50
QET	Norfolk[2]	[5]—	[4]—	[5]—	70	[5]—	20

[1] Posts that had been vacant for three months or more as at 31 March of each year.
[2] In April 2000 Cambridge and Huntingdon HA, East Norfolk HA and Northwest Anglia HA merged to become Cambridge HA and Norfolk HA therefore the 1999 and 2000 information is not directly comparable.
[3] Denotes zero.
[4] Denotes less than five or greater than zero.
[5] Denotes not available.
Notes:
Figures are whole-time equivalents rounded to the nearest 10.
Source
Department of Health Vacancies Survey.

Health Funding

Miss Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of growth in real terms of NHS funding by 2004. [149129]

Mr. Denham: National Health Service expenditure is planned to increase by around 5.8 per cent. in real terms in each of the next three years. This is on top of the planned real-terms increase of 8.4 per cent. for this year. Over all four years, the NHS will benefit from an average annual increase in real terms of 6.4 per cent.—the largest ever sustained increase in NHS funding over such a period.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the planned funding will be for *(a)* the NHS and *(b)* personal social services in (i) Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland per head of population in 2000–01. [150693]

Mr. Hutton: Issues relating to Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the devolved Assemblies.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next General Election is called. [149316]

Ms Stuart: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Medical Training

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 51W, on training places, how many of the nurses in the NHS Plan will be *(a)* returning to nursing, *(b)* from overseas, *(c)* newly qualified and *(d)* others in each year from 2000 until 2004; and if he will make a statement. [149378]

Mr. Denham: The NHS Plan commitment is that between now and 2004 there will be 20,000 more nurses. Annual targets have not been set. The increase in staff will be made up of students coming out of training and a range of recruitment and retention initiatives including staff returning to practice, international recruitment and measures to reduce the number of staff leaving the National Health Service.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 264W, on medical school training places, how many of the *(a)* general practitioners and *(b)* consultants pledged in the NHS Plan will be (i) those returning to medical practice, (ii) doctors from overseas, (iii) doctors from elsewhere in the NHS and (iv) others, for each year from 2000 until 2004; and if he will make a statement. [149435]

Mr. Denham: The NHS Plan commitments are for 7,500 more consultants and 2,000 more general practitioners by 2004. Annual targets have not been set. The increase in staff will be made up of doctors coming out of training and a range of recruitment and retention initiatives including staff returning to practice, international recruitment and measures to reduce the number of staff leaving the National Health Service.

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 51W, on training places, how many of the therapists in the NHS Plan will be *(a)* returning to the profession, *(b)* professionals from overseas, *(c)* newly qualified professionals and *(d)* others, in each year from 2000 to 2004; and if he will make a statement. [149432]

Mr. Denham: The NHS Plan commitment is for an increase of 6,500 therapists and other health professionals by 2004. Annual targets have not been set. The increase in staff will be made up of students coming out of training and a range of recruitment and retention initiatives including staff returning to practice, international recruitment and measures to reduce the number of staff leaving the National Health Service.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what mechanisms he is putting in place to facilitate the recruitment of the overseas doctors identified in the NHS plan. [149805]

Mr. Denham: Over the last six months we have put into place an effective infrastructure capable of supporting the increased levels of international recruitment envisaged in the National Health Service.

A director of international recruitment has been appointed to implement a national strategy for international recruitment and co-ordinate the work of regional office leads in this area.

To practise in this country, all overseas doctors need to satisfy the registration requirements of the General Medical Council (GMC); doctors employed at consultant level also need to satisfy the Specialist Training Authority (STA) that they hold satisfactory specialist medical qualifications. The Department is working with the GMC, STA and the royal colleges to ensure overseas doctors are able to progress quickly and efficiently through the necessary registration procedures.

A Government to Government agreement was signed with Spain in November 2000 to promote closer working between the two countries. As part of this agreement, the first 63 nurses arrived in the North West on 19 January 2000 to work in four NHS trusts. Following this successful recruitment, the initiative is being extended to medical staff through a pilot project also being led by North West Region.

We are also investigating the recruitment of doctors from other countries who have a surplus of doctors, both within the European Economic Area and outside.

Autism/Crohn's Disease

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the incidence of *(a)* autism and *(b)* Crohn's disease among children aged (i) 18 months and (ii) three years in (1) 1987, (2) April 1992 and (3) April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [149626]

Mr. Denham: Autism is rarely diagnosed in children as young as 18 months. An estimated prevalence rate of classic autism of between four and five per 10,000 population is widely accepted. Prevalence of all autistic spectrum disorders is more difficult to estimate but could be as high as 91 per 10,000. These figures would imply that, in England in 1999, between 250 and 300 children of three years of age were affected by classic autism and that up to 5,500 children may have been affected by autistic spectrum disorders.

The incidence of Crohn's disease in childhood in the United Kingdom is not currently known. The disease is likely to be underdiagnosed in very young children, who cannot express specific symptoms as adults do.

Hospices

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what proportion of extra NHS funding for the period 2001–02 relative to the previous year is dedicated to special palliative services and hospice care; [149607]

(2) if he will calculate the level of NHS statutory funding for hospices in each of the last 10 years; and what proportion of total hospice operational costs the statutory funding covered in each of the last 10 years; [149608]

(3) what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the current level of NHS statutory funding for hospices; and if he will make a statement. [149609]

Yvette Cooper: 70 per cent. of specialist palliative care is provided by voluntary sector providers. Information on total hospice expenditure and the National Health Service contribution over the last 10 years is not available.

A current estimate of expenditure on hospice and specialist palliative care for adults is £300 million. Of this, £170 million is provided by the voluntary sector and £130 million by the NHS.

The NHS Cancer Plan acknowledged that

"hospices have rightly argued that the NHS should invest more in palliative care services".

In response, the Plan set out the commitment that by 2004 the NHS will invest an extra £50 million to end inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and to enable the NHS to make a realistic contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed levels of service. This will mean that, for the first time ever, NHS investment in specialist palliative care services will match that of the voluntary sector.

The NHS Plan Implementation Programme sets out key targets and milestones for the NHS for 2001–02 including the requirement for all cancer networks to develop and begin implementing costed strategic plans for palliative care in partnership with the voluntary sector. This process is now under way.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money has been paid to *(a)* Darien House Children's Hospice and *(b)* St. Catherine's Hospice in 2000–01. [150338]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* During 2000–01, Derien House Children's Hospice received statutory funding totalling £21,000 from the south and east Lancashire health authorities. St. Catherine's Hospice received £488,384 during the same period from the south Lancashire and north-west Lancashire health authorities.

Strokes

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) following the publication of "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation and the developing National Service Framework for older People" what priority will be accorded in *(a)* his Department's policy research and *(b)* the NHS Research and Development Programme to deal with strokes; and if he will make a statement; [149770]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 9 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 532–36W, on strokes, if he will indicate which of the stroke research projects listed are still in progress; and how much money was committed in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 for each one. [149784]

Yvette Cooper: Through the National Health Service research and development programme for cardiovascular disease and stroke, one of a number of time-limited research programmes, the Department made a major investment in stroke research, commissioning 57 projects at cost of £11.8 million. The Department continues to support stroke research through the NHS health technology assessment programme (HTA) and the

Department's policy research programme and other NHS research and development programmes. Research to underpin the national service frameworks is a priority for the Department and NHS research and development programmes. Future Departmental/NHS research on stroke is likely to be taken forward as part of the overall research strategy to support the National Service Framework for Older People and to meet the research needs of the National Institute of Clinical Excellence.

We are also providing support for stroke research through the Medical Research Council (MRC) who are always willing to consider well-designed research projects.

The following projects funded by the Department of Health and listed on 9 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 532–36W, are still in progress.

British Regional Heart Study: a prospective study into the causes of CHD, hypertension and stroke in a cohort of men now aged about 60–79

Professor Peter Whincup, St. George's Hospital Medical School

2000—£79,011

2001—£104,304

Contract renewed from end of 2000

A related study in a cohort of women of similar age

Professor Shah Ebrahim, University of Bristol

2000—£234,990

2002—£196,782

Contract finishes at end of 2001

The following ongoing projects are supported by the HTA Programme, and a figure is provided for the total cost of the projects. Figures for 2000 and 2001 spend are not available.

Project title: Early prediction of rehabilitation needs following acute stroke

Professor Philip Bath, University of Nottingham

Cost: £87,766

Start date November 1995 estimated publication early 2001

A controlled comparison of alternative strategies in stroke rehabilitation

Professor Lalit Kalra, Guy's, King's and St. Thomas' School of Medicine

Cost: £499,778

Start date April 95 estimated publication date late 2001

A systematic review of the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and barriers to implementation of thrombolytic and neuroprotective therapy for acute ischaemic stroke in the NHS

Professor Peter Sandercock, University of Edinburgh

Cost: £77,482

Start date Feb 2000 estimated publication date late 2002

What is the best imaging strategy for acute stroke?

Dr. Joanna Wardlaw, University of Edinburgh

Cost: £131,415

Start date Feb 1999 estimated publication date late 2002

Social-environmental, psychological and physical approaches to stroke rehabilitation

Professor David Barer, University of Newcastle

Cost: £371,264

Dec 1995 estimated publication late 2001

FOOD—A multicentre international randomised trial to evaluate percutaneous endoscopic gastrotomy and nasogastric tube feeding in patients admitted to hospital with a recent stroke

Dr. Martin Dennis, University of Edinburgh

Cost: £357,411

Feb 1999 estimated publication Late 2004

The MRC are supporting the following ongoing projects. Figures for 2000 and 2001 are not available, and overall cost for each project is provided

Surgical Trial in Intracerebral Haemorrhage

Professor A. D. Mendelow, University of Newcastle

Overall Cost: £892,712

End date 26 Feb 2001

Acute and Chronic Brain Injury—Mechanisms and Outcome

Wolfson Brain Imaging Centre

Professor J. D. Pickard, University of Cambridge

Cost: £1,583,194

End date 31 Dec 01

Functional and Metabolic Magnetic Resonance Imaging of the Brain During the Acute and Recovery Stages of Stroke

Professor P. M. Mathews, University of Oxford

Cost: £1,373,622

End date 31 Jan 02

The Cambridge Cerebrovascular Centre—genetic predisposition, vascular biology, Functional Imaging

Professor J. D. Pickard, University of Cambridge

Cost: £4,101,451

End date 31 Jan 02

Investigation of calpain function in slice cultures using noval fluorescent probes

Professor M. Bradley, University of Southampton

Cost: £156,100

End date 30 Sept 02

Brain Protection after Cerebral Ischaemia

Professor J. McCulloch, University of Glasgow

Cost: £221,212

End date 7 Nov 02

Intravenous Magnesium Efficacy in Stroke Study (IMAGES)

Dr. K. R. Lees, University of Glasgow

Cost: £1,394,970

End date 30 Sept 03

Asymptomatic Carotid Surgery Trial

Miss A Halliday, St. Mary's Hospital

Cost: £631,816

End date 30 March 04

Brain Damage Co-operative: from Mechanisms to Man

Professor Mcculloch, University of Glasgow

Cost: £209,586

End date 3 April 04

Neuronal pathways underlying CNS responses to injury and disease

Professor N. J. Rothwell, University of Manchester

Cost: £429,332

End date 31 May 04

The pathophysiology of clinical recovery and deterioration after ischaemic stroke: Studies with functional/physiologic

Professor J. Baron, University of Cambridge

Cost: £1,000,004

End date 30 Nov 04

The CRASH trial (Corticosteroid randomisation after significant head injury)

Dr. I. G. Roberts, Institute of Child Health (London)

Cost: £2,210,337

End date 31 Oct 05.

Insulin Pumps

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what his Department's most recent guidance is regarding use of insulin pumps; [149845]

(2) how many health authorities provide funding for insulin pump therapy. [149844]

Ms Stuart: There has been no comprehensive evaluation of the place of insulin pumps in diabetes treatment. The Department has not issued specific guidance on their use.

However, if resources allow, hospital consultants may prescribe equipment such as insulin pumps as part of National Health Service treatment. Health authorities may provide such equipment, prescribed as part of NHS treatment, either permanently or on loan, and in these circumstances no charge may be made. It is for health authorities to make decisions about the best use of their resources on the basis of clinical priorities and local needs.

No information is collected centrally on which health authorities provide funding for insulin pump therapy.

Care Home Standards

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the final version of the national minimum standards for homes for older people; and if he will make a statement on the consultation process, including who was consulted, in formulating compensatory quality standards contained in the final version. [149843]

Mr. Hutton: We consulted extensively on the proposals for care homes for older people, set out in the consultation document "Fit For The Future?"; the formal consultation period ended in January 2000. Following this, we consulted provider organisations, and in particular smaller providers, and other interested parties, and achieved broad agreement for the flexibilities we announced last year. These decisions should ensure that any improvements in the quality of care homes necessary will be achieved smoothly, and that stability in the care homes sector and sufficient capacity is maintained while changes are made. We intend to publish the finalised standards shortly.

Compulsory Hospital Admissions

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many compulsory admissions there were to hospital in England and Wales in each year between 1990 and 2000 under the powers in the Mental Health Act 1983. [150003]

Mr. Hutton: The Department collects and publishes information annually relating to patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983 on:

Admissions to hospitals under the Act by section of the Act, sex and category of disorder as defined and required under the Act.

Changes in patient's legal status while in hospital.

Patients in hospital at the end of the year, by sex and category of disorder.

The latest data are published by the Department, in a statistical bulletin "In-patients formally detained in hospitals under the Mental Health Act 1983 and other legislation, England: 1989–1990 to 1999–2000". The National Assembly for Wales published a separate statistical report entitled "Admission of patients to mental health facilities in Wales, 1999–2000 (including patients detained under the Mental Health Act 1983)". Both publications are available in the Library.

Loughborough General Hospital

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress he has made on the completion of the new Loughborough general hospital. [149982]

Yvette Cooper: The full business case for the development of Loughborough hospital was approved by the Trent Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive in November 1999. Since that time, Leicestershire and Rutland Healthcare NHS Trust has continued to develop the design and costing of the scheme and was able to confirm in December 2000 that the project programme was on target.

Outstanding issues around planning conditions pertaining to the main hospital site entrance are being resolved.

Work is planned to start on site at the end of February 2001, with a completion and in-use date forecast for early February 2003. It is planned that the bulk of the capital spend will be in 2000–01(£4,020,000) and 2002 (£4,306,000).

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of the walk-in centre at Loughborough general hospital on general practitioners. [149978]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has put in place systems to gather monthly management information on the operation of walk-in centres. In addition, it has commissioned a full national evaluation led by Dr. Chris Salisbury at University of Bristol. This began on 1 June 2000 and will report at the end of 2001. Each of the 40 pilot sites nationally is also undertaking local evaluation.

In Loughborough, general practitioners and primary care group support was achieved on the basis that the impact of Loughborough walk-in centre on local GP services would be assessed. To achieve a realistic and effective evaluation a comparison of the "before" and "after" opening positions was considered essential.

Leicestershire Health Authority's Public Health Department began collecting the "before" data in January 2000. When Loughborough walk-in centre opened on July 3 2000, data began to be collected on the impact of the

centre on local GP surgeries, the GP out of hours co-operative and a range of other healthcare provider sites.

In order to allow for seasonal fluctuations in both the student population and general healthcare demand, data will continue to be collected for this particular evaluation until the end of June 2001. These will then be analysed between July and September 2001.

Leicestershire Health Authority

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average level of increase was in percentage terms for health authorities between 1992–93 and 2000–01; and what has been the percentage increase for Leicestershire health authority; [149983]

(2) how much funding would be received by Leicestershire health authority were it funded at 100 per cent. of its weighted capitation. [149984]

Mr. Denham: The table shows the average cash increase for health authorities between 1992–93 and 2000–01 and the cash increase for Leicestershire health authority.

Year	*Average cash increase in percentage terms*	*Leicestershire health authority cash increase in percentage terms*
1992–93	9.52	8.50
1993–94	2.72	3.40
1994–95	5.38	4.70
1995–96	4.40	5.35
1996–97[1]	3.86	4.51
1997–98	3.93	4.28
1998–99	4.70	5.19
1999–2000[2]	6.60	7.15
2000–01	8.88	9.59

[1] Allocations prior to 1996–97 were to regional health authorities, who determined health authority shares

[2] Figures for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. These figures are not strictly comparable with earlier years which cover hospital and community health services only

Leicestershire health authority's weighted capitation target for 2000–01 is £586.39 million.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in Leicestershire health authority in each year between 1987–88 and the most recent year for which figures are available. [149980]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows the average daily number of available beds in wards open overnight in the Leicestershire health authority area from 1987–88 to 1999–2000. Figures are taken from the annual Korner return KH03 "bed availability and occupancy".

Year	*Total number of available beds*
1987–88	4,796
1988–89	4,696
1989–90	4,436
1990–91	4,050
1991–92	3,856
1992–93	3,537
1993–94	3,566
1994–95	3,308
1995–96	3,606
1996–97	3,258
1997–98	3,213
1998–99	3,187
1999–2000	3,270

Source:
DH form KH03, SH3

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were registered in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01, with general practitioner practices in the Leicestershire health authority area; and what proportion of patients are of pensionable age in each case. [149994]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is in the table.

Numbers of patients of Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPES)[1] in Leicestershire health authority, 1 October 1996 to 1999

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
All patients	949,256	953,375	964,625	953,521
Patients 65+	139,879	140,701	141,469	139,765
Percentage of total patients 65+	14.7	14.8	14.7	14.7

[1] UPEs includes Unrestricted Principals, PMS Salaried GPs and PMS Contracted GPs

Source:
General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Waiting Lists

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) in which health authorities more than one patient in eight who are waiting for in-patient treatment has waited over one year; [150319]

(2) which health authorities have more patients waiting over one year for in-patient treatment now than on 1 May 1997. [150379]

Mr. Denham: No more than one patient in eight is waiting over one year for in-patient treatment in any health authority in England.

The health authorities which have more patients waiting over one year for in-patient treatment now than on 1 May 1997 are shown in the table.

Patients waiting for elective admission, March 1997 and December 2000

Region	*Health authority*
Northern and Yorkshire	Bradford
	Calderdale and Kirklees
	Durham
	East Riding
	Gateshead and South Tyneside
	Leeds
	Newcastle and North Tyneside
	North Cumbria
	North Yorkshire
	Northumberland
	Sunderland
	Tees
	Wakefield

Patients waiting for elective admission, March 1997 and December 2000

Region	*Health authority*
Trent	Leicestershire
	North Nottinghamshire
West Midlands	Birmingham
	Coventry
	Dudley
	Herefordshire
	North Staffordshire
	Sandwell
	Shropshire
	Solihull
	South Staffordshire
	Walsall
	Warwickshire
	Wolverhampton
	Worcestershire
North West	Bury and Rochdale
	East Lancashire
	Manchester
	Morecambe Bay
	North Cheshire
	North West Lancashire
	Salford and Trafford
	Sefton
	South Cheshire
	South Lancashire
	St. Helens and Knowsley
	Stockport
	West Pennine
	Wigan and Bolton
	Wirral
Eastern	Bedfordshire
	Cambridgeshire
	East and North Hertfordshire
	Norfolk
	North Essex
	South Essex
	Suffolk
	West Hertfordshire
London	Barking and Havering
	Bexley and Greenwich
	Bromley
	Camden and Islington
	Croydon
	Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster
	Kingston and Richmond
	Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth
South East	Berkshire
	Buckinghamshire
	East Kent
	East Surrey
	East Sussex Brighton and Hove
	North and Mid Hampshire
	Northamptonshire
	Portsmouth and South East Hampshire
	Southampton and South West Hampshire
	West Kent
	West Surrey
	West Sussex
South West	Avon
	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly
	Dorset
	Gloucestershire
	North and East Devon
	Somerset
	South and West Devon
	Wiltshire

[1] Ordinary and day case admissions combined.

Note:

Data have been given from March 1997 as these are the nearest available data to May 1997. Data were not collected on a monthly basis at March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health form QF01

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics his Department collects on the number of patients who die while on waiting lists for general surgery. [151253]

Mr. Denham: The Department does not collect statistics on how many patients die while waiting for surgery. Data are collected on how many patients are removed from the waiting list without being treated but these are not broken down into the reasons why.

Health Service Inequalities

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to tackle inequalities in health services. [150378]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Plan published in July 2000 sets out targets for the National Health Service and social services which are focused on delivering fast, convenient and people centred services. They are aimed at providing the highest standards of care, tackling the major causes of disease and reducing inequalities in health and in access to health services. These include national health inequalities targets to narrow the gap between socio-economic groups and between deprived areas and the rest of the country, a review of the existing weighted capitation formula with reducing inequalities a key criterion for allocating NHS resources, new partnerships between health and social services to tackle inequalities, improved access to primary care for all patients, and more and better screening programmes.

E.coli

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many outbreaks of E.coli there were in *(a)* 1996, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1998, *(d)* 1999 and *(e)* 2000; how many people were affected in each year; and how many fatalities were linked to these outbreaks. [150318]

Ms Stuart: The table gives details of all general outbreaks of verocytotoxin-producing E.coli O157 infection in England and Wales reported to the Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre and Laboratory of Enteric Pathogens in each year from 1996 to 2000. The table also shows the number of laboratory-confirmed cases and the number of fatalities linked to these outbreaks.

Verocytotoxin-producing Escherichia coli 0157: General outbreaks in England and Wales, 1996 to 2000

	Outbreaks	Outbreaks—number of laboratory confirmed cases	Outbreaks—number of people who died
(a) 1996	14	69	0
(b) 1997	25	153	2
(c) 1998	17	72	0
(d) 1999	16	209	2
(e) 2000[1]	24	170	1
Total	96	673	5

[1] Provisional data

Sources of data:

1. G. A. Willshaw, T. Cheasty, H. R. Smith, S. J. O'Brien, G. K. Adak. Verocytotoxin—producing Escherichia coli (VTEC) 0157 and other VTEC from human infections in England and Wales: 1995 to 1998. Journal of Medical Microbiology 2001, 50: 135–142.
2. PHLS Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre. Outbreaks of Infectious Intestinal Disease Database (data for 1999 and 2000).

Cruse Bereavement Care

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with Cruse Bereavement Care concerning the role they might play in alleviating the distress of relatives following the removal of internal organs from deceased people. [R] [150400]

Mr. Denham: Officials have contacted Cruse Bereavement Care to obtain their consent for NHS Direct to provide their national phone number if a specific request to be put in touch with the organisation was made by a caller inquiring about the removal of organs following post-mortem.

Health Authority Allocations

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list, for each health authority, the difference between its capitation targets and allocation in cash and percentage terms *(a)* prior to and *(b)* following their 2001–02 allocations. [150528]

Mr. Denham: The 2001–02 distance from capitation targets in cash and percentage terms prior to and following allocations are listed for each health authority in the table.

	2000–01 distance from target (£000s)		2000–01 distance from target (%)	
Health authority	[1]Prior to allocations	After allocations	[1]Prior to allocations	After allocations
Avon	−8,304	−8,757	−1.28	−1.25
Barking and Havering	4,150	4,332	1.50	1.45
Barnet	−6,774	−7,131	−2.90	−2.82
Barnsley	−5,367	−5,616	−3.05	−2.95
Bedfordshire	−16,160	−16,969	−4.54	−4.40
Berkshire	−17,361	−18,213	−3.46	−3.36
Bexley and Greenwich	22,157	23,230	7.51	7.27
Birmingham	8,941	9,395	1.21	1.18
Bradford	−3,473	−3,604	−1.01	−0.96
Brent and Harrow	−196	−230	−0.06	−0.06
Bromley	3,349	3,488	1.69	1.63
Buckinghamshire	−12,226	−12,845	−2.92	−2.83
Bury and Rochdale	−1,401	−1,455	−0.51	−0.49
Calderdale and Kirklees	2,104	2,205	0.53	0.51
Cambridgeshire	−14,265	−14,973	−3.19	−3.10
Camden and Islington	818	820	0.23	0.21
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	3,913	4,094	1.15	1.12
County Durham	−5,725	−5,971	−1.25	−1.20
Coventry	−1,850	−1,910	−0.83	−0.79
Croydon	−3,115	−3,237	−1.38	−1.33
Doncaster	2,451	2,623	1.15	1.14
Dorset	13,949	14,599	2.96	2.86
Dudley	−1,116	−1,157	−0.55	−0.53
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	−9,859	−10,384	−1.82	−1.77
East and North Hertfordshire	−3,245	−3,432	−1.00	−0.98
East Kent	11,663	12,225	2.78	2.69
East Lancashire	1,108	1,194	0.29	0.29
East London and the City	−43,575	−45,631	−7.38	−7.15
East Riding	5,779	6,087	1.50	1.46
East Surrey	5,822	6,074	2.23	2.15
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	16,584	17,372	3.11	3.01
Enfield and Haringey	−3,822	−4,000	−1.06	−1.03
Gateshead and South Tyneside	871	953	0.32	0.32
Gloucestershire	13,409	14,047	3.83	3.71
Herefordshire	265	272	0.24	0.23
Hillingdon	−1,561	−1,626	−0.92	−0.88
Isle of Wight	7,372	7,725	7.96	7.70
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	−41,390	−43,475	−11.23	−10.90
Kingston and Richmond	1,671	1,724	0.71	0.68
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	−3,939	−3,981	−0.62	−0.58
Leeds	6,623	6,984	1.31	1.27
Leicestershire	−14,597	−15,334	−2.51	−2.44
Lincolnshire	−1,443	−1,533	−0.33	−0.33

Health authority	2000–01 distance from target (£000s)		2000–01 distance from target (%)	
	[1]Prior to allocations	After allocations	[1]Prior to allocations	After allocations
Liverpool	11,774	12,371	3.23	3.13
Manchester	10,866	11,467	2.96	2.89
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	16,360	17,155	3.72	3.60
Morecambe Bay	9,631	10,103	4.51	4.37
Newcastle and North Tyneside	8,229	8,631	2.32	2.25
Norfolk	−2,368	−2,514	−0.46	−0.46
North and East Devon	4,278	4,456	1.32	1.27
North and Mid Hampshire	−572	−630	−0.18	−0.18
North Cheshire	4,862	5,093	2.29	2.22
North Cumbria	−169	−168	−0.08	−0.07
North Derbyshire	1,499	1,561	0.61	0.58
North Essex	−5,906	−6,246	−1.06	−1.04
North Nottinghamshire	−1,756	−1,843	−0.67	−0.65
North Staffordshire	−3,832	−4,010	−1.14	−1.10
North West Lancashire	5,417	5,671	1.57	1.52
North Yorkshire	−3,580	−3,795	−0.75	−0.74
Northamptonshire	1,078	1,149	0.30	0.30
Northumberland	1,596	1,712	0.75	0.75
Nottingham	−6,985	−7,280	−1.61	−1.55
Oxfordshire	−12,133	−12,752	−3.23	−3.14
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	1,839	1,942	0.51	0.49
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	10,925	11,435	3.51	3.39
Rotherham	−854	−883	−0.49	−0.47
Salford and Trafford	8,431	8,831	2.56	2.48
Sandwell	−259	−222	−0.12	−0.09
Sefton	8,749	9,162	4.32	4.18
Sheffield	11,153	11,732	2.89	2.81
Shropshire	−3,925	−4,118	−1.43	−1.39
Solihull	1,254	1,310	0.95	0.92
Somerset	2,787	2,894	0.88	0.85
South and West Devon	11,750	12,310	2.90	2.80
South Cheshire	7,154	7,467	1.64	1.58
South Derbyshire	−7,539	−7,919	−1.97	−1.91
South Essex	−6,055	−6,372	−1.29	−1.26
South Humber	5,390	5,721	2.57	2.52
South Lancashire	1,942	2,013	0.96	0.92
South Staffordshire	−4,518	−4,755	−1.27	−1.24
Southampton and South West Hampshire	1,280	1,342	0.36	0.35
St. Helen's and Knowsley	−1,326	−1,381	−0.51	−0.49
Stockport	−849	−895	−0.44	−0.43
Suffolk	4,720	4,916	1.10	1.06
Sunderland	−816	−809	−0.37	−0.34
Tees	−2,487	−2,522	−0.61	−0.57
Wakefield	63	96	0.03	0.04
Walsall	−4,491	−4,653	−2.46	−2.35
Warwickshire	3,744	3,909	1.19	1.14
West Hertfordshire	−358	−414	−0.10	−0.11
West Kent	4,810	4,998	0.79	0.76
West Pennine	−5,896	−6,170	−1.79	−1.73
West Surrey	7,055	7,354	1.80	1.74
West Sussex	−1,758	−1,893	−0.34	−0.34
Wigan and Bolton	−12,370	−12,959	−2.93	−2.84
Wiltshire	1,798	1,873	0.48	0.46
Wirral	8,963	9,398	3.77	3.65
Wolverhampton	−1,531	−1,570	−0.87	−0.82
Worcestershire	704	724	0.22	0.20

[1] Distances from target have changed since 2000–01 as a result of adjustments to initial 2000–01 allocations and changes to data, ie the updating of population and other data sources used in the weighted capitation formula.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what basis health authorities were selected for a Years of Life Lost allocation; how Years of Life Lost allocations took into account the age-profile of the population; which health authorities received Years of Life Lost allocations; and which health authorities would qualify for the allocation had it been weighted for the age profile of the population. [150527]

Mr. Denham: Allocations to health authorities for 2001–02 include an adjustment based on rates of years of life lost (YLL) for circulatory diseases, all cancers, accidents, suicides and undetermined injury. £70 million was shared between the 47 health authorities with rates at or above 137 on the YLL index. The health authorities that received the YLL adjustment are shown in the table.

The YLL index takes account of the age structure of the population. Other things being equal, a health authority with an older population is likely to have a higher YLL rate than a health authority with a younger population.

Health inequalities adjustment for Health Authorities at or above 137 on the YLL index

Health Authority	*£ million*
Barnsley	925
Bradford	1,686
Bury and Rochdale	1,528
Calderdale and Kirklees	1,967
Camden and Islington	1,358
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,744
County Durham	2,424
Coventry	1,067
Doncaster	1,106
Dudley	1,010
East Kent	1,962
East Lancashire	2,069
East Riding	2,054
Gateshead and South Tyneside	1,476
Herefordshire	560
Isle of Wight	436
Leeds	2,471
Lincolnshire	2,301
Liverpool	1,997
Manchester	2,013
Morecambe Bay	1,101
Newcastle and North Tyneside	1,778
North Cheshire	1,151
North Cumbria	1,226
North Derbyshire	1,308
North Nottinghamshire	1,376
North Staffordshire	1,752
North West Lancashire	1,748
Northumberland	1,175
Nottingham	2,124
Rotherham	854
Salford and Trafford	1,723
Sandwell	1,180
Sefton	998
Sheffield	1,787
Shropshire	1,450
South Humber	1,188
South Lancashire	1,081
St. Helen's and Knowsley	1,374
Sunderland	1,112
Tees	2,166
Wakefield	1,190
Walsall	900
West Pennine	1,827
Wigan and Bolton	2,158
Wirral	1,246
Wolverhampton	872
England	70,000

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the current year's allocation to health authorities was directed towards moving health authorities closer to their capitation targets; and what the *(a)* cash and *(b)* percentage difference between allocation and capitation target was in each case, in each of the last three years. [150529]

Mr. Denham: Health authorities received an additional £2.79 billion with 2000–01 allocations. £110 million was directed specifically towards moving under target health authorities closer to their capitation targets.

The cash and percentage differences between allocation and capitation target (distance from target) for each of the last three years are shown in the table.

	Distance from target (£000)			*Distance from target (percentage)*		
Health authority	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*[1]	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[1]	*2000–01*
Avon	1,720	−6,924	−7,351	0.40	−1.17	−1.13
Barking and Havering	1,660	−1,934	2,573	0.88	−0.75	0.92
Barnet	8,333	4,594	447	5.66	2.25	0.20
Barnsley	−6,088	−4,786	−5,379	−5.24	−2.98	−3.05
Bedfordshire	−8,397	−12,427	−13,980	−3.61	−3.82	−3.90
Berkshire	−12,355	−15,619	−15,847	−3.83	−3.50	−3.17
Bexley and Greenwich	13,209	14,573	18,097	6.30	5.31	6.03
Birmingham	−165	2,656	4,390	−0.03	0.39	0.59
Bradford	−7,528	−5,542	−3,853	−3.18	−1.77	−1.11
Brent and Harrow	15,686	9,296	7,051	7.02	3.09	2.11
Bromley	2,062	−498	214	1.55	−0.27	0.11
Buckinghamshire	−2,276	−9,343	−11,999	−0.86	−2.48	−2.86
Bury and Rochdale	−5,816	−3,241	−1,049	−3.07	−1.29	−0.38
Calderdale and Kirklees	−2,621	1,619	−671	−0.95	0.44	−0.17
Cambridge and Huntingdon[2]	−3,614	−2,663	n/a	−2.08	−1.13	n/a
Cambridgeshire[2]	n/a	n/a	−10,687	n/a	n/a	−2.36
Camden and Islington	15,494	6,949	6,701	6.56	2.22	1.92
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	410	6,454	5,506	0.18	2.08	1.62
County Durham	−10,393	−9,737	−8,724	−3.36	−2.31	−1.89
Coventry	−4,955	−7,182	−6,172	−3.36	−3.45	−2.71
Croydon	17	−2,556	−2,517	0.01	−1.25	−1.12
Doncaster	−5,037	−276	−427	−3.50	−0.14	−0.20
Dorset	8,501	9,771	9,035	2.66	2.24	1.89
Dudley	−1,521	−1,840	−3,044	−1.12	−1.00	−1.50
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	11,284	−2,835	−133	3.24	−0.59	−0.03
East and North Hertfordshire	3,186	−2,118	−4,059	1.58	−0.73	−1.26
East Kent	−693	7,108	11,031	−0.24	1.83	2.62
East Lancashire	−7,207	−2,389	−2,822	−2.77	−0.68	−0.73
East London and The City	−16,068	−24,117	−20,945	−4.20	−4.69	−3.69
East Norfolk[2]	−1,639	3,198	n/a	−0.60	0.85	n/a
East Riding	−5,446	−2,397	−159	−2.04	−0.66	−0.04
East Surrey	7,197	5,013	5,777	4.09	2.10	2.20
East Sussex Brighton and Hove	3,958	10,634	13,072	1.07	2.15	2.43
Enfield and Haringey	3,803	1,731	1,464	1.55	0.54	0.41

Health authority	Distance from target (£000)			Distance from target (percentage)		
	1998–99	1999–2000[1]	2000–01[1]	1998–99	1999–2000[1]	2000–01
Gateshead and South Tyneside	–1,497	–1,954	–2,889	–0.79	–0.76	–1.03
Gloucestershire	7,708	12,408	10,564	3.28	3.85	2.99
Herefordshire	393	61	–319	0.55	0.06	–0.29
Hillingdon	179	658	–963	0.15	0.43	–0.56
Isle of Wight	5,407	6,326	6,603	8.64	7.35	7.02
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	–11,480	–27,917	–27,876	–5.13	–8.88	–7.99
Kingston and Richmond	9,988	4,593	5,795	6.81	2.25	2.50
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	1,499	–3,567	12,253	0.34	–0.62	1.96
Leeds	–5,231	1,203	3,114	–1.52	0.26	0.61
Leicestershire	–13,432	–13,466	–16,280	–3.42	–2.54	–2.78
Lincolnshire	–360	2,528	–3,733	–0.13	0.64	–0.86
Liverpool	612	7,149	6,603	0.24	2.09	1.78
Manchester	5,013	7,758	7,498	2.04	2.28	2.02
Merton Sutton and Wandsworth	15,223	9,553	8,245	4.96	2.31	1.84
Morecambe Bay	6,669	8,671	7,291	4.60	4.40	3.36
Newcastle and North Tyneside	–1,059	1,752	3,206	–0.42	0.53	0.89
Norfolk[2]	n/a	n/a	186	n/a	n/a	0.04
North and East Devon	4,970	5,434	4,395	2.30	1.84	1.36
North and Mid Hampshire	6,626	3,913	1,612	3.17	1.36	0.51
North Cheshire	5,838	3,561	2,200	4.00	1.80	1.02
North Cumbria	–249	111	434	–0.17	0.06	0.20
North Derbyshire	329	–575	–1,090	0.20	–0.25	–0.44
North Essex	–8,593	–3,480	–436	–2.27	–0.69	–0.08
North Nottinghamshire	–4,691	–2,849	–5,763	–2.61	–1.19	–2.16
North Staffordshire	–6,157	–8,156	–5,796	–2.70	–2.62	–1.70
North West Anglia[2]	–5,046	–4,748	n/a	–2.73	–1.86	n/a
North West Lancashire	–9,296	–1,356	54	–3.81	–0.42	0.02
North Yorkshire	40	–1,736	–2,462	0.01	–0.40	–0.52
Northamptonshire	1,085	4,847	3,079	0.43	1.51	0.87
Northumberland	–915	–325	–661	–0.64	–0.17	–0.31
Nottingham	–10,487	–10,151	–10,245	–3.53	–2.53	–2.34
Oxfordshire	–4,833	–9,569	–8,166	–2.02	–2.84	–2.19
Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	2,037	–917	60	0.85	–0.28	0.02
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	9,808	13,384	11,902	4.43	4.72	3.82
Rotherham	–3,746	–1,079	–1,970	–3.03	–0.67	–1.12
Salford and Trafford	–2,105	6,440	5,725	–0.93	2.13	1.72
Sandwell	–1,285	–2,795	–2,060	–0.87	–1.34	–0.91
Sefton	1,361	1,987	5,688	0.94	1.05	2.77
Sheffield	4,190	5,419	4,686	1.57	1.50	1.19
Shropshire	–2,145	–905	–3,616	–1.19	–0.36	–1.32
Solihull	1,553	1,598	496	1.89	1.32	0.37
Somerset	1,476	2,866	1,843	0.70	1.00	0.58
South and West Devon	3,033	6,989	5,998	1.09	1.86	1.45
South Cheshire	948	2,168	4,007	0.32	0.54	0.91
South Derbyshire	–2,514	–7,068	–5,958	–1.01	–2.03	–1.56
South Essex	–9,292	–14,809	–7,240	–2.97	–3.42	–1.54
South Humber	4,178	6,625	4,180	2.96	3.44	1.97
South Lancashire	4,314	4,328	4,249	3.22	2.38	2.10
South Staffordshire	1,362	2,721	–508	0.57	0.85	–0.14
Southampton and South West Hampshire	–209	312	178	–0.09	0.10	0.05
St. Helen's and Knowsley	–4,463	–1,013	–2,173	–2.68	–0.43	–0.84
Stockport	–4,820	802	926	–3.68	0.46	0.48
Suffolk	7,332	6,452	3,950	2.68	1.65	0.92
Sunderland	–4,597	–1,530	–2,255	–3.02	–0.76	–1.02
Tees	–7,819	–3,681	–4,624	–2.82	–0.99	–1.13
Wakefield	2,485	771	1,031	1.66	0.37	0.45
Walsall	–4,844	–2,093	–2,826	–3.87	–1.27	–1.55
Warwickshire	7,918	7,616	5,177	3.76	2.66	1.64
West Hertfordshire	6,118	4,980	1,788	2.67	1.59	0.52
West Kent	6,779	3,636	5,974	1.70	0.65	0.97
West Pennine	–8,940	–4,898	–5,594	–3.81	–1.62	–1.69
West Surrey	14,279	8,531	10,150	5.49	2.35	2.60
West Sussex	–812	–3,555	–2,609	–0.24	–0.76	–0.51
Wigan and Bolton	–13,922	–12,069	–12,351	–4.85	–3.13	–2.92
Wiltshire	8,856	5,699	7,725	3.65	1.68	2.07
Wirral	–2,500	4,365	7,386	–1.50	1.97	3.08
Wolverhampton	–2,095	–2,351	–3,311	–1.74	–1.45	–1.85
Worcestershire	5,129	5,228	1,981	2.36	1.75	0.60

[1] Figures for 1999–2000 onwards are for unified allocations, which cover hospital and community health services, prescribing and discretionary family health services. These figures are not strictly comparable with those for previous years which cover hospital and community health services only.

[2] Figures are not comparable due to the merger of the former North West Anglia into the new health authorities of Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Health Authority Spending

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding has been spent in each region on voluntary sector and prevention work by health authorities in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [150391]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is not held centrally in the form requested and cannot be collected without incurring disproportionate cost.

The NHS Plan sets out the actions needed by the National Health Service to tackle the causes of ill health. The NHS must work in partnership with other agencies including the voluntary sector.

Doctors' Hours

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS junior doctors in England are routinely working hours above those set out in the New Deal on working hours. [150388]

Mr. Denham: At 31 September 2000, 38.4 per cent. of junior doctors in England were working hours which did not comply with the New Deal hours limits and rest requirements. Monitoring figures for 31 March 2001 will be available in May.

Mobile Phone Technologies

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been commissioned into the health implications of mobile phone technologies since the publication of the Stewart report. [150178]

Yvette Cooper: The Stewart report on mobile phones and health made a recommendation that a substantial research programme should be set up under the aegis of a demonstrably independent panel and financed by the mobile phone companies and the public sector. This programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, was announced in December 2000 and was launched at a scientific workshop in London on Friday 9 February when the first call for proposals was issued. The research will be undertaken under the direction of an independent programme management committee chaired by Sir William Stewart.

The Department is also continuing to provide financial support for the World Health Organisation International Electromagnetic Fields (EMF) Project which is comprehensively reviewing EMF effects, including those of radio waves.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact of mobile telephone masts on elderly people's and children's health; and what plans he has to carry out research on this in the future. [150991]

Yvette Cooper: The Stewart report on mobile phones and health was published in May 2000. This rigorous and comprehensive assessment of existing research considered the possible effects on health of mobile phones and base stations (masts). The report concluded that the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to health of people living near base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines. However, in view of the concerns expressed by residents near base stations and the indirect effect on people's wellbeing, the report made a number of recommendations aimed at improving the public consultation and the availability of information about the siting of base stations.

In its summary the Stewart group commented that the upsurge of mobile phone technology should be matched by good quality research. It recommended that a substantial research programme should be set up under the aegis of a demonstrably independent panel and financed by the mobile phone companies and the public sector. This programme, jointly funded by Government and industry, was announced in December 2000 and was launched at a scientific workshop in London on Friday 9 February when the first call for proposals was issued. The research will be undertaken under the direction of an independent programme management committee chaired by Sir William Stewart.

Readmitted Patients

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients, by health authority, were readmitted to hospital within one month of their discharge in the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [150392]

Mr. Denham: Information for 1998–99 on emergency readmission to hospital within 28 days of discharge was published in tabular form in July 2000 in "Quality and performance in the NHS: NHS Performance Indicators", copies of which are available in the Library. Standardised rates for all health authorities for 1998–99 and for the years 1997–98 and 1996–97 are available on the Department of Health's website, http://www.doh.gov.uk/nhsperformanceindicators/hlpi2000/h1137t.html

Figures for earlier years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

TB Inoculations

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the injection rates for TB have been in each year since 1990; what percentage of the United Kingdom population has been inoculated against TB in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [150396]

Yvette Cooper: Information about immunisation against tuberculosis (BCG) is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 1999–2000". A copy of the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0026.htm.

Although the routine schools immunisation programme for 10 to 14-year-olds was suspended in September 1999 due to severe manufacturing problems encountered by the sole United Kingdom licensed source, Celltech Medeva, BCG vaccine against tuberculosis has always been available for those individuals at higher risk of TB. On 19 July, the Department announced that there is now sufficient supply of vaccine to initially restart the routine schools programme in the London area, where the highest rate of tuberculosis in the country currently occurs.

The Department is doing all it can to secure a robust supply of UK licensed and batch released BCG vaccine, and will announce as soon as possible when the routine schools programme can resume across the country. All

those who missed their BCG vaccination due to the suspension of the programme will be recalled as part of a catch-up programme.

Dystonia

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for improved training of medical staff and general practitioners in diagnosing and treating dystonia; and how much is spent annually on research into the causes and treatment of dystonia. [150423]

Mr. Denham: All doctors, including general practitioners, and medical staff receive training designed to ensure they have the basic skills, knowledge and experience to provide quality services to patients and to respond to changing patterns of disease and modern methods of health care delivery.

The main Government agency for research into the causes of, and treatment for disease, is the Medical Research Council (MRC) funded via grant in aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

The MRC has spent the following amounts on research related to dystonia:

	£
1994–95	1,435,000
1995–96	1,702,000
1996–97	1,784,000
1997–98	1,731,000
1998–99	1,769,000

In 1999–2000 the MRC spent over £3 million on research into movement disorders including dystonia.

Food Labelling

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recommendations the Food Standards Agency has made on mandatory country of origin labelling. [150241]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Food Standards Agency is pressing for changes to labelling rules at European and international levels to require compulsory origin labelling on a wider range of foods, particularly meat products, and for clear rules on the use of terms like "produce of".

Variant CJD

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which hospitals do not have the facilities to sterilise instruments against VCJD; and if he will make a statement. [150432]

Mr. Denham: We have received advice from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee that a key factor in reducing the theoretical risk of person-to-person spread of variant CJD during surgery is high standards of decontamination of surgical instruments. In October, we issued a circular (Health Service Circular 2000–032) to the National Health Service emphasising the importance of effective decontamination in preventing the spread of variant CJD. As a result of this circular, all NHS trusts in England have been instructed to perform an all-embracing review of their decontamination facilities and procedures. In addition, the Department is carrying out a comprehensive survey of the NHS in England to assess the effectiveness of decontamination and we expect it to be complete by April 2001.

On 4 January I announced that we were investing £200 million to modernise NHS decontamination and sterilisation facilities. The money will ensure that surgical equipment is cleaned and sterilised to the highest standards possible to protect patients from a theoretical risk of variant CJD. The investment will underpin a major overhaul to provide the NHS with the most up-to-date decontamination services.

Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland NHS Trust

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he approved the creation of a Mental Health Trust for Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland; when the Trust is due to commence its responsibilities; who was appointed *(a)* Chair and *(b)* Chief Executive of the Trust and when their appointments began. [150895]

Mr. Denham: The decision to create the Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health National Health Service Trust was taken on 27 October 2000 and the trust will become operational on 1 April 2001. The recruitment process for the chair and non-executive directors is now complete and a decision on the chairmanship will be announced soon. The post of chief executive has been advertised nationally but the short-listing and interview process will need to involve the chair of the trust once he or she has been appointed.

Organ Donations

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department is taking to reassure potential organ donors and encourage the maximum number of organ donations to be made. [150358]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* We announced a comprehensive strategy for the development and reorganisation of transplant services in this country last February. In order to explore further ways of increasing organ transplantation, a National Summit on organ donation will take place shortly.

Organ Retention

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 75W, on organ retention, when he expects the Commission to permit NHS trusts to *(a)* provide specific information and *(b)* begin the process of returning organs and tissues to members of the public. [151215]

Mr. Denham: Further guidance is being prepared which will enable information to be provided once the Retained Organs Commission is satisfied that trusts can provide accurate responses to relatives who have made inquiries. The guidance will be issued as soon as possible.

NHS Trust Boards

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will issue guidance on the circumstances under which NHS trust boards should decide *(a)* disciplinary cases and *(b)* cases involving amendments of performance. [150685]

Mr. Denham: The existing guidance, "Code of Conduct, Code of Accountability", sets out the role and responsibilities of trust boards. These include the need to ensure that high standards of corporate governance and personal behaviour are maintained in the conduct of business of the whole organisation. Chairs and non-executive directors are responsible for taking disciplinary action against executive directors who breach the Code of Conduct.

Resuscitation Policies

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how and when compliance with Health Service Circular 2000/028-Resuscitation policy will be monitored and audited by his Department; what sanctions will be administered on the NHS trusts which have not complied; and how and when the outcomes of these monitoring activities will be made available to the general public. [151446]

Yvette Cooper: We have asked the Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) to pay particular attention to resuscitation decision-making processes as part of its rolling programme of clinical governance arrangements put in place by National Health Service organisations. Where CHI finds notable practice or areas for action relating to resuscitation practices, these will be outlined in the review report.

CHI will work with the NHS organisation, and the appropriate NHS Executive regional office (and local health authority where relevant), to set objectives for improvement. The organisation will then develop an action plan, the implementation of which will be monitored by the regional office to ensure any necessary action is taken.

Home/Domiciliary Care (Charges)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received relating to inaccurate statements or examples in his Department's draft statutory guidance on charging for home or domiciliary care. [150821]

Mr. Hutton: We have received one representation. However, we believe the draft guidance is in fact correct on the points which have been questioned.

Newcastle Health Services

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what deficit he estimates for Newcastle City Health Trust; what bridging loan have been granted to Newcastle City Health Trust; and how these deficits and loans are to be apportioned in respect of its successor authorities. [150954]

Mr. Denham: The Newcastle City Health National Health Service Trust is forecasting a revenue breakeven position for 2000–01. The NHS Executive has not provided any direct assistance in the form of brokerage in 2000–01. The trust has received £1 million assistance in respect of the Newcastle Strategic Review (NSR) bridging arrangements, which is partially funded from national special assistance funding. As the trust is forecasting breakeven, no brokerage has been provided; and as the NSR bridging funding is non-repayable, there is no impact on the successor organisations.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many PMS services have been approved in Newcastle City; if these are located in the area of greatest health need; if approval been given for a PMS for asylum seekers in Newcastle; and how this will be funded. [150953]

Mr. Denham: A total of 12 personal medical services (PMS) pilots have been approved in the City of Newcastle since April 1998.

PMS pilots under the National Health Service (Primary Care) Act 1997 are an opportunity for general practitioners, nurses and community trusts to test different ideas for delivering primary care services, focusing on local service problems and bringing about health improvements. Health Service Circular 2000/018 outlined our priorities for future PMS Pilots. Pilot schemes are not necessarily restricted to areas of greatest health need, however that may be defined.

Approval has been given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Newcastle Asylum Seeker Unit as a PMS pilot to become operational on 1 April 2001. For all PMS pilots a transfer of funds is undertaken at a national level from the General Medical Services (GMS) non-discretionary budget to the unified budget. The transfer of existing resources is based on the appropriate GMS and other funding paid to GPs or practices moving to pilot status.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been allocated for bridging support for the Newcastle City Strategic Review in each financial year from 1996–97 to 2001–02; and if he has decided to terminate support from 2002 onwards. [150955]

Mr. Denham: Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority has received special assistance funding in support of strategic change as follows:

£ million

Year	*Special assistance*
1996–97	2
1997–98	4.5
1998–99	3.5
1999–2000	4.8
2000–01	3

Decisions on special assistance funding are taken annually and an announcement will be made shortly with regard to 2001–02. No decisions have been taken in respect of 2002–03 onwards.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the PFI for Newcastle City Hospitals Trust will go to open advertisement for bidders; if he has received a request to prioritise work on the new cancer treatment centre; and if he intends to put the new cancer treatment centre on a faster track for completion. [150956]

Mr. Denham: The private finance initiative (PFI) schemes to complete the implementation of the Newcastle Strategic Review will be able to go to advert for bidders once the outline business cases for the various capital investments have been assessed and approved by the National Health Service Executive. The business cases were received on 14 February 2001 and work on their assessment will be completed by the end of March 2001.

We are aware of local aspirations that the cancer treatment centre element of the Newcastle Strategic Review be publicly funded in advance of the remainder of the PFI developments. However, the business cases advocate that the new cancer treatment centre should be procured as one part of the overall PFI developments proposed at both the Freeman Hospital and Royal Victoria Infirmary, and not separately. The PFI has been the major element of our modernisation of the NHS's capital stock and has enabled a much faster pace of development than if there had been a reliance on public capital funds alone. Subject to satisfactory progress being made in progressing the scheme, the new facilities at Freeman Hospital should be operational in 2005.

Electronic Booking System (Hospital Appointments)

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated value is of the computer contract to provide an electronic booking system for hospital appointments. [151483]

Ms Stuart: A Strategic Outline Case (SOC) is being developed for Electronic Booking, in line with guidance from the Central Communications and Telecommunications Agency. The SOC will establish a number of options to be pursued in later stages of business case development.

It is not possible to provide a meaningful estimate of the value of possible future contracts until the scope of any possible future contracts has been further defined through the development of a business case.

NHS Walk-in Centre (Clapham Junction)

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will establish an NHS Walk-in Centre at Clapham Junction; and if he will make a statement. [151152]

Mr. Denham: We have not received an expression of interest from the local health committee to set up a walk-in centre at Clapham Junction.

We are considering the roll-out of additional walk-in centres in the wider context of improving access.

Ambulance Services (Work Injuries)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of litigation are being considered by the ambulance service relating to work injuries sustained by employees; and what has been the cost of such litigation in each of the last five years. [150679]

Ms Stuart: Since 1 April 1999, the National Health Service Litigation Authority has indemnified National Health Service trusts against employers liability claims. There have been 312 such claims against ambulance trusts. Fifty five of these cases have been closed without any payment being made. Two cases were settled during 2000–2001 at a total cost of £4,700. All other cases remain outstanding.

Figures in respect of employer's liability claims brought before 1 April 1999, and in respect of cases settled by National Health Service ambulance trusts without the involvement of the NHS Litigation Authority, are not held centrally.

Patient Referrals

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce new incentives for patients referred to consultants by their general practitioners to keep their appointments. [151319]

Mr. Denham: In 1998 we launched our National Booked Admissions Programme under which growing numbers of patients are being given the opportunity to agree a date and time for their outpatient appointment, or a date for admission to hospital. Booked dates enable patients to plan ahead and make any necessary work, childcare or other arrangements. Patients who have a say in their appointment date are much more likely to keep it. Under the NHS Plan all patients will be able to book their outpatient appointments and admission to hospital by the end of 2005.

Clinical Waste Disposal

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the annual cost to the National Health Service of clinical waste disposal. [151318]

Mr. Denham: From year end figures for 1999–2000 we are able to identify that the total annual cost to the National Health Service in England for clinical waste disposal was £29.2 million.

To help the NHS reduce the cost and environmental impact of incinerating clinical waste, we issued Health Technical Memorandum 2065 "Healthcare in waste management—segregation of waste streams in clinical areas" (1997). This document advocates a change of focus from simply disposing to managing waste throughout the production process.

Planning Permission

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the occasions since 3 May 1997 (1) when an NHS hospital trust applied for outline planning permission before public consultation was initiated on the proposed development concerned; and which NHS hospital trusts were involved; [151456]

(2) when a health authority has applied to a local authority for outline planning permission before public consultation was initiated on the proposed development concerned. [151258]

Mr. Denham: Information is not held centrally on planning applications made by National Health Service trusts and health authorities.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Pavilion

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost of the EU pavilion at the Hanover World Fair was; what its purpose was; what the UK share of financing the Euro-Kiosk was; what the cost of the EURODISC was; and if he will make a statement on the purpose and future use of the latter. [147465]

Mr. Wilson: The EU pavilion and associated structures at Expo 2000 in Hanover were financed and managed by the European Commission. Detailed information requested is available from the London office of the European Commission Representation in the United Kingdom.

Lord Levy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the *(a)* cost to public funds and *(b)* purpose was of Lord Levy's visit to the Middle East in January. [146518]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I refer to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 390W.

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries visited by Lord Levy on behalf of Her Majesty's Government, and the purposes of each visit together with the cost to public funds in each case. [148308]

Mr. Wilson: I refer to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 390–91W, and to the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 236W.

Lord Levy also visited Israel and the Palestinian Authority as the Prime Minister's personal envoy on 21–23 February, to exchange views with leaders on regional issues.

Srebrenica Massacre

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what requests he has received from the French National Assembly to provide evidence to their inquiry into the Srebrenica massacre. [148554]

Mr. Vaz: The British Government have received no requests from the French National Assembly for written material relating to the Srebrenica massacre. However, we understand that the inquiry are interested in speaking to senior British officers who were serving in UNPROFOR at the time.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Special Advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next General Election is called. [149317]

Mr. Robin Cook: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press releases were issued by his Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what his estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149251]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The Foreign and Commonwealth Office issues a daily bulletin of ministerial engagements and announcements. We do not keep records of the number of additional press releases issued each year.

Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. [149772]

Mr. Vaz: The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has no immediate plans to visit the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Kosovo Albanian Prisoners

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions have been taken by *(a)* UNMIK, *(b)* the EU, *(c)* the International Committee for the Red Cross, *(d)* the International Commissioner for Human Rights and (d) his Department to secure the release of the Kosovo Albanian prisoners detained in Serbia. [149778]

Mr. Vaz: UNMIK and the EU regularly raise the issue of Kosovo detainees with the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) authorities. The International Committee of the Red Cross visit and provide humanitarian assistance to all Kosovo Albanian prisoners in Serbia and report regularly too on their findings. Representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights visit Kosovo Albanians in Serbian prisons, monitor trails and lobby the authorities in cases of sick, juvenile and women prisoners.

We have stressed to the FRY authorities that it is unacceptable that people should be held for a prolonged period without trial. We have repeatedly made clear the importance we attach to the rapid resolution of this issue. We welcome the draft Amnesty law on political prisoners and call on the FRY and Serbian Governments to release all Kosovo Albanian prisoners held without charges or on political grounds.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Kosovo Albanian prisoners are detained in Serbia. [149777]

Mr. Vaz: According to Special Representative Mr. Henrik Amneus, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), 673 Kosovo Albanians are imprisoned in Serbia.

North Korea

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the prospects for bilateral links between the UK and North Korea. [149908]

Mr. Battle: Following the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UK and the DPRK on 12 December 2000, both sides have agreed to set up a resident Embassy in each other's capital, and have appointed Charges d'Affaires who will be responsible for developing relations until Ambassadors are appointed later this year.

Initially we propose to increase our contacts with the DPRK through English language teaching, and training. Sir John Kerr, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, will also visit the DPRK in March for talks on political, economic, foreign trade and cultural issues.

I have recently met a senior delegation from the Korean Workers' Party, the ruling party in the DPRK, and met DPRK participants at a recent conference on North East Asia at Wilton Park. They later called on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 20 February.

During this meeting the Secretary of State raised a number of issues including human rights and non-proliferation.

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when his policy planning unit was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental Special Advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150362]

Mr. Robin Cook: Policy Planners Department has been in existence since 1967–68 when it was a part of the Planning, Research, Defence and Disarmament Group. Policy Planning Staff is the present name of the department. It reports direct to the Permanent Under-Secretary, Sir John Kerr, who chairs the FCO Policy Advisory Board which is made up of civil servants. The papers produced for the board are not normally in the public domain. Policy Planning Staff contribute to several FCO public documents including the FCO departmental report and the FCO website.

There are 11 full-time staff and two secondees from outside the UK. No Special Adviser works in the department.

Ministerial Meetings

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many technical committees and working parties of the EU Council of Ministers the Scottish Executive have been informed about in advance by *(a)* UKREP and *(b)* UK Government Departments, since 1 July 1999. [150352]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Under the arrangements set out in the EU concordat, the Scottish Executive are informed by Government Departments of all technical committees and working parties in which they have an interest.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many technical committees and working parties of the EU Council of Ministers have been attended by *(a)* UK officials and *(b)* UK delegations including Scottish Executive Ministers since 1 July 1999. [150354]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Detailed information in the form requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Ministers do not attend working level meetings.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal EU Council of Ministers meetings have been attended by British Government delegations which include Scottish Executive Ministers since 1 July 1999; and if he will list the dates and subjects of these meetings. [150356]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The information is as follows.

Year	*Date*	*Council*	*Minister*
1999	24–25 September	Informal meeting of Ministers of Education	Sam Galbraith
1999	26 October	Fisheries Council (Luxembourg)	John Home Robertson
1999	22 November	Fisheries Council (Brussels)	John Home Robertson
1999	13 December	Environment Council (Brussels)	Sarah Boyack
1999	14 December	Agriculture Council (Brussels)	Ross Finnie
1999	16 December	Fisheries Council (Brussels)	John Home Robertson
2000	17–18 March	Informal Council for Ministers of Lifelong Learning (Portugal)	Nicol Stephen
2000	20 March	Agriculture Council (Brussels)	Ross Finnie
2000	8 June	Education Council (Luxembourg)	Nicol Stephen
2000	16 June	Fisheries Council (Luxembourg)	John Home Robertson
2000	22 June	Environment Council (Brussels)	Sarah Boyack
2000	17 November	Fisheries Council (Brussels)	Rhona Brankin
2000	20 November	Agriculture Council (Brussels)	Ross Finnie
2000	30 November	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Brussels)	Jim Wallace
2000	14–15 December	Fisheries Council (Brussels)	Rhona Brankin
2001	12 February	Education and Youth Council (Brussels)	Nicol Stephen

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK joint ministerial committee meetings regarding European Union issues have been held since 1 July 1999. [150351]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The first UK joint ministerial committee meeting on EU issues will take place on 1 March.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which technical committees and working parties of the EU Council of Ministers, attended by UK Government delegates, have been led by Scottish Executive Ministers on behalf of the UK. [150353]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Ministers do not attend working level meetings.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal EU Council of Ministers meetings attended by British Government delegations were led by Scottish Government Ministers since 1 July 1999; and if he will list the dates and subjects of these meetings. [150355]

Mr. Vaz *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* On 8 June 2000 and 12 February 2001 Nicol Stephen, currently Deputy Minister for Education, Europe and External Affairs in the Scottish Executive, led for the UK at Education Councils. These are the only occasions since May 1997 that the UK delegation has been led at the Council of Ministers by a Minister who is not a Member of the Westminster Parliament. These substitutions were agreed with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment.

Mr. Swinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many *(a)* formal and *(b)* informal EU Council Ministers meetings have been attended by UK Government Ministers since 1 July 1999; and if he will list the dates and subject of the meetings. [150357]

Mr. Vaz: Since 1 July 1999 there have been 131 formal Council meetings and 33 informal meetings, as shown in the following list. UK Government Ministers or Ministers from the devolved Administrations have attended the vast majority of these. Where appropriate, senior officials have attended in their place.

Detailed information of who attended individual meetings is not held centrally, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Date	*Council*
Formal EU Council meetings	
1999	
12 July	ECOFIN
16 July	Budget
19–20 July	General Affairs
19 July	Agriculture
29 July	General Affairs
13 September	General Affairs
27 September	Agriculture
4 October	Justice and Home Affairs
6 October	Transport
8 October	ECOFIN
11–12 October	General Affairs
12 October	Environment
22 October	Labour and Social Affairs
26 October	Fisheries
28 October	Internal Market
29 October	Justice and Home Affairs
8 November	ECOFIN
8 November	Consumers
9 November	Industry
11 November	Development
12 November	Labour and Social Affairs
15–16 November	General Affairs
15 November	Agriculture
18 November	Health
22 November	Fisheries
23 November	Culture
23 November	Youth
25–26 November	Budget
26 November	Education
29 November	ECOFIN
29 November	Labour and Social Affairs
30 November	Telecommunications
29 November-3 December	General Affairs
2 December	Justice and Home Affairs
2 December	Energy
2 December	Research
6–8 December	General Affairs
7 December	Internal Market
8 December	ACP-EC Council
9 December	Transport
13–14 December	Environment
14 December	Agriculture
16–17 December	Fisheries
2000	
24 January	General Affairs
24 January	Agriculture
31 January	ECOFIN
2–3 February	General Affairs
14–15 February	General Affairs
28 February	ECOFIN
13 March	ECOFIN
13 March	Labour and Social Affairs
16 March	Internal Market
20–21 March	General Affairs
20 March	Agriculture
27 March	Justice and Home Affairs
28 March	Transport
30 March	Environment
2 April	General Affairs
10–11 April	General Affairs
13 April	Consumers
17 April	Agriculture
2 May	Telecommunications
8 May	ECOFIN
8 May	Employment and Social Policy
16 May	Agriculture
16 May	Culture
18 May	Industry
18 May	Development
22–23 May	General Affairs
25 May	Internal Market
29 May	Justice and Home Affairs
30 May	Energy
6 June	ECOFIN
6 June	Employment and Social Policy
8 June	Education
13–14 June	General Affairs
15 June	Research
16 June	Fisheries
19 June	ECOFIN
19 June	Agriculture
18 June	ECOFIN
22 June	Environment
26 June	Transport
19 June	General Affairs
29 June	Health
10 July	General Affairs
17 July	ECOFIN
17 July	Agriculture
20 July	Budget
18–19 September	General Affairs
26 September	Culture

Date	Council
28 September	Justice and Home Affairs
28 September	Internal Market
29 September	ECOFIN
20 September	Transport
2 October	Transport
3 October	Telecommunications
9–10 October	General Affairs
10 October	Environment
17 October	Employment and Social Policy
17 October	ECOFIN
17 October	JHA and Civil Protection
23 October	Agriculture
7 November	ECOFIN
7 November	Environment
9 November	Education/Youth
10 November	Development
16 November	Research
17 November	Fisheries
20–21 November	General Affairs
20–21 November	Agriculture
23–24 November	Budget
23 November	Culture
26–27 November	ECOFIN
27–28 November	Employment and Social Policy
30 November-1 December	JHA and Civil Protection
30 November	Internal Market/Consumers/Tourism
4–5 December	General Affairs
4 December	Agriculture
5 December	Industry and Energy
14 December	Health
14–15 December	Fish
18–19 December	Environment
19 December	Agriculture
20 December	Employment and Social Policy
20–21 December	Transport
22 December	Telecommunications
2001	
19 January	ECOFIN
29–30 January	Agriculture
12 February	ECOFIN
12 February	Education

Informal Council ministerial meetings

1999	
8–10 July	Labour and Social Affairs
18–20 July	Culture
23–25 July	Environment
4–5 September	General Affairs
10–12 September	ECOFIN
12–14 September	Agriculture
16–17 September	Justice and Home Affairs
23–25 September	Education
27–28 September	Housing
9 December	ECOFIN
2000	
28–29 January	Development
11 February	Labour and Social Affairs
28 February	Defence Ministers Informals
3–4 March	Justice and Home Affairs
6–7 March	Research
17–18 March	Economy and Finance
30–31 March	Culture
7–8 April	ECOFIN
15–16 April	Environment
6–7 May	Foreign Affairs
25–26 May	Foreign Affairs
28–30 May	Agriculture
7–8 July	Employment and Social Policy
14–15 July	Environment
20–21 July	Culture
28–29 July	Justice and Home Affairs
2–3 September	Foreign Affairs
3–5 September	Agriculture
8–9 September	ECOFIN
22 September	Defence Ministers Informals

Date	Council
2001	
22–23 January	Equality and Social Security
8–9 February	Justice and Home Affairs
15–17 February	Employment and Telecommunications

Peace Brigades International

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he is making to the Colombian Government concerning the safety of British volunteers with Peace Brigades International in Colombia. [150633]

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Colombian Government following the recent declaration of the Colombian Parliament that humanitarian workers for Peace Brigades International are to be targeted as a military objective. [150702]

Mr. Battle: We were appalled to learn about the threats made against Peace Brigades International volunteers in Colombia. As I made clear in a statement on 13 February, we are very concerned about the safety of all human rights workers in Colombia, who operate in extremely difficult and dangerous conditions. We have asked that the Colombian Government take further steps to protect human rights workers so that they may go about their lives and work in safety. In addition, the EU presidency, on behalf of all EU member states, has expressed concern about the threats made against Peace Brigades International and other human rights workers, and has urged that appropriate measures be taken by the Colombian authorities to protect them.

Shooting

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has consulted, and what plans he has to consult, sporting shooting organisations in the United Kingdom before the UN Conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in July. [150695]

Mr. Wilson: In line with our commitment to the success of the UN Conference, we are working in partnership with Governments, NGOs and representatives of civil society, and also with business. We already have regular contacts with the Defence Manufacturers' Association. We have also had contact with the British Shooting Sports Council, which has highlighted issues as marking and tracing of weapons, the potentially important role of Interpol and end-user certification. We plan to continue our dialogue with industry in the run-up to the UN Conference and beyond.

HMG are actively engaged in preparations for the July 2001 UN Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects. We attach great importance to a successful outcome. The Conference will be a milestone in international attempts to combat the proliferation of small arms. It is an ideal opportunity for nations and regional groups to unite, under the UN, in giving political impetus to their efforts. Our objective is to agree global political commitment and the adoption of norms, measures and timely follow-up action aimed at reducing the levels of illicit trade in—and establishing

accumulations of—small arms. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary plans to attend and address the Conference.

The UK hosted a policy brainstorming seminar for around 30 countries at Lancaster House, London, on 13–14 February. The seminar considered possible UN Conference outcomes and the political and financial commitments these will require. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave an opening address. He highlighted the need to better regulate the legal small arms trade, to work to combat the illicit trade and to reduce the volume of small arms in illegal circulation throughout the world.

Al-Kosheh Trial

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Egyptian authorities concerning the recent verdict in the El-Kosheh trial. [151019]

Mr. Wilson: None. Following the violence in Al-Kosheh, we encouraged the Egyptian authorities to conduct a thorough investigation and to take appropriate action against anyone found to have committed a crime. The Egyptian Government quickly set up an investigation into the incident sending some 50 prosecutors to the area. They co-ordinated their efforts with leaders of both religious communities. The subsequent trial was conducted in a normal criminal court where due legal process was followed. It is important that we now concentrate on the promotion of inter-faith dialogue and an increase in tolerance.

Indonesia

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of Indonesia about the allegations of attacks made on Christians in that country; and if he will make a statement. [151499]

Mr. Battle: We are deeply concerned by reports of attempts to force Christians to covert to Islam in Maluku and our Embassy has raised this with senior officials at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Jakarta.

Both the Secretary of State for International Development and I visited Indonesia in October 2000 and discussed the situation in Maluku with President Wahid and senior Ministers. We urged tolerance and restraint and made clear to them the Indonesian Government's responsibility to maintain law and order and to take immediate steps to bring the perpetrators of the violence to justice. I also discussed events with Alwi Shihab, the Indonesian Foreign Minister, in the margins of the EU-ASEAN meeting in Vientianne on 12 December.

Ministerial Visits

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas ministerial visits have been undertaken by the Foreign Secretary since 1992; and which countries were visited. [146871]

Mr. Robin Cook *[holding answer 23 January 2001]:* I have placed in the Libraries of the House a list detailing my visits overseas from 2 May 1997 to 31 January 2001 and overseas visits undertaken by the then Foreign Secretaries from 1 January 1992 to 1 May 1997.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Prison Officers (Vacancies)

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many vacancies for prison officers were filled in each institution in the north-west of England between July 2000 and the latest date for which information is available. [151235]

Mr. Boateng: The following prison officer vacancies were filled in the north-west of England between July 2000 and February 2001:

Prison establishment	*Number of vacancies filled*
Haverigg	2
Lancaster Castle	1
Lancaster Farms	3
Liverpool	2
Risley	1
Wymott	1

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150559]

Mr. Straw: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office annual reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the House of Commons Library. The Recorded Crime Statistics includes information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder Partnership.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Bristol, East constituency or the immediate locality:

Targeted Policing

One scheme, awarded £1,050,000 under round two of the Targeted Policing Initiative, proposes to tackle robbery and fear of crime in the Central Bristol area.

An Avon and Somerset forcewide project was awarded £27,500 under round two, increasing the numbers and effectiveness of confiscations imposed by the courts.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

One bid for a CCTV scheme in Brislington, which proposes to modernise an existing car park system, has been submitted under

round two of the CCTV Initiative. The bid is under consideration, along with others from the region.

Reducing Burglary Initiative

One project submitted under round two of the Reducing Burglary Initiative was awarded £34,200. The scheme proposes to tackle burglary in Upper Easton using the following interventions: Concentrated policing; target hardening; locks and alarms; inter agency work; information newsletters; neighbourhood watch and drug referrals.

Three projects, total capital of £930,400 have been received under round three of the Reducing Burglary Initiative, and are currently under consideration.

The Bristol Youth Offending Team (YOT) during 2000–01 has worked with 2,200 young offenders and supervised 330 young people on community-based orders. The YOT has prepared more than 450 court reports and its appropriate adult volunteers have attended 350 interviews with young people at police stations. The YOT has established offender-victim mediation services and are providing intervention programmes to confront young offenders with the views of their victims. The YOT is also working to deliver the Government's Pledge to halve the average time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, from 142 to 71 days. The most recent figure for Bristol is 89 days.

Bristol is also receiving funding from the Youth Justice Board's development fund of £1,044,505 over three years for a bail supervision scheme and five intervention programmes.

Funding is also being provided by the Youth Justice Board from the inter-departmental Youth Inclusion Programme for a project at Barton Hill in the Bristol, East area. The Programme seeks to reduce offending, truancy and exclusion in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Each project receives annually £75,000 from local partnerships and £75,000 from the Youth Justice Board.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Bristol East to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000;

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Fire Services

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on fire services per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [150014]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 9 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 732W.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150717]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. "Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000" and "Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000" can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder Partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency or the immediate locality:

Targeted Policing

One project covering Blackpool was awarded £103,000 under round 2 of the Targeted Policing Initiative, which proposes to reduce vehicle crime and anti-social behaviour within the town centre and main car parks.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

Three projects were awarded a total of £786,000 under first round of the CCTV initiative:

i. Blackpool town centre and car parks—awarded £559,000, proposed 36 cameras to cover two car parks and to increase the security of three other parking areas.

ii. Community Safety on Housing Estates—awarded £107,400, will site nine cameras to target crime and disorder problems at two housing estates in Blackpool, including two mobile cameras to be placed in crime "hot spot" areas.

iii. Wyre Mobile CCTV Unit—awarded £120,000, proposed two fully equipped mobile vehicle units capable of being deployed to any part of Wyre borough, targeting crime "hot spots" and areas suffering from youth crime and disorder.

Reducing Burglary Initiative

Two projects, total capital of £285,000, submitted under round three of the Reducing Burglary Initiative and are currently under consideration.

Neighbourhood Wardens

One project, awarded £199,000 to provide a co-ordinated, responsive and community focused approach to promoting the safety and well being of local residents, by providing trained high profile wardens to work with communities and address issues as identified by those communities.

Youth Offending Teams (YOT)

The Lancashire YOT covers the constituency and different units have been established to provide a countywide service. They are all fully operational. One of these units is located within the centre of Fleetwood. The YOT is providing a very successful offender/victim mediation scheme in support of the final warning scheme and community based sentences. The take up rate of this service by victims is very high. The YOT and local police are working together with a local Youth Referral Scheme to respond to concerns about incidences of juvenile nuisance. The YOT was involved in running a Splash scheme during the summer holidays in 2000 which provided activity schemes for children most at risk of offending. The YOT is intending to run similar schemes over the Easter and summer holidays in 2001.

Blackpool borough council has implemented a bail supervision scheme—Blackpool Youth Court Bail Support Scheme—to reduce the incidence of secure remands and re-offending while

on bail for 10–17 year olds. The scheme has been awarded a grant from the Youth Justice Board's development fund of approximately £100,000 over three years.

Barnados is operating a parenting scheme in Blackpool—Parenting Matters—to provide support to parents whose children get into trouble. The scheme is also receiving grant funding from the Youth Justice Board's development fund of approximately £143,000 over three years.

The Lancashire Restorative Justice Project which provides a victim/offender mediation service across the county, including Blackpool, is receiving grant funding through the Youth Justice Board's development fund of approximately £36,748 over three years.

The work of the team is well integrated into the local Crime and Disorder Partnership regarding joint activities and common targets. In particular, the YOT has taken an active lead in The Fleetwood Action Group which is a sub-group of the Community Safety Partnership. This project has recently been involved in identifying a local youth crime hotspot, arranging meetings with local residents and young people separately, and then bringing the two groups together to agree an action plan for the area.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Blackpool, North and Fleetwood to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000;

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Departmental Policies (Clwyd, South)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150911]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the House of Commons Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder Partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out below are examples relating to the Clwyd, South constituency or the immediate locality:

Reducing Burglary Initiative

1 scheme, awarded £33,300 under round 2 of the Reducing Burglary Initiative, covering a virtual community of houses in multiple occupancy in Colwyn Bay, Abergele and Rhyl, elderly person's sheltered housing in Flintshire, and the areas of Gwenfro and Y Wern in Wrexham. Main interventions under the project include: covert observations; high profile and targeted policing; preparation/distribution of crime prevention literature and a crimestoppers campaign.

Arrest Referral Scheme

An arrest referral scheme is currently operating in the area and is being developed alongside the Drug Treatment and Testing Orders scheme. Figures will be available shortly. A further investment of £70,000 has been awarded in the criminal justice agencies.

Youth Offending Teams (YOT)

The Wrexham YOT covers the constituency. The YOT has been working with local police to pioneer a nuisance reporting scheme which means that any young person stopped by the police or coming to the notice of police will have their details recorded and some action will take place. All young people going through the courts carry out some form of reparation irrespective of the community disposal they receive. The YOT is also the lead agency concerning anti-social behaviour orders. More than 17 families have been successfully engaged resulting in a reduction in their previous anti-social behaviour. The YOT is also working to deliver the Government's Pledge to halve the average time taken from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders, from 142 to 71 days. The most recent figure for North East Wales is 79 days.

North-East Wales is operating a bail supervision scheme to reduce the incidence of secure remands and re-offending while on bail among 10–17 year olds. The scheme is receiving grant funding from the Youth Justice Board's development fund of £50,000 over two years.

The Youth Justice Board is also providing grant funding through its development fund for the North Wales Drug, Alcohol and Substance Abuse Treatment Service for Young People. The service covers six local authorities in north Wales, including Wrexham, and is receiving funding of approximately £42,000 over three years. Funding is also being provided by the Youth Justice Board from the inter-departmental Youth Inclusion Programme for a project on the Caia Park Estate in Wrexham. The programme seeks to reduce offending, truancy and exclusion in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Each project receives annually £75,000 from local partnerships and £75,000 from the Youth Justice Board.

The Youth Justice Board also provided funding for the operation of Splash schemes during the Summer holidays in 2000. These schemes provided constructive and positive leisure activities for young people most at risk of offending. A Splash scheme was run in Plas Madoc.

The YOT has also developed criminal justice protocols with Stoke Heath Young Offender Institution to ensure that the explicit needs of Welsh young offenders in custody are being addressed.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Clwyd, South to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000;

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website. (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150887]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although the following are examples relating to the North-East Derbyshire constituency or the immediate locality:

Targeted Policing

Two projects covering Derbyshire were awarded funding totalling £485,000 under the Targeted Policing Initiative: £317,000 to concentrate on mapping of drugs markets in the region and £168,000 to focus on distraction burglary.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

Under the CCTV Initiative Steering Group a project in Clay Cross and Danesmoor received funding totalling £194,850. The project begun on 1 August 2000, and has extended the existing town centre system, with a view to reducing further, crime and fear of crime, in particular vehicle crime and burglary. Coverage has been increased to include main routes to residential areas, car parking, community facilities and business community areas.

Reducing Burglary Initiative

Two schemes have received funding in Derby City totalling £120,000. The areas of Peartree and City West have each received £60,000 to fund development of an anti-burglary task group, which will initiate local projects using a multi-agency approach.

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)

The Derbyshire YOT is providing appropriate adult services for young people when interviewed by police and has dealt with 242 requests for their services between April and December 2000. The Derbyshire YOT is utilising the ASSET assessment system in order to ensure intervention work is effectively targeted at the personal, family, social, educational and health problems that contribute to the causes of a young person's offending behaviour. The health staff attached to the YOT are carrying out basic assessments of young offenders for substance misuse and, where appropriate, referring them on to specialist substance misuse services for young people.

The police officers seconded to the Derbyshire and Derby City YOT have delivered 50 training sessions on the final warning scheme to over 1,200 police officers in order to ensure consistency of police assessment and referral to the YOTs. More than 12 community reparation schemes have been established throughout Derbyshire in order to allow the YOTs to deliver victim-offender mediation services. There is a wide range of activities available to meet the needs of the young person and provide opportunities for further development through accredited training and skills.

Derbyshire is benefiting from the Youth Justice Board's development fund which has awarded grants of approximately £613,000 over three years for two bail support schemes and two intervention programmes in the county.

The Derbyshire YOT also received funding from the Youth Justice Board and the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme to run a Splash scheme during the Summer holidays in 2000. The scheme provided various activity schemes for young people most at risk of offending in four wards of Bolsover. This resulted in a marked reduction in nuisance calls and offending in the local area.

The Derbyshire YOT is also benefiting from funding from the National Lottery to operate a community sports initiative in Clay Cross. The initiative is currently being implemented.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of North-East Derbyshire to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000;

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female foreign nationals were being held in prisons in England and Wales on 1 February. [150445]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information shows that on 31 January 2001 there were 6,298 male and 627 female foreign nationals in prisons in England and Wales. This information is also available in successive volumes in 'Prison Statistics England and Wales' (Table 6.2 in the 1999 edition, CM 4805), copies of which are available in the Library.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the age of the oldest *(a)* male and *(b)* female inmate being held in prison in England and Wales; for what offence they are being detained; and on what date and for how long they were sentenced. [150449]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information shows that on 31 January 2001 the oldest male prisoner was 89 years old, sentenced on 25 May 2000 to 730 days for committing a sexual offence. The oldest female was 74 years old, sentenced on 31 January 1984 to life for committing murder.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners

have died in prisons in England and Wales from the effects of taking illegal drugs while in prison during the last 12 months. [150444]

Mr. Boateng: One prisoner—an adult male—has died since 1 January 2000 following the apparent use of illegal drugs while in prison custody; the coroner's inquest is awaited.

UK Passports

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many United Kingdom passports were issued in 2000. [150443]

Mrs. Roche: The number of United Kingdom passports issued by the Passport Agency in 2000 was 5,089,598.

Victim Support

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations to which he gave grants for the support of *(a)* murder victims and *(b)* victims of crime other than murder, and the amount per organisation, for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [150562]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In the past three years the Home Office has given grant to Support After Murder and Manslaughter (SAMM), which offers help to relatives and friends of homicide victims, and to Victim Support which, as part of its wider support services to victims of crime and witnesses, supports those bereaved by homicide. Grant details are given in the table.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Support After Murder and Manslaughter (£ million)	43,000	100,000	100,000
Victim Support (£)	12.682	17.500	18.600

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the organisations to which he gave grants for the support of those killed in or as a result of road crashes, and the amount per organisation, for each of the last three years for which figures are available. [150563]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office has provided £23,000 per annum since 1999 to the road safety organisation BRAKE for the supply of the booklets "Coping with grief" and "Procedures following a death on the road in England and Wales" free of charge to all the police forces in England and Wales, for the families of those killed in road crashes.

From April 2001 the Home Office will pay BRAKE an additional £15,000 per annum for administration costs and training undertaken in connection with the use of the booklets.

Correspondence

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East about Mr. Abdul Rastomi, reference R1019683/2, of 27 November 2000. [150450]

Mrs. Roche: My noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, Lord Bassam, wrote to the hon. Member on my behalf on 15 January 2001.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to reply to correspondence concerning Mrs. Brenda Williams dated 23 September 1999, reference IMPW25862 5(9) and PO18327/S8 and 16641/99. [147423]

Mrs. Roche: I wrote to the hon. Member on 15 February. I am sorry for the delay in replying. Unfortunately, the original letter did not reach my office.

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the hon. Member for Manchester, Central's letter of 2 August 2000 regarding Mr. H. (Ref: S1020866). [149769]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* I wrote to my hon. Friend on 22 February 2001. I am sorry that it was not possible to send an earlier reply.

Police and Fire Services (Pensions)

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the state's total liability at 2001 prices to pay the pensions of *(a)* police and *(b)* fire officers, assuming all existing contributors retire and that all pensioners die at the age projected by the pension scheme actuaries. [148007]

Mr. Charles Clarke: In 1998, when the appraisal was last undertaken, the Government Actuary's Department estimated that the total accrued liabilities for police and fire officer pensions were broadly £25 billion and £5 billion respectively.

Naturalisation Applications

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) at what level within his Department authority can be given for an application for naturalisation to be treated other than in date order of receipt *(a)* in respect of initial consideration and *(b)* during subsequent stages of the process; [149576]

(2) at what level in his Department discretion can be exercised to treat an application for naturalisation other than in date of receipt order. [149577]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Decisions to start consideration of a case other than in date of receipt order can be taken at the normal caseworking level. Decisions to give case priority throughout its various stages have to be taken at Higher Executive Officer level or above.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of naturalisation decisions taken in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999 and *(d)* 2000 were made within (i) six months, (ii) nine months, (iii) 12 months, (iv)18 months and (v) more than 18 months of the date of receipt of the application. [150056]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* Applications for naturalisation concluded under section 6(1) of the British Nationality Act 1981 in a specified time are shown in the table.

Naturalisation decisions

	Total 6(1)	*6 months*	*Percentage*	*9 months*	*Percentage*	*12 months*	*Percentage*	*18 months*	*Percentage*
1997	6,125	331	5.4	758	12.0	1,946	31.8	4,594	75.0
1998	22,935	486	2.1	722	3.1	1,935	8.44	9,965	43.4
1999	21,607	1,112	5.1	1,345	6.2	1,819	8.42	4,339	20.1
2000	25,159	1,371	5.4	1,819	7.2	4,733	18.8	15,231	60.5

Notes:
1. Totals for each year are cumulative.
2. 1997 figures are for January to March and October to December only. Due to technical problems other months' figures are not available. The "Total" number also covers only these months.
3. For the same reason, 2000 figures are for January and May–December only. Again, the "Total" number covers only these months.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set a target for the length of time the security services take to complete the security check on those applying for settlement in the UK. [150097]

Mrs. Roche: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate aims to deal with 70 per cent. of non-asylum applications within three weeks. Within that overall target, there are no specific targets for applications which may require security checks, and no plans at present to set such targets.

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received concerning asylum seekers going without food because of problems with the administration of vouchers; and if he will make a statement. [150936]

Mrs. Roche: We have received a number of communications, by letter or telephone, concerning asylum seekers who have encountered difficulties in receiving their vouchers. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has set up a dedicated telephone inquiry service to enable asylum seekers in this position to register their position as quickly as possible. A special team within NASS ensures any difficulty is resolved as soon as possible.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the asylum application made on 1 April 1997 under Home Office reference M718960LTN/97/259/1L will be determined. [151432]

Mrs. Roche: The asylum application was refused on 22 August 1998 and the appeal was finally dismissed on 12 December 1998. The outstanding application on the basis of marriage will now be considered.

Post-mortems

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many post-mortem examinations took place in each year since 1995; and how many of these in each year were undertaken *(a)* because there was suspicion of criminal activity in the death, *(b)* because the doctor was unsure of the cause of death, *(c)* for research purposes and *(d)* for other specified purposes; [150124]

(2) how many post mortems in each year since 1995 *(a)* established a prima facie criminal case, *(b)* established a previously unknown cause of death and *(c)* did not establish a cause of death. [150125]

Mr. Boateng: Information about the reasons for coroner post-mortem examinations is not held centrally. Available information up to 1999, including data on non-coroner post-mortems held by the Office for National Statistics, is set out in the table.

	1995	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*
Deaths					
Reported to a coroner where a post-mortem was held	126,398	126,184	123,015	124,356	124,780
of these:					
Where a coroner did not proceed to hold an inquest	104,151	104,321	100,679	101,165	100,884
Subject to a post-mortem but no cause of death found	413	461	582	695	738
Inquests					
Resulting in verdict of unlawful killing[1]	217	169	165	142	165
Resulting in open verdicts[1]	2,257	2,151	2,319	2,571	2,497
Resulting in any other verdict[1]	22,030	21,694	22,171	23,049	23,731
Post-mortems					
Performed for clinical purposes	[2]—	[2]—	3,614	3,527	3,474

[1] In a small number of cases, inquests will have been held without post-mortem examinations
[2] Data not available

European Union Humanitarian Operations

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers the UK may be called upon to supply in order to provide civil assistance for European Union humanitarian operations under the terms of the treaty of Nice; and if he will make a statement. [150033]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* In the event of the European Union carrying out a civilian policing operation, the United Kingdom would not be obliged to contribute any police officers, but would decide in the light of circumstances whether it was appropriate for the United Kingdom to contribute to the operation, and if so, in what numbers.

Police Officers (Gloucestershire)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were in Gloucestershire in each year from 1993 to 2000; and what the projected numbers are for the next three years. [150854]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Police numbers in Gloucestershire in each year from 1993 to September 2000 (the latest date at which figures are available) are given in the table.

Year	*Number*
March 1993	1,149
March 1994	1,159
March 1995	1,163
March 1996	1,133
March 1997	1,133
March 1998	1,104
March 1999	1,104
March 2000	1,114
September 2000	1,142

The Chief Constable has informed me that on present estimates the force's planned staffing levels are 1,187 officers from April 2001, 1,222 officers from April 2002 and 1,244 officers from April 2003.

Firearms

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has consulted, and what plans he has to consult, sporting shooting organisations in the United Kingdom before the UN Conference on the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons in July. [150696]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Arrangements for participation in the United Nations Conference are being taken forward by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs. I understand that his Department has already had contacts with a wide range of organisations, including representatives of the shooting community.

Defendants (Previous Convictions)

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of defendants who elected for trial by jury at the Crown court *(a)* were subsequently convicted and had previous convictions and *(b)* were acquitted and had previous convictions. [150649]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not collected centrally. Research conducted by the Home Office showed that nearly 90 per cent. of convicted offenders who had elected trial in 1989 had previous convictions and over a third had more than 10 previous convictions.

Departmental Travel Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what was the total gross running cost to his Department for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds for visits exclusively within the United Kingdom by *(a)* him and *(b)* Ministers in the last 12 months. [149138]

Mr. Straw: The available information on the cost of travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other allowances met from public funds for ministerial visits exclusively within the United Kingdom between 1 February 2000 and 31 January 2001 is set out. The figures include where relevant the cost of an accompanying Private Secretary.

(a) £14,523.38

(b) £48,295.38.

Animal Welfare

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the Government's progress in preventing cruelty to animals. [150280]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This Government are committed to improving standards of animal welfare and I am pleased to report that since May 1997, we have agreed a significant number of measures designed to prevent the unnecessary suffering of animals, these include:

a whole range of United Kingdom, European Union and Council of Europe legislation and recommendations designed to improve the conditions in which farm animals, of all kinds, are kept, transported and slaughtered;

revising pre-export procedures for sheep and pigs destined for fattening, production or slaughter in other European Union member states;

announcing a review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 to ensure that we have veterinary para-professionals are effectively regulated;

supporting the private Member's Bill which became the Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act 2000: this will allow for better care to be made of commercial animals while proceedings under the Protection of Animals Act 1911 are in hand;

legislation to prohibit fur farming in England and Wales—the Fur Farming (Prohibition) Act 2000;

introducing the Pet Travel Scheme, which allows dogs and cats coming from Western Europe and certain other rabies-free islands to enter the United Kingdom without quarantine, provided that they meet certain conditions. The Government are consulting on statutory provisions for the welfare of those animals still subject to quarantine while there;

agreeing, during the United Kingdom's Presidency of the European Union, the European Union Zoos Directive which requires zoos to accommodate animals under conditions that satisfy their biological and conservation requirements;

creating the Zoos Forum which advises the Government on all zoo matters and came into existence following a review of the Zoo Licensing Act 1981;

updating the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice;

commissioning a review of the Dangerous Wild Animals Act 1976 to look at its effectiveness;

supporting a private Member's Bill which became the Breeding and Sale of Dogs (Welfare) Act 1999, a measure aimed at tightening regulation of commercial dog breeding establishments, and the issue to local authorities of related detailed guidance;

preparing, with the Association of Circus Proprietors, a code of practice on the care and welfare of animals in travelling circuses;

making an order that allows for an indefinite prohibition of the culling of seals on the east coast of England.

We are also working to ensure that the highest possible standards of animal welfare are applied to those used in scientific procedures and that they are used only where it is fully justified—where the benefits outweigh the costs and where there are no suitable alternatives. To this end

we are promoting the fullest application of the 3Rs—the replacement of procedures with others which do not use animals, the reduction of the number of animals used and the refinement of procedures to minimise pain and suffering.

In addition to our commitment to the 3Rs, the other main individual measures this Government have introduced since the election to ensure that animals are used only where fully justified are as follows. We have:

secured a voluntary ban on testing cosmetic finished products on animals;

increased the budget made available to the Animal Procedures Committee to sponsor research on alternatives by 45 per cent. to £265,000 for 2000–01;

banned the use of animals to test alcohol and tobacco products;

increased the size of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate from 18 to 21, and recruited seven new inspectors to fill these and other vacancies;

introduced a requirement that all establishments licensed under the 1986 Act have local ethical review processes as a complement to the existing controls under the Act;

announced our intention never to allow the use of Great Apes (gorillas, chimpanzees, pygmy chimpanzees and orang-utans);

announced the phasing out of the use of ascitic animals in certain forms of monoclonal antibody production; and

ended the licensing of the LD50 test and of tests for skin corrosivity and phototoxic potential where valid alternatives exist.

Departmental Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running cost to his Department in the last 12 months was of alcoholic drinks. [149045]

Mr. Straw: Provisional expenditure on alcoholic drinks for official guests at ministerial functions in the last 12 months to 31 January 2001 was £3,007. The cost of alcoholic drinks taken with meals when entertainment is provided by civil servants for official guests cannot be identified separately.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running costs were to his Department in the last 12 months of *(a)* stationery and *(b)* printing and publishing. [149140]

Mr. Straw: The provisional total gross running costs to my Department in the last 12 months to 31 January 2001 were *(a)* £3,675,956 for stationery and *(b)* £6,257,404 for printing and publishing.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the total gross running costs to his Department of the non-departmental public bodies accountable through his Department in the last 12 months. [149143]

Mr. Straw: The Cabinet Office publication, "Public Bodies 2000", contains information for the 1999–2000 financial year of the total costs to Departments of sponsoring their non-departmental public bodies. "Public Bodies 2000" was published on 4 January 2001 and copies have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been the total gross running costs to his Department of fees and disbursements paid to consultants in the last 12 months. [149151]

Mr. Straw: The total gross running costs to the Home Department of fees and disbursements paid to consultants in the 12 months ending 31 December 2000 were £14,234,969.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department's total gross running costs were for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and other expenses met from public funds, but excluding such costs for journeys and stays exclusively within the United Kingdom, *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149044]

Mr. Straw: Provisional costs are *(a)* £8,334,486 in the period from 1 May 1997 to 31 January 2001 and *(b)* £2,206,897 in the last 12 months to 31 January 2001.

Departmental Visits

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many visits abroad have been made by him and his Ministers on departmental business *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149043]

Mr. Straw: The information requested is as follows:

(a) between 1 May 1997 and 31 January 2001 Home Office Ministers made 107 overseas visits on departmental business, 86 of which were within the European Union.

(b) between 1 February 2000 and 31 January 2001 Home Office Ministers made 26 overseas visits, 24 of which were within the European Union.

Road Accidents (Police Vehicles)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* injuries and *(b)* deaths were caused by police cars in each year from 1996 to 2000, broken down by police authority. [150888]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on the number of injuries and deaths in road traffic accidents involving police vehicles on immediate response or in a pursuit are given in the table.

Recommendations from the report "Police Pursuit Driver Training", issued in September 1998, which have been taken forward on a national basis are well advanced and many forces are now working towards full implementation of the report. National standardised police pursuit driver training courses are now available.

Injuries and deaths in road traffic accidents (RTA) involving police vehicles on immediate response/pursuit

	1996–97		*1997–98*		*1998–99*		*1999–2000*	
Force	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*
Avon and Somerset	2	80	0	21	0	72	1	86
Bedfordshire	0	19	0	14	1	14	0	21
Cambridgeshire	0	28	0	43	0	27	0	16
Cheshire	0	42	0	26	0	22	1	33
City of London	0	12	0	6	0	10	0	0

Injuries and deaths in road traffic accidents (RTA) involving police vehicles on immediate response/pursuit

	1996–97		1997–98		1998–99		1999–2000	
Force	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*	*Deaths*	*Injuries*
Cleveland	0	12	0	21	0	16	0	25
Cumbria	0	2	0	5	0	24	0	9
Derbyshire	0	43	1	33	0	27	0	28
Devon and Cornwall	0	33	0	26	0	15	0	19
Dorset	0	12	0	12	0	13	0	22
Durham	0	30	0	25	1	33	0	36
Dyfed-Powys	0	9	0	1	0	2	0	1
Essex	1	32	0	44	1	40	0	40
Gloucestershire	0	13	0	7	0	21	0	13
Greater Manchester	2	105	8	71	2	94	2	98
Gwent	0	4	0	5	0	26	0	9
Hampshire	0	37	0	13	0	21	0	32
Hertfordshire	0	26	0	13	0	32	0	48
Humberside	0	13	0	25	1	16	0	9
Kent	1	26	0	35	0	25	0	6
Lancashire	2	28	0	67	0	0	0	32
Leicestershire	2	10	0	44	2	18	0	23
Lincolnshire	0	5	0	7	0	10	2	0
Merseyside	2	246	1	124	0	95	0	81
Metropolitan Police	1	611	1	740	1	660	1	504
Norfolk	0	13	0	23	0	9	3	24
Northamptonshire	0	27	0	7	0	15	0	16
Northumbria			1	61	0	54	0	95
North Wales	0	12	0	4	0	13	1	2
North Yorkshire	0	20	0	29	0	21	0	12
Nottinghamshire	0	39	0	71	0	27	0	37
South Wales	0	2	0	21	0	22	0	13
South Yorkshire	0	57	0	28	1	53	0	34
Staffordshire	0	39	0	33	0	31	1	24
Suffolk	0	6	0	0	0	4	0	5
Surrey	0	30	0	17	0	17	0	5
Sussex	0	61	3	49			0	41
Thames Valley	1	18	0	103	0	126	2	149
Warwickshire	0	15	0	19	0	12	0	11
West Mercia	0	20	0	17	0	8	0	11
West Midlands	1	90	0	99	0	66	0	63
West Yorkshire			0	101	1	51	0	20
Wiltshire	0	3	0	13	0	11	0	7
Total England and Wales	15	1,930	15	2,123	11	1,863	14	1,760

Notes:
All figures for financial year e.g. 1 April-31 March.
A blank cell indicates that the force did not provide the data for that year.
The figures are numbers of deaths/injuries, not numbers of accidents.
The figures refer only to accidents involving police vehicles which were engaged in immediate/emergency response or pursuit at the time of the accident.
The figures include both police and civilian casualties.

Robert Thompson

Mr. Cann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department was informed of allegations about an incident involving Robert Thompson which took place on 16 January 1997; what action was taken; and if he will make a statement. [151045]

Mr. Boateng: The alleged incident was first brought to our notice in *The Sunday People* newspaper on 11 February 2001. The High Court considered the allegation in the course of judicial review proceedings and concluded in its judgment on Friday 16 February that the allegation was without foundation.

Postal Votes

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the suggested format for the new form for postal votes being sent by his Department to electoral registration offices includes a request that those aged 70 years or over should tick a box. [151519]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There is no requirement or any proposal for electors aged 70 years or over to declare their age when applying for a postal or proxy vote. I recently circulated to all Members two application forms: one for use when registering under the new rolling registration system and one for use when applying for a postal vote. The registration form asks those who are over 70 to tick a box. This is standard registration procedure and allows those electors to avoid being called for jury service from which they are exempt. The postal vote form makes no mention of age.

British Crime Survey

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate from the latest

British crime survey the percentage of each tenure group classified as *(a)* owner occupiers, *(b)* social renters and *(c)* private renters who are victims of crime in each region and nation of the United Kingdom. [150994]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The available information is given in the table.

The 2000 British Crime Survey (BCS) is a representative survey of adults living in private households in England and Wales. Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own separate crime surveys.

The BCS estimates that 30.5 per cent. of adults in England and Wales were victims of crime in 1999. It is possible to provide a breakdown of victimisation figures for each type of tenure on a regional basis. However, some caution should be exercised when interpreting the results for the private rented sector category, as the regional sample sizes for this group are comparatively small.

Percentage victims[1] of any BCS crime in 1999 by tenure type within Government Office Region and in England and Wales

	Percentage victims once or more			
Government Office Region	*Owner occupiers*	*Social renters*	*Private renters[2]*	*All tenures*
North East	27.3	23.4	35.0	27.7
North West	33.6	30.4	41.6	34.5
York and Humberside	31.2	40.4	49.7	34.9
East Midlands	27.2	32.8	33.2	29.0
West Midlands	27.4	28.1	34.8	28.3
South West	27.1	29.9	41.9	29.3
Eastern	25.5	29.3	39.3	27.7
London	29.9	28.6	42.5	32.1
South East	28.0	31.1	38.5	30.0
Wales	26.0	31.3	32.1	27.7
England	28.7	30.8	40.0	30.7
England and Wales	28.6	30.8	39.6	30.5

[1] Victim of a personal crime or lived in a victimised household.

[2] Private rented sector (includes tied to job, rent free and squatting).

Source:
2000 BCS

Hoax Emergency Calls

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people in each of the last five years in the Metropolitan Police area have been *(a)* prosecuted and *(b)* cautioned for making hoax 999 calls. [150959]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Hoax 999 calls fall within section 43 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that where an individual is identified as a "persistent 999 hoax caller" the normal practice is for the Metropolitan Police Service to pass the details of the calls and caller to the service providers, who then deal with the case individually.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Metropolitan Police log the telephone numbers of callers to the 999 service. [150958]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that when a 999 call is received at New Scotland Yard, an entry is made on the Computer Aided Despatch System and the telephone number recorded on the entry.

Drug Testing (Prisons)

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes have been made to *(a)* procedures, *(b)* methods and *(c)* equipment for drug testing in prisons since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [150982]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested can be found in the Prison Service Orders listed in the table and is available in the Library.

Prison Service Order (PSO)	*PSO number*
Mandatory Drug Testing	3,601
Procedures for the Independent Analysis of Mandatory Drug Test Samples	3,605
Voluntary Drug Testing Units and the Framework for Voluntary Drug Testing	3,620

Community Court Orders

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons who are subject to a community court order are *(a)* male and over 65 years of age and *(b)* female and over 60 years of age. [150981]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on the number of persons subject to a community sentence at any one time is not collected centrally. However, information taken from the Home Office's court proceedings database is given in the table and shows the number of males over 65 years of age and females over 60 years of age sentenced to a community sentence by all courts in England and Wales during 1998 and 1999.

Males over 65 years of age and females over 60 years of age sentenced to a community sentence by type of sentence, at all courts England and Wales 1998–99

	Type of sentence					
Sex, age and year	*Probation order*	*Community service order*	*Combination order*	*Curfew order*	*Other order*	*Total*
Males aged more than 65						
1998	153	36	11	2	0	202
1999	147	53	8	1	0	209
Females aged more than 60						
1998	32	5	4	0	0	41
1999	44	11	6	2	0	63

Electronic Tagging

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were electronically tagged in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available. [151012]

Mr. Boateng: 3,558 women were electronically tagged in England and Wales between the start of the current electronic monitoring contracts on 28 January 1999, and 31 January 2001. At midnight on 31 January 2001, a total of 264 women were still being monitored.

Petrol Crisis

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish the correspondence sent by his Department in 2000 to chief constables asking them to submit claims for special grants to cover costs incurred by the petrol crisis. [150687]

Mr. Charles Clarke: My officials wrote to police authorities and to chief officers of police on 18 September and 15 December 2000 inviting claims for additional policing costs necessarily incurred during the fuel distribution emergency last year. Guidance was given that costs should be reasonable, proportionate to immediate local need and that claims should be audited in due course.

Claims for expenditure are now being examined and payment of the bulk of each claim will be made before the end of this financial year.

Copies of the correspondence have been placed in the Library.

Rehabilitation Programmes

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many prisoners had successfully completed *(a)* an offending behaviour programme and *(b)* a sex offender treatment programme by the most recent date for which figures are available; [151249]

(2) how many prisoners he estimates will have completed *(a)* an offending behaviour programme and *(b)* a sex offenders treatment programme by 31 March; and if he will make a statement. [151248]

Mr. Boateng: The Prison Service estimates that between 1 April 2000 and 31 March 2001 there will be 6,512 completions of accredited offending behaviour programmes, of which 849 will be of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme (by 31 January there had been 4,034 completions, 332 of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme). However, these figures precede the annual round of audit and quality assurance, which determines the final number of formally recognised completions.

Between 1992, when the Prison Service introduced accredited offending behaviour programmes, and 31 March 2000 there have been 13,986 completions of formally audited and quality assured programmes, of which 4,094 were of the Sex Offender Treatment Programme.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he personally took the decision to grant the naturalisation application for Mr. S. P. Hinduja. [151247]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him, the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) and the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmonds (Mr. Ruffley) on 30 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 167W.

Trial Outcomes

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many cases in which the defendant chose trial by jury *(a)* ended in terminations without a formal decision of the court and *(b)* resulted in a court decision in each year since 1990. [150680]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Prison Visitors

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of boards of visitors for prisons in England and Wales were serving magistrates in each of the last five years. [151494]

Mr. Boateng: The proportion of serving magistrates on Boards of Visitors for prisons in England and Wales over the last five years was as follows:

Date	*Total number of Board Members*	*Number of Board Members who were serving Magistrates (%)*
19 February 2001	1,733	467 (27)
31 December 2000	1,755	485 (28)
31 December 1999	1,779	492 (28)
31 December 1998	1,588	426 (27)
31 December 1997	1,708	510 (30)
31 December 1996	1,680	407 (24)

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people serve on each board of visitors for prisons in England and Wales; [151490]

(2) what proportion of board of visitors places in each prison establishment were not filled at the latest date for which figures are available. [151491]

Mr. Boateng: Out of a potential membership of 2,074 there was a total of 342 vacancies on Boards of Visitors in England and Wales as at 16 February 2001. A breakdown is set out in the table:

Number of vacancies on boards of visitors by prison establishment

Board	*In post*	*Vacancies*
Acklington	14	2
Albany	11	1
Altcourse	13	4
Ashfield	10	6
Ashwell	12	2
Askham Grange	10	1
Aylesbury	11	5
Bedford	14	0

Number of vacancies on boards of visitors by prison establishment

Board	*In post*	*Vacancies*
Belmarsh	19	2
Birmingham	14	2
Blakenhurst	15	0
Blantyre House	8	4
Blundeston	12	2
Brinsford	10	6
Bristol	11	4
Brixton	14	4
Brockhill	11	1
Buckley Hall	13	1
Bullingdon	13	7
Bullwood Hall	9	7
Camp Hill	13	1
Canterbury	13	1
Cardiff	12	3
Castington	10	2
Channings Wood	15	0
Chelmsford	13	1
Coldingley	14	0
Cookham Wood	9	1
Dartmoor	12	4
Deerbolt	11	1
Doncaster	12	3
Dorchester	10	2
Dover	11	3
Downview	11	5
Drake Hall	11	1
Durham	16	1
East Sutton Park	8	4
Eastwood Park	15	0
Elmley	10	6
Erlestoke	11	1
Everthorpe	10	5
Exeter	15	0
Featherstone	13	1
Feltham	17	1
Ford	14	0
Forest Bank	18	2
Foston Hall	8	2
Frankland	15	1
Full Sutton	13	3
Garth	12	2
Gartree	12	2
Glen Parva	13	5
Gloucester	9	3
Grendon/Springhill	14	1
Guys Marsh	14	0
Haslar	6	4
Hatfield	11	1
Haverigg	14	1
Hewell Grange	12	0
High Down	12	7
Highpoint	15	5
Hindley	14	2
Hollesley Bay	14	0
Holloway	16	2
Holme House	15	4
Hull	13	2
Huntercombe	16	0
Kingston	10	2
Kirkham	16	0
Kirklevington	11	0
Lancaster Castle	11	2
Lancaster Farms	14	2
Latchmere House	11	3
Leeds	20	2
Leicester	11	4
Lewes	15	1
Leyhill	11	2
Lincoln	14	3

Number of vacancies on boards of visitors by prison establishment

Board	*In post*	*Vacancies*
Lindholme	12	4
Littlehey	14	2
Liverpool	19	2
Long Lartin	11	5
Low Newton	8	4
Lowdham Grange	9	7
Maidstone	13	3
Manchester	20	3
Moorland	12	4
Morton Hall	10	0
New Hall	13	2
North Sea Camp	10	6
Northallerton	10	1
Norwich	15	3
Nottingham	14	4
Onley	14	2
Parc	20	0
Parkhurst	13	4
Pentonville	15	5
Portland	13	4
Preston	16	2
Rafby	12	4
Reading	12	0
Risley	15	4
Rochester	12	3
Rye Hill	6	9
Send	10	2
Shepton Mallet	8	4
Shrewsbury	13	1
Stafford	14	2
Standford Hill	9	5
Stocken	17	0
Stoke Heath	13	3
Styal	12	3
Sudbury	12	4
Swaleside	13	3
Swansea	14	2
Swinfen Hall	10	2
The Mount	16	2
The Verne	15	0
Thorn Cross	11	5
Usk	15	0
Wakefield	14	2
Wandsworth	20	1
Wayland	14	4
Wealstun	12	4
Weare	10	5
Wellingborough	12	4
Werrington	12	0
Wetherby	17	0
Whatton	10	2
Whitemoor	18	0
Winchester	14	1
Wolds	13	3
Woodhill	16	3
Wormwood Scrubs	18	6
Wymott	12	4
Total	1,732	342

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* gender and *(b)* ethnic breakdown was for members of boards of visitors for prisons in England and Wales in each of the last five years. [151492]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is published in the Annual Report of the National Advisory Council

for the Boards of Visitors of England and Wales copies of which are available in the Library. The current position and in 1996–2000 are shown in the tables.

Gender and Ethnic Breakdown for Members of Boards of Visitors for Prisons in England and Wales in Each of the Last Five Years. As at 19 February 2001

	Ethnicity				
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	795	28	15	2	840
Male	804	46	41	2	893
Total	1,599	74	56	4	1,733

Year ending 31 December 2000

	Ethnicity				
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	797	31	13	4	845
Male	826	41	40	3	910
Total	1,623	72	53	7	1,755

Year ending 31 December 1999

	Ethnicity				
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	796	23	15	3	837
Male	864	36	40	2	942
Total	1,660	59	55	5	1,779

Year ending 31 December 1998

	Ethnicity					
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Unknown*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	629	18	13	60	8	728
Male	714	28	37	74	7	860
Total	1,343	46	50	134	15	1,588

Year ending 31 December 1997

	Ethnicity					
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Unknown*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	663	20	13	77	9	782
Male	764	30	37	90	5	926
Total	1,427	50	50	167	14	1,708

Year ending 31 December 1996

	Ethnicity					
Gender	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Unknown*	*Other*	*Total*
Female	639	22	12	83	6	762
Male	749	31	34	98	6	918
Total	1,388	53	46	181	12	1,680

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of members of boards of visitors in England and Wales were aged *(a)* under 30 years, *(b)* between 30 and 39 years, *(c)* between 40 and 49 years, *(d)* between 50 and 59 years and *(e)* over 60 years in each of the last five years. [151493]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is published in the Annual Report of the National Advisory Council for the Boards of Visitors of England and Wales, copies of which are placed in the Library. The position over the last five years and more recently was as follows:

	Male	*Female*	*Grand total*
(i) Age Distribution of existing members as at 21 February 2001			
Under 31 years	10	17	27
31 to 35 years	18	22	40
36 to 40 years	34	29	63
41 to 45 years	45	49	94
46 to 50 years	80	96	176
51 to 55 years	145	205	350
56 to 60 years	140	168	308
Over 60 years	427	256	683
Total	899	842	1,741
(ii) Age distribution of existing members as at 31 December 2000			
Under 31 years	8	16	24
31 to 35 years	17	23	40
36 to 40 years	35	29	64
41 to 45 years	44	46	90
46 to 50 years	77	97	174
51 to 55 years	145	201	346
56 to 60 years	142	167	309
Over 60 years	443	265	708
Total	911	844	1,755
(iii) Age distribution of existing members as at 31 December 1999			
Under 31 years	15	15	30
31 to 35 years	17	29	46
36 to 40 years	28	30	58
41 to 45 years	59	58	117
46 to 50 years	90	112	202
51 to 55 years	173	213	386
56 to 60 years	184	188	372
Over 60 years	376	192	568
Total	942	837	1,779
(iii) Age distribution of existing members as at 31 December 1998			
Under 31 years	10	14	24
31 to 35 years	19	18	37
36 to 40 years	30	24	54
41 to 45 years	56	53	109
46 to 50 years	76	110	186
51 to 55 years	164	200	364
56 to 60 years	165	153	318
Over 60 years	340	156	496
Total	860	728	1,588
(ii) Age distribution of existing members as at 31 December 1997			
Under 31 years	13	15	28
31 to 35 years	21	26	47
36 to 40 years	32	22	54
41 to 45 years	61	53	114
46 to 50 years	114	121	235
51 to 55 years	170	209	379
56 to 60 years	180	178	358
Over 60 years	334	159	493
Total	925	783	1,708
(iii) Age distribution of existing members as at 31 December 1996			
Under 31 years	10	11	21
31 to 40 years	54	49	103
41 to 50 years	195	223	418
51 to 60 years	343	331	674
Over 60 years	316	148	464
Total	918	762	1,680

Prisoners' Activities

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners are employed in prison workshops and other employment in total and in each category of prison; and if he will make a statement. [151209]

Mr. Boateng: The number of prisoners employed in the public sector in prison workshops is 9,527, and engaged in other employment is 16,139, totalling 25,666. The number of prisoners employed in the private sector in prison workshops is 1,041, and engaged in other employment is 1,686, totalling 2,727.

For public sector prisons the breakdown by category is:

Category	*Numbers employed in industrial workshops*	*Numbers employed elsewhere*
Category A	1,158	966
Category B	1,221	1,271
Category C	3,488	4,050
Category D	460	1,221
Female	372	2,266
Local	2,335	4,021
Young Offender Institution	493	2,344
Total	9,527	16,139

For private sector prisons the breakdown by category is:

Category	*Numbers employed in industrial workshops*	*Numbers employed elsewhere*
Category B	413	341
Local	628	1,280
Young Offender Institution	—	65
Total	1,041	1,686

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much time on average prisoners spent unlocked *(a)* per weekday and *(b)* per day per weekend, in (i) each category of prison and (ii) in the prison service as a whole in each year since 1995; and if he will make a statement. [151208]

Mr. Boateng: Time out of cell data, in hours, per weekday and per day per weekend for the years 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are set out in the tables.

1997–1998

Category	*Weekdays*	*Weekends*
Category B	10.4	9.5
Category C	11.9	11.2
Dispersal	9.7	9.4
Female closed	12.0	11.4
Female local	10.6	9.8
Female open	21.4	21.7
Male closed young offender	10.0	7.2
Male juvenile	13.5	13.0
Male local	8.7	7.6
Male open	18.2	17.7
Male open young offender	13.4	13.3
Male remand centre	9.5	8.1
Total	10.5	9.4

1998–1999

Category	*Weekdays*	*Weekends*
Category B	10.7	9.2
Category C	11.8	11.1
Dispersal	9.7	9.0
Female closed	11.6	10.5
Female local	10.4	9.8
Female open	19.0	19.3
Male closed young offender	9.8	7.0
Male juvenile	13.1	12.6
Male local	9.1	7.7
Male open	17.8	17.5
Male open young offender	12.8	12.8
Male remand centre	8.9	6.2
Total	10.6	9.3

1999–2000

Category	*Weekdays*	*Weekends*
Category B	10.7	8.8
Category C	11.3	10.4
Dispersal	9.5	8.4
Female closed	11.2	10.4
Female local	10.8	9.9
Female open	18.5	18.9
Male closed young offender	9.3	6.8
Male juvenile	10.8	9.8
Male local	8.8	7.4
Male open	17.0	16.7
Male open young offender	12.7	12.7
Male remand centre	8.1	4.5
Total	10.2	8.8

Comparable data for 1995–96 and 1996–97 are not available.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners work a full eight-hour day; and if he will make a statement. [151214]

Mr. Boateng: Prisoners undertake a range of purposeful activities including education, work, offending behaviour programmes, library and resettlement programmes. For many prisoners full-time employment would not be appropriate. Regimes must allow time for those who need it to complete offending behaviour or basic education programmes. Prison Service establishments record the number of hours of purposeful activity undertaken by prisoners. However, it is not possible to identify how many prisoners work a given number of hours.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisons operate industrial workshops; how many prisoners are employed in such workshops; what the income and expenditure of each prison workshop is; and if he will make a statement. [151210]

Mr. Boateng: There are 106 industrial workshops in public sector prisons and six in private sector workshops. On 31 March 2000 there were 1,041 employed in public sector workshops and on 19 February 2001, there were 1,041 prisoners employed in private sector workshops. This is the most recent available data.

It is not possible to provide information on income and expenditure of each public sector prison workshop as it is not recorded centrally. It is not possible to provide information on income and expenditure in each private sector prison workshop, as it is commercial in confidence.

Prison Population

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the prison population of England and Wales is; how many prisoners are *(a)* on remand and *(b)* serving sentences of one month or less; and if he will make a statement. [151177]

Mr. Boateng: Provisional information shows that on 31 January 2001, there was a prison population of 63,974. Of these prisoners, 10,952 were on remand and 1,158 were serving sentences of one month or less.

Assaults (Prisons)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults by prisoners on *(a)* staff, *(b)* prisoners and *(c)* other people took place in prisons and resulted in a positive disciplinary adjudication in (i) 1996–97, (ii) 1997–98, (iii) 1998–99, (iv) 1999–2000, and (v) the period since 1 April 2000; how many prisoners and what percentage of the average prison population during the relevant period this represented; and if he will make a statement. [151212]

Mr. Boateng: Data for positive assault adjudications for the years in question are set out in the table. Data since 1 April 2000 are provisional and subject to validation.

	Assaults on prisoners	*Rate of assaults on prisoners (%)*	*Assaults on staff/others*	*Rate of assaults on staff/others (%)*
1996–97	2,747	4.8	2,531	4.5
1997–98	3,004	4.8	2,857	4.6
1998–99	3,131	4.8	2,998	4.6
1999–2000	3,457	5.3	3,010	4.7
April 2000—January 2000[1]	3,248	5.0	3,050	4.7

[1] Data since April 2000 are annualised.

The Prison Service does not collect data on assaults on staff and others separately. Data on assaults have been previously published in Her Majesty's Prison Service Corporate Plan 1999–2000 to 2001–02, Her Majesty's Prison Service Annual Reports and Accounts 1998–99 (HC 748) and Her Majesty's Prison Service Annual Reports and Accounts 1999–2000 (HC 622). Her Majesty's Prison Service Corporate Plan for 2001–02 to 2003–04 is available in the Library.

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults by prisoners, expressed as a percentage of the average prison population, occurred on *(a)* staff *(b)* prisoners and *(c)* other people and resulted in positive disciplinary adjudication in (i) all prisons, (ii) local male prisons and (iii) young offender institutions in (A) 1996–97, (B) 1998–99 (C) 1999–2000 and (D) the period since April 2000; and if he will make a statement. [151213]

Mr. Boateng: Data for positive assault adjudications for the years in question are set out in the tables. Data since 1 April 2000 are provisional and subject to validation. The Prison Service does not collect data on assaults on staff and others separately. For completeness, the year 1997–98 is included.

All prisons

	Assaults on prisoners	*Rate of assaults on prisoners (%)*	*Assaults on staff/others*	*Rate of assaults on staff/others (%)*
1996–97	2,747	4.8	2,531	4.5
1997–98	3,004	4.8	2,857	4.6
1998–99	3,131	4.8	2,998	4.6
1999–2000	3,457	5.3	3,010	4.7
April 2000—January 2000[1]	3,248	5.0	3,050	4.7

[1] Data since April 2000 are annualised.

Male locals

	Assaults on prisoners	*Rate of assaults on prisoners (%)*	*Assaults on staff/others*	*Rate of assaults on staff/others (%)*
1996–97	764	3.8	1,150	5.7
1997–98	948	4.2	1,379	6.1
1998–99	1,064	3.9	1,474	5.4
1999–2000	1,070	4.0	1,378	5.1
April 2000—January 2000[1]	902	3.5	1,188	4.6

[1] Data since April 2000 are annualised.

Young offender institutions

	Assaults on prisoners	*Rate of assaults on prisoners (%)*	*Assaults on staff/others*	*Rate of assaults on staff/others (%)*
1996–97	934	16.0	319	5.5
1997–98	1,297	23.7	529	9.7
1998–99	1,183	16.9	599	8.6
1999–2000	1,359	20.0	698	10.3
April 2000—January 2000[1]	1,604	20.9%	878	11.4%

[1] Data since April 2000 are annualised.

Note:

Young offender institutions include open, closed and juvenile establishments.

Criminal Justice System Business Plan

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the criminal justice system business plan for 2001–02. [151323]

Mr. Straw: My right hon. and noble Friends the Lord Chancellor, the Attorney-General and I have today published the business plan for the criminal justice system in England and Wales for 2001–02. The plan describes the aims, objectives and performance targets which the Government expect the criminal justice system as a whole to work to deliver. Copies of the plan have been placed in the Library.

CABINET OFFICE

Special Advisers

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, pursuant to her answer of 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 763W, on Special Advisers, which clauses of Schedule 1 (Part 1) of the "Model Contract for Special Advisers" set out the role of Special Advisers in costing the policies of opposition parties. [148844]

Marjorie Mowlam: The "Model Contract for Special Advisers" makes it clear that Special Advisers can discharge their duties with a degree of party political commitment and association which would not be possible for a permanent civil servant.

Section (iv) of Schedule 1 (Part 1) sets out the duties of Special Advisers which include devilling for the Minister and checking facts and research findings, and adding party political content to material prepared by permanent civil servants.

Strategic Communications Unit

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what role will be played by *(a)* the Prime Minister, *(b)* ministers, *(c)* Special Advisers and *(d)* the Chief Press Secretary in relation to the Strategic Communications Unit in the period following the calling of a general election. [150240]

Marjorie Mowlam: The activities of Government during an Election period are undertaken in line with the requirements of "the Ministerial Code", "the Civil Service Code", "the Model Contract for Special Advisers", and the additional Election Guidance that is routinely issued to all civil servants once an Election has been called. The Prime Minister's Chief Press Secretary has already made it clear that he will resign as soon as an Election is called.

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance is given to the Strategic Communications Unit relating to information concerning the policies of Opposition parties. [150237]

Marjorie Mowlam: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 47W.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will list the contracts that exist between Serco and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if she will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151342]

Marjorie Mowlam: The Cabinet Office, including its executive agency, has contracts with Serco for the provision of:

messengers, post room, security and other support services for the main Department;

security services for the Government Car and Despatch Agency; and

a helpline for users of secure telephone facilities.

In addition, the Department's Special Services Group has a number of contracts with Serco for the supply of services at Government establishments throughout the UK at which Serco acts as Facility Manager or main contractor.

Departmental IT Policies

Mr. Field: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if she will list the IT projects currently undertaken in her Department; and if she will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project; [151504]

(2) if she will list the IT projects her Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if she will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151468]

Mr. Ian McCartney: The IT projects currently being undertaken by the Cabinet Office are as follows:

Ukonline.gov.uk citizen portal

In July 2000 the Cabinet Office awarded a contract to BT (British elecommunications plc) to build and operate the Ukonline.gov.uk citizen portal, for one year (until July 2001). This initial development phase is expected to cost around £10 million, of which around £4 million has been spent so far. We are currently considering the longer-term arrangements for operating the site.

Government Gateway

In October 2000 the Cabinet Office began working with a group of suppliers including Microsoft and Cable and Wireless to deliver the initial phase of the Government Gateway. The initial phase of delivery will be complete by June 2001 and will have cost around £18 million.

The initial development phases of both the ukonline.gov.uk citizen portal and the Government Gateway projects will continue into the next financial year, ending in July and June 2001 respectively. Both projects are part of the long term strategy for delivering electronic government, and the Cabinet Office has applied for CMF funding to enable both projects to continue beyond these dates. The value of this work will depend upon which aspects of each project are selected for development during the next phase.

Pierre-Yves Gerbeau

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when she last met Mr. Pierre-Yves Gerbeau. [151429]

Marjorie Mowlam: I met Mr. Gerbeau from time to time on an informal basis. We last met in an official capacity at a meeting of the Millennium Commission on 14 June 2000.

WALES

Steel Industry

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what recent representations he has made to the European Commission about extra funding for the Llanwern and Ebbw Vale areas; and if he will make a statement. [150231]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* Any redirection of Structural Funds in Wales would be for the Assembly to discuss with the Commission. I understand that the Commission has indicated a willingness to engage in such discussions.

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151512]

Mr. Paul Murphy: There is none. My Department's IT requirements are provided by the National Assembly for Wales under the terms of a service level agreement.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the IT projects his Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if he will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151471]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None. My Department's IT requirements are provided by the National Assembly for Wales under the terms of a service level agreement.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Paramilitary Violence

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* murders, *(b)* shootings, *(c)* beatings, *(d)* bombings, *(e)* expulsions and *(f)* other crimes have been carried out by (i) Republican and (ii) Loyalist paramilitary groups since the signing of the Belfast Agreement. [150223]

Mr. Ingram: The tables show the number of deaths, bombings, shootings, and the number of casualties as a result of the security situation in Northern Ireland. These figures would include, for example, where an armed robbery is believed to have been committed by a paramilitary grouping. There may be other incidents recorded under the heading of a criminal offence, for example, robbery, where a paramilitary group may have been involved, but this cannot be confirmed.

There are no figures available which indicate the number of persons who may have been forced to leave the province through paramilitary/terrorist intimidation. Attribution for shootings and bombings cannot be given after 31 March 1999 (these details are no longer held centrally and therefore are not readily available), and figures for 2001 are provisional and may be subject to minor adjustment.

Security statistics 10 April 1998 to 31 March 1999

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*
Deaths	10	32
Bombings:		
Incidents	95	22
Explosions	90	16
Defused	106	11
Shootings	88	51
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary Style Shootings	39	30
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary Style Assaults	111	60

Security statistics 1 April 1999 to 8 February 2001

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*	*Not known*
Deaths	16	5	2
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary Style Shootings	134	73	—
Casualties as a result of Paramilitary Style Assaults	139	86	—
Bombings:			
Incidents	—	—	223
Exploded	—	—	100
Defused	—	—	165
Shootings	—	—	421

Notes:
1. The following types of shootings incidents are included:
(a) Shots fired by terrorists
(b) Shots fired by security forces
(c) Paramilitary-style attacks involving shootings
(d) Shots heard (and later confirmed)
(e) Other violent incidents where shots are fired eg armed robbery
2. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusing. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many convictions for paramilitary *(a)* beatings and *(b)* shootings there were in (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000. [150308]

Mr. Ingram: I regret that the information requested is not available. Court Database records are maintained by the type of offence e.g. Assault Occasioning Actual Bodily Harm. It is not therefore possible to link such convictions to paramilitary-style assaults as there is no such offence.

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Northern Ireland Secretaries in the last 20 years have been provided with a Jaguar. [148195]

Dr. Reid: The answer is four.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much it cost to buy and adapt the Jaguar for the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; [148193]

(2) how much it cost to buy and adapt the official car for the right hon. Member for Redcar (Marjorie Mowlam) as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. [148194]

Dr. Reid: This information cannot be provided on the grounds of security.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use is made of the official car which was used by the right hon. Member for Redcar (Marjorie Mowlam), when she was Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. [148191]

Dr. Reid: This information cannot be provided on the grounds of security.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many former Northern Ireland Secretaries have chauffeur-driven Jaguars provided for their current use. [148192]

Dr. Reid: One. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) has retained a relief Jaguar for security reasons.

RUC

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many RUC officers were absent on the grounds of illness on average in each month since 1 April 1998 to the latest date for which figures are available. [150296]

Mr. Ingram: The following table provides the information requested.

Average number of RUC and RUCR absent through illness April 1998–2001

Month	*Number*
1998	
April	824
May	733
June	730
July	681
August	807
September	903
October	931
November	945
December	926
1999	
January	1,021
February	1,040
March	1,000
April	929
May	878
June	872
July	831
August	979
September	1,053
October	1,188
November	1,147
December	1,141
2000	
January	1,158
February	1,070
March	1,001
April	965
May	956
June	956
July	917
August	1,052
September	1,128
October	1,176
November	1,217
December	1,197
2001	
January	1,244

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the actual strength of the RUC/RUCR in each month since 1 April 1998. [150295]

Mr. Ingram: The table provides the information requested.

Actual strength of RUC Regulars and Reserve, April 1998 to February 2001

	Regulars	*FTR*	*PTR*	*Total*
1989–99				
April	8,484	2,963	1,290	12,727
May	8,464	2,990	1,282	12,736
June	8,509	2,950	1,277	12,736
July	8,491	2,938	1,269	12,698
August	8,467	2,929	1,268	12,664
September	8,446	2,980	1,255	12,681
October	8,485	2,949	1,245	12,679
November	8,470	2,944	1,244	12,658
December	8,456	2,936	1,238	12,630
January	8,531	2,884	1,230	12,645
February	8,520	2,874	1,226	12,620
March	8,496	2,862	1,217	12,575
1999–2000				
April	8,471	2,858	1,212	12,541
May	8,455	2,850	1,209	12,514
June	8,490	2,823	1,204	12,517
July	8,479	2,813	1,200	12,492
August	8,514	2,775	1,194	12,483
September	8,501	2,762	1,188	12,451
October	8,488	2,753	1,181	12,422
November	8,455	2,727	1,176	12,358
December	8,445	2,719	1,174	12,338
January	8,423	2,708	1,169	12,300
February	8,413	2,698	1,157	12,268
March	8,393	2,688	1,152	12,233
2000–01				
April	8,415	2,668	1,145	12,228
May	8,393	2,654	1,140	12,187
June	8,374	2,643	1,137	12,154
July	8,352	2,623	1,131	12,106
August	8,337	2,606	1,121	12,084
September	8,318	2,593	1,118	12,029
October	8,303	2,579	1,112	11,994
November	8,245	2,567	1,106	11,918
December	8,268	2,555	1,097	11,920
January	8,038	2,530	1,089	11,657
February	7,896	2,521	1,089	11,506
March	—	—	—	—

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when his economic policy unit was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental Special Advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150375]

Dr. Reid: Economic policy has been devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly and an Economic Policy Unit has been set up within the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. It is therefore no longer a matter for the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCO and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151350]

Dr. Reid: None.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Hill Farmers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how much public subsidy there was for a typical hill farmer in England for the most recent year for which figures are available. [148400]

Ms Quin: The average total direct subsidy payment to full-time LFA cattle and sheep farm businesses in England in 1999–2000 is estimated as £24,400 per farm. This figure excludes the additional support farmers receive from the consumer, through the maintenance of EU agricultural prices above world levels by the CAP.

Sheep

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what *(a)* assessments of and *(b)* representations he has made concerning the recent reduction in payments of the sheep annual premium scheme by the European Commission. [148872]

Ms Quin: The rate recently determined for Sheep Annual Premium for the 2000 marketing year is 17.477 euro/ewe (£10.73). This is the lowest level set for a number of years.

There are two reasons for this low premium. First, it is the difference between a Community-set basic price and average prices on the EU market. High sheep prices across the Community have reduced the premium. Secondly, the £/euro exchange rate reduces the sterling value to British farmers of the euro rate.

Nevertheless we are satisfied that all the rules for calculating the premium have been applied correctly.

BSE

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many cows were detected with BSE *(a)* over and *(b)* under the age of 30 months in each month of (i) 1999 and (ii) 2000. [148877]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* No cases of cows with BSE under the age of 30 months were detected in the period referred to. The number of cases confirmed in 1999 and 2000 in Great Britain by month of restriction aged over 30 months is as follows:

Month	*1999*	*2000*
January	250	140
February	244	147
March	280	145
April	198	104
May	185	131
June	190	93
July	156	81
August	156	94
September	159	91
October	129	113
November	167	105
December	140	[1]62
Total	2,254	1,306

[1] There are three cases pending from 1999.

The figures do not include animals tested under the active surveillance programme, which numbered 20 in 1999 and 32 in 2000, as at 9 February 2001 (these figures also include private submissions).

Mr. Amess: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what communications with the Agriculture departments of other EU member states his Department *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have to pass on the UK's environmental experience and good practice of large-scale culling and incineration of cattle liable to be infected with BSE. [150011]

Ms Quin: The Intervention Board has had considerable contact on these matters with representatives from other member states. In particular, in mid January the Intervention Board hosted a two day seminar on the Over Thirty Month Scheme at which representatives from Spain, Portugal, France, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden and the European Commission were present.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what changes he plans to make in the UK standards for the disposal of animal carcases suspected of harbouring the BSE agent as a result of recent large-scale slaughter of possible BSE infected cattle in other EU member states. [150012]

Ms Quin: None. All cattle slaughtered as BSE suspects in the United Kingdom are incinerated.

Fishmeal

Mr. Curry: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what assessment he has made of the cost to the United Kingdom feed manufacturing industry of a ban on the use of fishmeal in feeds for cattle and sheep; [149653]

(2) if it is his intention to seek a derogation for the United Kingdom from EU proposals banning the use of fishmeal in feeds for cattle and sheep. [149654]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 9 February 2001]:* Interested parties have been consulted on the impact of the new EU-wide feed controls, including the ban on fishmeal. Representations received are currently being examined. When this assessment is complete, we will announce how we intend to proceed.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received concerning the proposed European ban on the use of fishmeal in animal feedingstuff; and what reply he has sent. [150062]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* We have received letters from 12 hon. Members and 53 other interested parties, including agricultural trade associations, farmers, feed manufacturers, feed nutritionists, veterinarians and welfare groups.

In responding to letters addressing the Agricultural Council decision on feed controls, we have made clear our intention to implement the ban on fishmeal from ruminant feed in a proportionate way, so far as we are able. Letters relating to the consultation on implementation of the feed controls will be considered as part of the consultation process and individual replies issued in due course.

GM Vines

Ms Walley: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will propose to the *(a)* European Commission and *(b)* Council of Ministers that they review support for the proposed provision under Directive 68/193/EEC in respect of the commercialisation of genetically treated grafted and non-grafted rooted vines; and if he will make a statement. [150441]

Ms Quin: The horizontal EU Directive on GMO releases 90/220 already allows for the marketing of genetically modified vine varieties, subject to rigorous controls to safeguard human health and the environment. The Commission's proposal to amend Directive 68/193 on the marketing of vines does not introduce anything new in this respect but mirrors the relevant provisions of Directive 90/220. Nevertheless, the Agriculture Council agreed at its most recent meeting that the proposal should be subject to further detailed consideration before there is any question of its possible adoption.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will make a statement on his policy on paying agrimonetary compensatory amounts to *(a)* cereal producers, *(b)* pig producers and *(c)* other producers. [148948]

Ms Quin: The decision to pay each tranche of agrimonetary compensation is considered on a case by case basis, taking into consideration the state and prospects for the industry and other calls on the UK Exchequer.

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what mechanism has been proposed by the Government to replace the agrimonetary compensation scheme. [150705]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 141W.

Departmental Business (Overseas Visits)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many visits abroad have been made by his Department's officials on departmental business *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149142]

Ms Quin: Information about the number of individual visits overseas undertaken by my officials on departmental business since 1 May 1997 is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Travel Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what were his Department's total gross running costs for travel, including fares, subsistence, accommodation and any other expenses met from public funds but excluding all such costs for journeys and stays exclusively within the United Kingdom *(a)* since 1 May 1997 and *(b)* in the last 12 months. [149139]

Ms Quin: The information requested is set out in the table.

£

Actual spend/description	*1 May 1997 to 31 January 2000*	*1 February 2000 to 31 January 2001*[1]	*Total*
Travel EC Institution Meetings	1,701,787.10	631,973.23	2,333,760.33
Travel Other Overseas Visits	1,401,096.55	537,523.73	1,938,620.28
Travel Foreign Hospitality	15,406.42	7,972.30	23,378.72
Subsistence EC Institution Meetings	968,357.23	229,150.30	1,197,507.53
Subsistence Other Overseas Visits	648,217.95	136,662.08	784,880.03
Total	4,734,865.25	1,543,281.64	6,278,146.89

[1] This column includes unaudited figures from 1 April 2000

Support Payment

Mr. Breed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the normal procedure is for notifying farmers of changes to their support payments. [149287]

Ms Quin: Proposals for major changes in the structure of agricultural support, such as the Agenda 2000 proposals, are the subject of consultations with farmers' organisations and other interested parties that are designed to inform the discussions which take place in the Council of Ministers, as re proposals for implementing such changes in the United Kingdom once agreement is reached in the Council. The outcome of any consultation is notified to the farming industry in a Press Notice.

Changes to the rules of the aid schemes are announced in scheme literature issued by the Ministry and the Intervention Board Executive Agency or in letters sent directly to farmers and traders. The scheme literature gives details of payment rates fixed in Euros but, where the Sterling rates are given, it is made clear that these are estimates and that the final rates of payment will depend

on the exchange rate effective on the date which sets the conversion rate applicable to the scheme in question. These dates vary from scheme to scheme. Changes in payment rates resulting purely from changes in the Euro/Sterling exchange rate are published in Notices to Traders issued by the Intervention Board.

Individual claimants are notified by the Regional Service Centre of the Ministry which handles their claim (or by the Intervention Board, as appropriate) of the amounts of aid that will be paid to them.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Spring: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the effect to date of BSE on the consumption of beef in the EU. [148762]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* Beef consumption in some member states has remained stable while in others, particularly France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece, Belgium and Austria, significant short-term falls have been reported. In January these latter countries indicated (on the basis of market intelligence reports rather than official statistics) that beef consumption had fallen by between 20 and 50 per cent. The Commission has estimated that overall EU consumption might fall by 10 per cent. or more in 2001. It is too early to judge whether this forecast will prove to be accurate.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what internal audit report he has commissioned into the plans to create a new CAP paying agency; and if he will place copies in the Library. [150867]

Ms Quin: The MAFF and Intervention Board Internal Audit Units have recently reviewed the programme controls which are being put in place to ensure the successful delivery of the new CAP Payments Agency.

An Action Plan covering the recommendations in the audit report is currently being finalised. I will place copies in the Library when it is available.

Farm Aid

Mr. Nicholls: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will provide a breakdown of expenditure of the £203.5 million, announced to United Kingdom farmers in March 2000. [150707]

Ms Quin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister on 16 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 138–42W.

Fruit

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what steps he is taking to encourage producers to bring on to the market varieties of *(a)* apples, *(b)* pears and *(c)* other fruits that were readily available in 19th-century England but are rarely found today. [149743]

Ms Quin: The England Rural Development Programme can assist growers to pursue new market opportunities, for example grants under the Rural Enterprise Scheme can help with the marketing of quality agricultural products, including older varieties of apples, pears and other fruit. The National Fruit Collection of Brogdale is a rich resource containing over 3,000 distinct varieties of apples, pears and other stone and bush fruits which are available to those interested in identifying old varieties suitable for niche markets. The Government support the National Fruit Collection at Brogdale at a cost of £180,000 per annum.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many press releases were issued by his Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what his estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149248]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The number of MAFF News Releases put out for the years 1996–97 to date are as follows:

Year	*Number*
1996–97	491
1997–98	467
1998–99	553
1999–2000	571
2000–01	[1]381

[1] To date

It is not possible to forecast the total number of MAFF Press Releases for this financial year.

Pet Travel Scheme

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food how many people in Pendle have benefited from the pet travel scheme since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [149921]

Ms Quin: Up to end of December 2000, the owners of 14,500 cats and dogs had used the Pet Travel Scheme to bring their pets into England. Unfortunately, data are not collected on numbers of people using the scheme from specific areas of the UK.

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when he expects to complete a review of the inclusion of the USA and Canada in the reformed quarantine regulations for pets. [149999]

Ms Quin: The Pet Travel Scheme was extended to include pet cats and dogs from certain rabies-free islands, including Hawaii, on 31 January 2001.

A risk assessment following the Kennedy Committee Report indicated that cats and dogs from North America could be included within the Pet Travel Scheme only with a further increase in risk. Any increase, even a small one, is obviously undesirable. We are however committed to reviewing the possibility of the inclusion of the USA and Canada in the Pet Travel Scheme on the basis of new data received.

Farming (Leicestershire)

Mr. Reed: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will estimate the total value to Leicestershire farmers of CAP payments for the most recent year for which figures are available. [149987]

Ms Quin: Total subsidies under the CAP paid to Leicestershire farmers by MAFF during the EU financial year 16 October 1999 to 15 October 2000 amounted to £36,493,221. In some cases amounts include an element of national as well as EU funding. Farmers also benefit from expenditure on market support measures, even though this is not paid directly to them.

Animal Exports

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what percentage of animals exported live from the UK undergo an inspection by an independent veterinary inspector; [150313]

(2) what procedures exist for the inspection of animals exported live from the UK. [150314]

Ms Quin: All consignments of live farm animals destined for export are inspected by a Local Veterinary Inspector (LVI) in the 24 hours prior to loading as part of the export health certification procedures. Arrangements vary for other animals but almost all are inspected prior to export so that the health certification can be completed. Notes for guidance which accompany each certificate outline the procedures to be followed by LVIs and exporters. Specific guidance on pre-export procedures for LVIs certifying live sheep and pigs for fattening or slaughter to other member states was issued on 31 May 1999. Copies will be made available to hon. Members in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. McDonnell: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) what percentage of animals exported live from the UK are exported under the procedure of further fattening certificates; [150315]

(2) what percentage of animals exported live from the UK are exported for slaughter where details of the destination abattoir are required. [150316]

Ms Quin: 'Fattening' and 'slaughter' export health certificates apply to live sheep and pigs. In 1999, 99 per cent. of live sheep and 2 per cent. of live pigs were exported from the UK under 'fattening' certification and 1 per cent. of live sheep and 43 per cent. of live pigs under 'slaughter' certification. Animals exported under 'slaughter' certification must be delivered to a specified abattoir of destination. The figures for 2000 will be available shortly.

GM Crops

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what evidence from the USA and Canada on boundary contamination by GM crops he has taken into account in determining separation distances for GM crop trials in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [150102]

Ms Quin: Separation distances for this spring's GM farm scale trials were announced on 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 460–91W. The Government asked SCIMAC to increase distances in two cases, following a review by the National Institute for Agricultural Botany (NIAB) of the available scientific data in this area, including evidence from North America on boundary levels of cross-pollination. The separation distances being applied, however, reflect expected levels of cross-pollination on a whole field to field basis. The NIAB report is available on the Ministry website at www.maff.gov.uk.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the throughput was for the over-30-months scheme in each year of its existence in terms of cattle weight and, for each year, the proportion of the throughput exceeding weight limits for compensation that applied at the time. [150243]

Mr. Nick Brown *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The table details the total throughput figures for each year in tonnes. During 1996 there was no weight cap restriction and therefore compensation was paid on the full weight. From 4 August 1997 until 5 June 2000 compensation was limited to a maximum 560 kgs. With the lifting of the weight cap on 5 June 2000 compensation now continues to be paid on the full weight. The proportion of the weight presented which exceeded the weight limit is also shown as a percentage together with the average carcase weight of the animals presented in each year.

	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Weight cap (560 kilo)	0	[1]560	[2]560	[2]560	[3]560
Total weight (tonnes)	688,799	492,907	506,192	538,521	548,289
Overall % of animal weight over weight cap	0	3.00	7.42	6.84	3.27
Average carcase weight (kilo)	605	582	565	555	562

[1] From 4 August 1997
[2] All year
[3] Until 5 June 2000

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food on what date the last shipment of nuclear waste was dumped at sea by MV Gem. [150800]

Mr. Morley: The last shipment of radioactive waste was dumped by MV Gem in the North Atlantic in August 1982.

Farming Costs

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will report on the progress of the task force looking at the input costs in farming. [151437]

Ms Quin: The Inputs Task Force published an interim report on 5 February. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House. A final report is due at the end of March.

TREASURY

EU Budget

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the anticipated *(a)* gross and *(b)* net UK contribution is to the EU Budget in the current financial year. [144042]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Government estimates of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget for future years are given on a financial year basis. The Government's latest forecast for 2000–01 and 2001–02 can be found at footnote 1 to Table B17 of the pre-Budget Report (Cm 4917) published in November. Details of the spring forecasts of the United Kingdom's gross and net contribution in 2000–01 will be published in the Chancellor's Departmental Report.

Debt Servicing (HIPC)

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was paid in total to the United Kingdom in debt servicing payments, in the last year for which figures are available, by *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Burundi, *(c)* Central African Republic, *(d)* Chad, *(e)* the Republic of Congo, *(f)* the Democratic Republic of Congo, *(g)* Côte d'Ivoire, *(h)* Ethiopia, *(i)* Ghana, *(j)* Kenya, *(k)* Lao PDR, *(l)* Liberia, *(m)* Myanmar, *(n)* Sierra Leone, *(o)* Somalia, *(p)* Sudan, *(q)* Togo, *(r)* Vietnam and *(s)* Yemen. [144479]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Her Majesty's Government have received amounts of debt service payments under bilateral debt agreements from the following countries in 2000:

Country	*Payment (£)*
Central African Republic	27,637
Ethiopia	525,526
Ghana	1,417,864
Kenya	6,357,388
Vietnam	66,285
Yemen	201,103
Total	9,205,803

No payments were made in 2000 by Angola, the Republic of Congo, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan or Togo. Nor was any payment received from Myanmar, which has no debt agreement with the UK.

Burundi, Chad and Lao PDR have no liabilities to Her Majesty's Government.

In addition, in 2000 the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC) received £5,020,124 from Ghana and £1,947,456 from Kenya. CDC is a PLC owned by Government: economic interest in CDC loans to HIPCs has been transferred to DFID.

With effect from 2 December, in line with the joint announcement of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development, Her Majesty's Government will receive no financial benefit from any future payments by any of these countries. They will be held in trust and refunded to the country when Decision Point under the enhanced HIPC initiative is reached, at which time 100 per cent. of future payments will also be relieved.

In order to reach Decision Point, HIPC countries must demonstrate their commitment to a programme agreed with the IMF to deliver macroeconomic stability and alleviate poverty. Poverty eradication must be the recognised priority: the UK cannot provide debt relief for conflict countries where defence spending is high or for those with no track record of economic reform.

Lump Sum Tax Payments

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many taxpayers have arrangements with the Inland Revenue whereby in exchange for payment of a fixed sum of tax they are absolved from having to file detailed accounts and tax returns; how many of these individuals are British subjects; and if he will list the nationality of those who are not. [145788]

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals were permitted to make an agreed annual lump sum payment to the Inland Revenue in lieu of submitting a tax return in the last financial year. [146006]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 17 January 2001]:* The Inland Revenue has a small number of agreements of this sort, entered into at various dates since 1988, though none of the individuals concerned has been absolved from the general obligation to file a tax return. Whether an individual is a British subject, and the question of their nationality, are not features of the agreements which have been made. The policy in relation to these agreements is currently under review.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the special advisers working for him will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149307]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Select Committee Report

Dr. Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information he received on the contents of the Education and Employment Committee's report on access to higher education, and the proceedings of the Committee prior to the publication of the report. [150051]

Mr. Andrew Smith *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State with responsibility for lifelong learning, my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, North (Mr. Wicks) on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 162W.

Ultra-low Sulphur Petrol

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken since the March 2000 Budget to monitor changes in use of ultra-low sulphur petrol. [150113]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Treasury does not monitor changes in the usage of individual road fuels. However, figures are produced each month showing deliveries from refineries. The most

recent figures for mid-January 2001 indicate that ultra-low sulphur petrol accounted for 47.8 per cent. of all petrol released in the UK.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations oil refineries have made to him to have defrayed the additional production costs of low sulphur petrol; and what response he gave them. [150228]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* The Government receive a wide range of representations in the run-up to each Budget. These include representations from oil producers. All such representations were taken account of before announcing in Budget 2000 a 1p per litre reduction in the duty rate for ultra-low sulphur petrol.

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made on the introduction of ultra-low sulphur petrol in the United Kingdom [151634]

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the pre-Budget report in November that the Government would reduce duty on ultra-low sulphur petrol (ULSP) on Budget day this year, in recognition of its environmental benefits, subject to consultation and it being widely available.

The Minister for Transport and I met the major oil companies on 21 February to discuss this issue. On the basis of that meeting, I am glad to say that we believe that the oil companies are on track to meet their target to supply ULSP nationwide at their retail sites by the end of March.

The Minister for Transport and I also met representatives of independent petrol retailers on 21 February. They operate over 5,000 retail sites across the country. Many are small businesses, often playing a vital role supplying rural and urban communities.

Although some independents are already supplying up to 50 per cent. ULSP, their representatives indicated that they anticipate that it could take independent retailers longer to complete the nationwide transition to ULSP than for the major oil companies, because of constraints on the capacity of UK oil refineries.

The independent retailers could move faster by increasing imports, but this might cause uncertainty in the wholesale and retail markets and would not necessarily be to the benefit of motorists.

The Government's objectives are to ensure that everyone should be able to share the environmental benefits of ULSP, and the benefits of the duty cut associated with it. It is in the whole country's interests that these objectives are achieved, and achieved as smoothly as possible.

Any decisions on actual duty rates will be taken and announced by the Chancellor in the Budget itself but, as a sensible measure that will be supported by independent petrol retailers to guarantee that all motorists would benefit from a cut in duty on Budget day, I can announce that the Government intend to match any reduction in duty on ULSP that is announced in the Budget with a reduction in duty on unleaded petrol for a temporary period until 14 June 2001.

This will ensure that the introduction of ULSP across the country will happen in the smoothest way, and that car drivers—especially in rural areas supplied by independent petrol retailers—will be able to benefit from any duty cut that is announced in the Budget for ULSP. We want to match nationwide availability at the major oil companies with all motorists benefiting from any duty cut at independent stations too.

In this way we best achieve our aims set out in November—first, that the long-term benefits to the environment are achieved; secondly, that motorists would be able to benefit from a cut in petrol duty on Budget day; and thirdly, that the benefit would go to all motorists in all areas.

ECOFIN Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held in Brussels on 12 February; and if he will make a statement. [150526]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the meeting of the Economic and Finance Council of Ministers.

The Council examined and agreed Opinions on Stability and Convergence Reports for Denmark, Greece, France, Ireland, Italy, Austria and the United Kingdom.

The Opinion on the UK programme confirms that the UK is meeting its obligations under the Stability and Growth Pact and has delivered a sound, stable, macroeconomic performance. Government debt is one of the lowest in all member states, and the Opinion welcomes the sustainable long-term position of the UK's public finances. The Opinion also notes that the UK is projected to move into deficit in the medium term. I made clear to the Commission that this reflects the more than doubling of net investment announced in the 2000 Spending Review to promote the renewal and modernisation of the country's capital stock, and that financing this essential investment by borrowing is in line with the Growth and Stability Pact and the Government's fiscal rules.

The Council also adopted a Recommendation addressed to Ireland under Article 99 paragraph 4 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

The Commission presented its report on the functioning of product and capital markets. The Council discussed a Presidency orientation document on the Broad Economic Guidelines. There was broad support on the need to press ahead with structural reforms and liberalisation of markets, particularly in financial services and network industries; and on the need to promote innovation and research and development. The Presidency will draft a key issues paper for the 12 March ECOFIN.

The Commission presented its Communication on E-commerce and Financial Services. The draft Directive on companies that manage common funds and unit trusts (UCITS) was referred back to the Committee of Permanent Representatives of the member states (COREPER) for further work.

Ministers confirmed their agreement to a proposed supplementary amending budget to allow for measures against BSE.

Political agreement was reached on measures against euro counterfeiting and on the Presidency compromise proposal on derogations for excise duties under the mineral oils Directive.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150556]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Bristol, East, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Since the general election, claimant unemployment in the constituency has fallen by 1,637, or 43 per cent., youth unemployment is down by 79 per cent., and long-term unemployment has fallen by 80 per cent.

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and to make work pay. To the end of November 2000, the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds had helped 1,229 young people in Bristol, East constituency gain valuable skills and experience—566 (46 per cent.) of whom had moved into employment. The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced in October 1999, is helping to make work pay for low and middle income families. In August 2000, 1,700 families in the constituency were benefiting from WFTC.

The Government are also committed to developing policies which enable all pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity. As a result of the recent pre-Budget report, all pensioners, including 15,500 in Bristol, East, will receive an above-inflation increase in the basic state pension from April 2001. Single pensioners will receive an extra £5 a week, and couples will receive an extra £8 a week. All pensioners aged 75 or over have also been entitled to a free TV licence since November 2000—including around 10,000 in Bristol, East.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150721]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Blackpool, North and Fleetwood, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Since the general election, claimant unemployment in the constituency has fallen by 660, or 24 per cent., youth unemployment is down by 77 per cent., and long-term unemployment has fallen by 75 per cent.

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and to make work pay. To the end of November 2000, the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds had helped 833 young people in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency gain valuable skills and experience—419 (50 per cent.) of whom had moved into employment. The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced in October 1999, is helping to make work pay for low and middle income families. In August 2000, 2,400 families in the constituency were benefiting from WFTC.

The Government are also committed to developing policies which enable all pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity. As a result of the recent pre-Budget Report, all pensioners, including 23,600 in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood, will receive an above-inflation increase in the basic state pension from April 2001. Single pensioners will receive an extra £5 a week, and couples will receive an extra £8 a week. All pensioners aged 75 or over have also been entitled to a free TV licence since November 2000—including around 14,500 in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood.

Departmental Policies (Clwyd, South)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150910]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Clwyd, South, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Since the general election, claimant unemployment in the constituency has fallen by 397, or 28 per cent., youth unemployment is down by 80 per cent., and long-term unemployment has fallen by 64 per cent.

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and to make work pay. To the end of November 2000, the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds had helped 546 young people in Clwyd, South constituency gain valuable skills and experience—289 (53 per cent.) of whom had moved into employment. The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced in October 1999, is helping to make work pay for low and middle income families. In August 2000, 1,900 families in the constituency were benefiting from WFTC.

The Government are also committed to developing policies which enable all pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity. As a result of the recent pre-Budget Report, all pensioners, including around 13,000 in Clwyd, South, will receive an above-inflation increase in the basic state pension from April 2001. Single pensioners will receive an extra £5 a week, and couples will receive an extra £8 a week.

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150881]

Miss Melanie Johnson: North-East Derbyshire, along with the rest of the United Kingdom, is benefiting from the long-term action we have taken to build economic stability and secure high and stable levels of growth and employment. Since the general election, claimant unemployment in the constituency has fallen by 440, or 18 per cent., youth unemployment is down by 67 per cent., and long-term unemployment has fallen by 62 per cent.

Macroeconomic stability is being complemented at the microeconomic level by the Government's policies to ease the transition from welfare into work and to make work pay. To the end of November 2000, the New Deal for 18 to 24-year-olds had helped 952 young people in North-East Derbyshire constituency gain valuable skills and experience—484 (51 per cent.) of whom had moved into employment. The Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC), introduced in October 1999, is helping to make work pay for low and middle income families. In August 2000, 1,700 families in the constituency were benefiting from WFTC.

The Government are also committed to developing policies which enable all pensioners to share in the country's rising prosperity. As a result of the recent Pre-Budget Report, all pensioners, including 18,100 in North-East Derbyshire, will receive an above-inflation increase in the basic state pension from April 2001. Single pensioners will receive an extra £5 a week, and couples will receive an extra £8 a week. All pensioners aged 75 or over have also been entitled to a free TV licence since November 2000—including around 11,500 in North-East Derbyshire.

Self-Employment

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been received from self-employed people in national insurance contributions whose contributions were inadequate to qualify them for contributory benefits in each of the last 10 years. [150453]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

Aggregates Tax

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received (1) about the impact of the proposed tax on aggregates on prices to *(a)* the primary producer and *(b)* the purchaser from the primary producer; [150893]

(2) on the increase in the cost of a cubic metre of concrete which will result from the imposition of the aggregates tax; [150892]

(3) on the increased cost of producing 1,000 aggregate/cement *(a)* bricks and *(b)* other building blocks normally used in house construction as a consequence of the imposition of the proposed tax on aggregates; and by how much he estimates the cost of the average sized dwelling constructed of such materials will increase. [150896]

Mr. Timms: The Chancellor has received numerous representations regarding taxation, including the planned aggregates levy. Decisions regarding taxation are made as part of the Budget process. Budget 2000 announced that the aggregates levy would be introduced from April 2002.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much aggregate, broken down by type, was *(a)* imported to and *(b)* exported from the United Kingdom by (i) land transport and (ii) sea transport, indicating his estimates of the value of such materials, in the current year and each of the previous three years. [150917]

Mr. Timms: Data on exports and imports of aggregate are published annually in the British Geological Survey's United Kingdom Minerals Yearbook. It is not possible to break this down between land transport and sea transport.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the impact on prices of the imposition of the proposed aggregates tax in road building. [150894]

Mr. Timms: Budget 2000 announced that the Government have decided to introduce an aggregates levy with effect from April 2002. The impact on prices will be dependent on the commercial decisions of aggregates suppliers and purchasers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implications for the United Kingdom of the policies and proposed policies of each EU state in relation to the taxation of aggregates. [150855]

Mr. Timms: Policies relating to the extraction of aggregates vary between member states outside the UK. These do not have a direct impact on the price of aggregates in the UK.

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what his estimate is of the quantities of material which arise each year from *(a)* the UK as a whole, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* England, which are suitable for recycling to produce aggregates; and how much under each of these headings is actually recycled; [150935]

(2) what *(a)* tonnage and *(b)* value of aggregates were produced, broken down by type, in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland in the current financial year and in the previous three financial years. [150920]

Mr. Timms: Data on the production of aggregate are published annually in the British Geological Survey's United Kingdom Minerals Yearbook. Data on the scope for increased use of recycled aggregate are contained in a report for the Environment Agency by Symonds Group Ltd., "Construction and Demolition Waste Survey: National Survey of the Production, Recycling and Disposal of Construction and Demolition Waste In England and Wales, 1999–2000, Environment Agency R&D Technical Report P402". A summary of this report has been published through the DETR.

Mr. Green: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what changes he has made in public procurement policy to encourage a greater use of recycled aggregates; and if he will make a statement. [150681]

Mr. Timms: The joint Treasury/DETR note on Environmental Issues in Purchasing explains that purchasers can specify their requirements in green terms and should award their contracts on the basis of whole life costs and quality, consistent with this policy. The procurement of aggregates—recycled or otherwise—can

be undertaken within this framework, by appropriate specifications where justified and technically possible. It is for the purchasing Department to make these decisions in the specific circumstances.

Halifax/Equitable Life

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Financial Services Authority is carrying out an investigation into the implications of the proposed acquisition by Halifax plc of the operations of Equitable Life and its implications for policyholders. [150440]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* We understand that the FSA is working closely with Equitable Life and the Halifax to ensure that the proposal meets the FSA's regulatory criteria and that it protects the interests of policyholders.

Children's Tax Credit

Mr. Pike: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in Lancashire will benefit from the introduction of the Children's Tax Credit. [150629]

Dawn Primarolo: An estimate of the number of families in Lancashire eligible to claim the Children's Tax Credit (CTC) is unavailable, but an estimate of the number of families in North West Government Office Region who will be eligible to claim CTC is 625,000.

Brit Disc

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he plans to introduce the Brit disc on foreign lorries; [150934]

(2) what meetings, correspondence and phone calls his Department has had with the European Commission over the introduction of a Brit disc for continental lorries; [150933]

(3) if he has *(a)* sought and *(b)* been granted permission by the EU to introduce a user charge for foreign lorries. [151018]

Mr. Timms: Officials from the Treasury are continuing to discuss with others how a user charge might operate, bearing in mind the experience of other countries that operate similar schemes. European Community law permits member states to introduce user charges for goods vehicles.

Church Repairs (VAT)

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2000, *Official Report*, column 622W, concerning VAT on church repairs, if he will set out details of the special arrangements to help congregations pay for repairs to listed buildings. [150576]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* Discussions on the details of the special arrangements to help congregations pay for repairs to listed places of worship are on-going.

Pensioners (Tax)

Mr. Rapson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many retirement pensioners are liable to pay income tax; at what rates; and what proportion each group represents of total retirement pensioners. [150065]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* The numbers of taxpayers of over state retirement pension age are set out in the table.

Estimates for 2000–01	*Number of pension age[1] taxpayers (million)[2]*	*Percentage of pension age[1] population*
Starting rate[3]	0.8	7
"Savers" rate[4]	0.6	6
Basic rate[5]	2.7	25
Higher rate[6]	0.2	2
All taxpayers	4.3	40

[1] Women aged 60 or over, men aged 65 or over

[2] Estimates rounded to the nearest 100,000

[3] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at the 10 per cent. starting rate from an extra £1 of earnings.

[4] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at the 20 per cent. lower rate for savings income or the 10 per cent. ordinary dividend rate from an extra £1 of earnings.

[5] Taxpayers with a marginal rate at the basic rate from an extra £1 of earnings.

[6] Taxpayers with taxable income above the higher rate threshold.

Note:

The estimates are based on the Survey of Personal Incomes and consistent with the November 2000 pre-Budget report.

Census Form

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to include *(a)* English, *(b)* Scottish, *(c)* Welsh and *(d)* Northern Ireland tick boxes to indicate nationality on the next census form; and if he will make a statement. [151361]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Lawrence Robertson, dated 26 February 2001:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the plans were for including English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland tick boxes to indicate nationality on the next census form.

As Registrar General for England and Wales I can only comment on the 2001 Census in England and Wales.

The 2001 Census form in England and Wales does not include a question on nationality. All the questions proposed in the White Paper were widely consulted upon and shown to have satisfied certain strategic criteria; such as the need for the information by a substantial number of census users, and that the information was not available from any other source in the detail or area level required.

The 2001 Census form in England and Wales does include a question on country of birth which includes tick boxes for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and a question on ethnic group. The prime purpose of the ethnic group question is to identify areas with high levels of ethnic minority populations, which would help provide valuable baseline information on which to plan and provide services and monitor racial disadvantage and social exclusion. A "write-in" response category within each of the main ethnic groupings provides the opportunity for persons to describe their ethnicity as "English", "Scottish", "Welsh", or "Northern Irish" or in whatever other way they wish.

Private Finance Initiative

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he next expects to publish updated information on the Government's PFI activity. [151633]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Tables containing this information will be published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report on 7 March.

In the course of updating the PFI information, errors in Tables C14, C15 and C16 of FSBR 2000 came to light, arising from mistranscription of data. I am placing corrected copies of these tables in the Library today.

Gold

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individuals, firms and financial institutions to which gold was sold by the Bank of England in auctions conducted since 1 January 1997; and if he will show in each case the amount of gold sold. [151040]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Details of individuals, firms and financial institutions to which gold was sold are commercially confidential. Information on entitlement to bid is set out in the Bank of England's "Information Memorandum: HM Government's Gold Auction Programme 2000–01", published on 3 March 2000, copies of which are in the Library.

Sir Peter Tapsell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the individuals, firms and financial institutions to which the Bank of England loaned and leased gold between 1995 and 1999; and if he will show in each case the amount of gold loaned or leased. [151039]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Details of individuals, firms and financial institutions to which gold was loaned and leased are commercially confidential.

Single Currency

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what officials were instructed to tell other EU Governments in respect of Britain's national changeover plan for the single currency and its timing. [150889]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The second Outline National Changeover plan was published on 9 March 2000. On 10 March, copies of the plan were sent to the European Commission for distribution to other EU Governments.

European Union

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer in what currency *(a)* UK contributions to the EU Budget and *(b)* EU payments to the UK are made. [150874]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Both the United Kingdom's contributions to the EC Budget and EC payments to the United Kingdom are made in sterling.

Mr. Gill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the net cost per month has been of UK contributions to the EU since January 2000. [150873]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government publish details of the United Kingdom's net contribution to the EC Budget on an annual, financial year, basis. The United Kingdom's net contribution in 1999–2000, together with the Government's latest forecast in respect of 2000–01, can be found at footnote 1 to Table B17 of the Pre-Budget Report (Cm 4917) published in November 2000.

Details of the Government's spring forecast of the United Kingdom's net contribution in 2000–01 will be published in the Chancellor's Departmental Report.

Wage Bill

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the *(a)* national wage bill and *(b)* public sector wage bill for 2001–02. [151369]

Mr. Andrew Smith: In line with the convention adopted by previous Administrations, this Government do not publish forecasts for employment, earnings or the wage bill.

Credit Unions

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with ABCUL over the proposal that credit unions should introduce a central services unit. [150843]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury maintains regular contact with ABCUL and the other representative bodies.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will investigate restrictions on credit unions regarding their ability to *(a)* lend to and *(b)* borrow from other voluntary groups. [150844]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government will be consulting shortly on a number of measures aimed at relaxing some of the restrictions on credit unions' operational powers.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions he has had with the Post Office network on allowing access by credit unions to its network; [150845]

(2) what plans he has to uprate the maximum amount an individual is allowed to borrow from a credit union. [150846]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Responsibility for the regulatory framework for credit unions is being transferred to the Financial Services Authority (FSA). The FSA is currently consulting widely on the new framework.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Financial Services Authority on the requirement of bonds from credit unions. [150847]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have no role in the regulation of credit unions, which is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list (1) the average weekly earnings, including and excluding overtime, for full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* Great Britain for (i) all manual, (ii) all non-manual and (iii) all workers; [151558]

(2) the percentages of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* Great Britain earning, including and excluding overtime, less than (i) £279.21 per week, (ii) £257.73 per week, (iii) £193.30 per week and (iv) £140 per week for the categories (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers. [151559]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 26 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on weekly earnings for workers in Great Britain, Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland (151558, 151559).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy. I have provided the available data for Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and Great Britain in the attached[1] tables only where the samples are large enough and have an acceptable level of accuracy. These are based on the 2000 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

[1] The tables attached to the letter are available in the Library.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workers earn, excluding overtime, *(a)* less than £67 per week, *(b)* between £67 and £72 per week, *(c)* between £72 and £87 per week and *(d)* between £335 and £375 per week; and how many of them are (i) women, (ii) part-timers and (iii) disabled. [151371]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Huw Edwards, dated 26 February 2001:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question about weekly earnings for women, part-time workers and the disabled.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the principal source of earnings data for the disabled. This source has therefore been used in order to provide comparable figures for the groups covered by the question. The LFS provides weekly earnings data on a basis which includes overtime; this cannot be excluded.

Table 1: Gross weekly pay in main job, including overtime, all employees and those on schemes

	Number of workers of working age (thousands—not seasonally adjusted)			
Gross weekly pay	*Total*	*Female*	*Part time*	*Disabled*
Less than £67	1,944	1,459	1,795	254
£67 to £71	172	135	160	[1]—
£72 to £86	649	511	591	89
£335 to £374	1,557	525	72	159

[1] Sample size too small for reliable estimate

Source:
Labour Force Survey—autumn (September 2000 to November 2000)—United Kingdom

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the percentages of workers on adult rates of pay in part-time employment whose hourly earnings, including and excluding overtime pay are less than *(a)* £5.11, *(b)* £6.82, *(c)* £7.39 and *(d)* £3.70 in (i) Scotland, (ii) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and (iii) Great Britain, broken down by (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) all non-manual and (9) all workers. [151560]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him on 18 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 302W.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate *(a)* the number of people on working families tax credit whose hourly earnings fall into the earnings bands (i) £3.70 to £3.90, (ii) £3.91 to £4.11, (iii) £4.12 to £4.32, (iv) £4.33 to £4.53, (v) £4.54 to £4.74, (vi) £4.75 to £4.95, (vii) £4.96 to £5.16, (viii) £5.17 to £5.37, (ix) £5.38 to £5.58, (x) £5.59 to £5.79, (xi) £5.80 to £6.00, (xii) £6.01 to £6.21, (xiii) £6.22 to £6.43, (xiv) £6.44 to £6.64 and (xv) £6.65 to £6.85 and *(b)* the average award received in each band. [151426]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 8 March 2000, *Official Report*, column 771W.

Death Certificates

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what increase in revenue is expected by the use of original death certificates instead of solicitor-certified copies in the administration of estates; [R] [151175]

(2) what representations he has received on the abolition of the use of solicitor-certified copy death certificates; [R] [151174]

(3) what steps he is taking to protect estate assets before the granting of representation is issued; [151168]

(4) what information he collated relating to fraudulent practice among solicitors in the administration of estates when solicitor-certified copy death certificates have been used, prior to deciding to end the use of solicitor-certified death certificates. [151169]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 6 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 494–95W. Solicitors could give financial institutions early notice of a death by letter or electronically, as they would have to do when the registration of a death is delayed by an inquest. The evidential value of a letter would be at least the same as a photocopy death certificate.

Equitable Life

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the management of Equitable Life regarding the honouring of guaranteed annuities; and if he will make a statement. [151360]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The regulator monitors companies on an on-going basis to ensure that regulatory requirements are met.

EU Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Cash: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to alter the Government's

budgetary statement, set out in the Red Book 2000, as it affects public expenditure in the United Kingdom following his discussions with the European Commission and ECOFIN about the Opinion of the Council under Regulation EC No. 1466/97 and Article 99EC. [151117]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Fiscal policy in the UK is designed to deliver sound public finances and to help ensure economic stability and sustainable investment in public services. The Budget statement will be delivered in the normal way on Wednesday 7 March.

National Insurance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost to the Exchequer of crediting in those earning between £67 and £72 per week to the national insurance system. [151425]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret a reliable answer cannot be provided because of the difficulty of making a long-term estimate of benefit costs for a relatively small number of people.

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in revenue to the Exchequer in the financial year 2001–02 as a result of *(a)* raising the upper earnings limit on employee national insurance contributions to the threshold of the higher rate of Income tax, *(b)* removing the upper earnings limit on employee national insurance contributions, *(c)* extending the 10 per cent. rate of income tax band to £7,272 per year of gross income and implementing it as a restricted allowance, restricted to the basic rate of 22 per cent. and *(d)* extending the 10 per cent. rate of income tax band to £10,052, and implementing it as a restricted allowance, restricted to the basic rate of 22 per cent. assuming the personal allowance is £7,272. [151427]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for the effects of raising and abolishing the upper earnings limit were given to my hon. Friend in my answer to him on 29 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 591W. Without further details I am unable to provide an answer to the final two parts of my hon. Friend's question.

Endangered Species Smuggling

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have been prosecuted for smuggling CITES listed *(a)* animal species and *(b)* reptiles into the United Kingdom for each year since 1992. [151130]

Dawn Primarolo: Numbers of persons prosecuted for smuggling offences involving CITES species since 1992 are as follows:

1992

Animals/birds—one person (spiders), one person (parrots and cockatoos)

Reptiles—nil

1993

Animals/birds—nil

Reptiles—one person (tortoises)

1994

Animals/birds—one person (parrots)

Reptiles—one person (chameleons)

1995

Animals/birds—five persons (parrots—all part of one case)

Reptiles—one person (snakes)

2000

Animals/birds—one person (macaws and parrots)

Reptiles—nil.

Stamp Duty

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has received EU permission to introduce lower stamp duty rates in the inner cities, in line with his pre-Budget statement. [151041]

Dawn Primarolo: Further announcements about the stamp duty relief for disadvantaged communities will be made in due course.

Married Couples Allowance

Mr. Alasdair Morgan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates the Treasury will have saved in the 2000–01 financial year through the withdrawal of the married couples allowance. [151010]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the March 2000 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

EU-Israel Association Agreement

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the time limit set out in the EU-Israel Association Agreement is for responses from the Israeli authorities to requests for documentation of origin as part of the verification exercise being carried out by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. [151135]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is set out in article 32 of Protocol 4 to the EC-Israel Agreement.

SCOTLAND

Taoiseach

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) when her Department was first informed of the projected visit to Scotland of the Irish Taoiseach to unveil a memorial at Carfin on 11 February; [150828]

(2) when her Department was first informed that the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) had written to the Irish Consul in Edinburgh to urge the Irish Taoiseach to cancel his visit to Scotland on 11 February; [150824]

(3) what discussions *(a)* she and *(b)* her predecessor had with the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) prior to his writing to the Irish Consul in Edinburgh urging the Irish Taoiseach to cancel his visit to Scotland on 11 February, concerning the contents of that letter; [150825]

(4) when, and by whom, her Department was first informed that the planned visit to Scotland of the Irish Taoiseach due to take place on 11 February had been cancelled; [150823]

(5) when her Department was first informed of the content and nature of the letter written by the hon. Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) urging the Irish Taoiseach to cancel his visit to Scotland on 11 February; [150826]

(6) what consultations took place between her Department and *(a)* the Scottish Executive and *(b)* the Irish Government concerning the planned visit to Scotland of the Irish Taoiseach to unveil a memorial at Carfin on 11 February; and when such consultations first took place. [150827]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department was not involved in preparations for the visit of the Irish Taoiseach planned for 11 February, nor was it consulted by my hon. Friend the Member for Motherwell and Wishaw (Mr. Roy) or by the Irish authorities before the decision was taken to cancel that visit. I received a letter of invitation to the ceremony at Carfin on Friday 2 February, and I learned of the Irish decision to cancel the visit from news reports on Thursday 8 February.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. David Marshall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will answer the Question from the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston Reference Number 146986 tabled for answer on 22 January. [151164]

Mr. Foulkes: I answered my hon. Friend's Question on Thursday 15 February.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if the special advisers working for her will relinquish their posts when the next general election is called. [149314]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Earthquake (India)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the material and financial assistance her Department has given to the Government of India for specific use in Gujarat State following the recent earthquake. [149465]

Mr. Mullin: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House on 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 21–22, the Department for International Development has allocated a total of £10 million to support this emergency relief effort without reducing our spending in other parts of India. The table summarises the allocation of funds spent to date.

We dispatched a 69-person search and rescue team who rescued six people and supported the Russian Ministry of Emergency for the provision of 75 search and rescue personnel who rescued 17 people. In addition we arranged for numerous relief items including tents, other shelter items, medical supplies and blankets to be transported to the region.

Our assessment and liaison team continues to work closely with the Indian authorities and the operational agencies to provide invaluable information on the remaining needs to enable appropriate allocation of the remaining funds.

Gujarat earthquake—summary of assistance

		£
UK search and rescue (SAR)	Sixty-nine strong team/equipment	265,000
Russian Ministry of Emergency	SAR/tents/blankets	200,000
UK tent lift (Red Cross—IFRC and Save the Children Fund—SCF)	Tents/plastic sheeting	504,545
UK trauma kit lift (World Health Organisation—(WHO)	Trauma kits/additional items	429,837
Indian blankets (SCF)	—	255,172
IFRC	Tents, blankets and non-food	750,000
Oxfam	Water and sanitation (watsan)	1,000,000
UNICEF	Watsan, re-establish schools, school kits	1,000,000
WHO	Medical, watsan, epidemiological survey	430,000
UNDP	Transitional recovery work	450,000
CARE	Shelter and care centres	500,000
SCF	Shelter, blankets and water containers	450,000
Christian Aid	Shelter, blankets and essential non-food	350,000
Help Age International	Medicare units, shelter, blankets and food	200,000
ADRA UK	Hygiene kits, blankets and linen	115,000
Food for the hungry	Shelter, blankets, toilets and medicine	51,950
BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha	Medical supplies, water, food, shelter, clothes	250,000
Handicap International	Injury treatment, therapy and rehabilitation	200,000
World Food Programme	Food	600,000
DFID Local Disbursement	Relief items to cover needs as identified	500,000
Total		8,501,504

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in her Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149270]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

Public Opinion Research

A study on public attitudes to development was undertaken in 1997–98 at a cost of £43,000. There was no expenditure in 1996–97 or 1998–99. A repeat survey to measure changes in public attitudes and the effects of our public education work was undertaken in 1999–2000 costing a total of £45,000.

In 2000–01 a further repeat study costing £33,000 was undertaken and a school children's survey is currently underway at a cost of £9,800.

Advertising

DFID does not have a specific advertising budget. The vast majority of advertising relates to recruitment advertising in newspapers and journals, and costs £1 million—£1.2 million annually.

Direct Mail

There was no significant expenditure on direct mail promotion of DFID materials between 1996–97 and 1999–2000. In 2000–01 our spending on direct mail promotion of DFID publications is projected at around £55,000.

Press Releases

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many press releases were issued by her Department in the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; how many have been issued in the current financial year; and what her estimate is of the total number for the current financial year. [149255]

Clare Short: Press releases issued for financial years from 1996 are as follows:

Overseas Development Administration

(a) 1996–97: 50.

Department for International Development

(b) 1997–98: 80

(c) 1998–99: 63

(d) 1999–2000: 72.

During the current financial year, 2000–01, my Department has issued 24 press releases. I do not have an estimate for the total number of press releases we will issue in the current financial year.

EU Sexual and Reproductive Health Programmes

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met the EU Commissioner for Development, and what representations she made concerning measures to ensure that aid funding is not used to support forced abortion, coercive sterilisation and compulsory population control programmes in developing countries. [150084]

Clare Short: I last met EC Development Commissioner Neilson on 8 February. European Assistance on sexual and reproductive health is governed by the European Community (EC) Council regulation number 1487/97 of 22 July 1997 on

"aid for population policies and programmes in the developing countries".

This regulation denounces any violation of human rights in the form of compulsory abortion, compulsory sterilisation, and other forms of curbing population growth which are contrary to the principles of free and informed choice agreed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The EC submits yearly reports to the European Parliament on the implementation of the Regulation.

Mr. Benton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information she collects on expenditure by the European Union on family planning and population control programmes in the Third World; what steps she takes to ensure that the United Kingdom contribution to that aid does not fund forced abortion, coercive sterilisation and compulsory population control programmes; and if she will make a statement. [150083]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development monitors European Union sexual and reproductive health programmes at headquarters and at country level.

European Assistance on sexual and reproductive health is governed by the European Community (EC) Council Regulation Number: 1487/97 of 22 July 1997 on

"aid for population policies and programmes in the developing countries".

This regulation denounces any violation of human rights in the form of company abortion, compulsory sterilisation, and other forms of curbing population growth which are contrary to the principles of free and informed choice agreed at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). The EC submits yearly reports to the European Parliament on the implementation of the Regulation.

Medicines (Access)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the Government are taking to encourage major pharmaceutical companies to offer discounts on drugs that are needed in developing countries. [150655]

Clare Short: The Government are working through a number of channels to increase substantially access to medicines. We are building partnerships with industry to improve access to affordable medicines, and support World Health Organisation initiatives such as Roll Back Malaria and STOP TB (tuberculosis). The Government welcome the Accelerating Access to HIV/AIDS-related Care and Treatment Initiative, whereby several pharmaceutical companies are working with UNAIDS to reduce the cost of anti-retroviral therapy for AIDS in developing countries, although more needs to be done in terms of transparency in prices and further discounts. We are working with developing country Governments to strengthen the basic health care systems, without which drugs will not reach the poorest.

The Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit is carrying out a study on a wide range of policy options for public-private partnership, with the aim of improving access and affordability of essential drugs in developing countries. Possibly policy measures include differential pricing agreements (selling drugs more cheaply in poor countries), tax incentives and common purchase funds.

Drugs (Access)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to allow developing countries to make cheap copies of drugs to treat diseases including AIDS, respiratory tract infections and childhood diarrhoea. [150656]

Clare Short: The majority of medicines required for the diseases of poverty are off-patent, and are available at competitive prices from generic companies. The Government believe that TRIPs (the Agreement on Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights) provides WTO members with sufficient flexibility to implement domestic intellectual property rights regimes that take account of their national circumstances. The agreement allows national governments to use compulsory licensing in certain situations of 'national emergency', when Governments may authorise production of drugs without the consent of patent holders.

We believe the best way forward is through negotiation with pharmaceutical companies, on price and licensing. The Government are considering a range of policy options for improving affordability of essential drugs in poor countries through the Performance and Innovation Unit's Global Health Project.

Africa Trade and Poverty Programme

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she expects to start the Africa Trade and Poverty Programme. [150840]

Clare Short: Activities under the Trade and Poverty Programme will start in the second quarter of 2001 in several African countries (provisionally Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana) and with the east African community.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the contracts that exist between SERCO and her Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if she will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151338]

Clare Short: My Department has not entered into any contractual arrangements with SERCO over the specified period.

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the IT projects currently undertaken in her Department; and if she will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151507]

Clare Short: DFID has three current IT projects:

A new CAT6 cabling network with associated patch panels and equipment for our London office at 1 Palace Street. Expected completion December 2001. Cost £2 million.

ASSIST 2000, a project to replace all PCs, and upgrade operating systems and key software. Estimated completion in all UK and overseas offices November 2002. Cost £7.6 million.

Enhanced communications links to overseas offices. Expected completion August 2002. Cost £7.7 million.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the IT projects her Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if she will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151474]

Clare Short: DFID will have two IT projects on-going next year (both started in 2001):

ASSIST 2000, a project to replace all PCs, and upgrade operating systems and key software. UK offices completed in 2001. Estimated completion of overseas offices November 2002—Total cost £7.6 million.

Enhanced communications links to overseas offices. Expected completion August 2002—Cost £7.7 million.

Tropical Rain Forests

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to reduce the rate at which tropical rain forests are being destroyed. [150727]

Clare Short: The Department for International Development's purpose is poverty elimination. Forests play a major role in providing livelihoods for poor people, and this is the starting point for our involvement in the sector. The causes of deforestation are complex and often lie outside the forest sector in such areas as property law, governance and the economic incentive framework. DFID works with developing countries to help them, and particularly their poorer forest communities, gain long-term benefit from trees through sustainable management, which secures both the existence of forests and the global environmental benefits they provide. DFID currently spends circa £30 million per annum on forest-related projects. A copy of the 2001 directory of DFID forest projects will be placed in the House of Commons Library as soon as it is available.

My Department works internationally in a variety of forums to promote sustainable forest management which supports the needs of the poor. DFID also funds the Global Environment Facility which includes forests within its support to biodiversity conservation. As stated in our recent White Paper, we will press for a 50 per cent. increase in the resources of the GEF at the next replenishment.

Mongolia

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of the severe weather in Mongolia this winter on the country's economy; and what steps her Department is taking to assist those adversely affected. [151315]

Clare Short: Mongolia has been hit by two consecutive winter disasters or "Dzuds" (1990–2000 and 2000–01) caused by widespread drought in the summer, unusually cold temperatures in the autumn and heavy snow fall in winter. These conditions are seriously affecting both animal and human welfare. Last year's dzud affected 450,000 herders and killed approximately 3 million livestock. This year's dzud is more serious. Over 300,000 herders are affected in 20 our of 21 provinces and 600,000 livestock have already died.

The Government of Mongolia have been active in disaster preparedness and relief assistance in dzud-affected areas. However, the two consecutive dzud have

overstretched national capacity. The Government have therefore requested international relief assistance following a needs assessment, in which my Department was involved. An Appeal for $11.8 million has been launched by the Government through the United Nations.

The Appeal aims to target vulnerable groups on the most severely affected provinces and seeks to fulfil unmet relief needs. It focuses on building the disaster management of the Mongolian State Emergency Commission and other relevant national partners to enhance preparedness and future response.

We have provided US $1 million for the provision of emergency relief under the framework of the UN appeal to be channelled through humanitarian agencies working in Mongolia.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Ministerial Visits (Peterborough)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough unitary authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151029]

The Solicitor-General: Neither the Attorney-General nor I visited any of the constituencies in the Peterborough unitary authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001.

Crown Prosecution Service (Chester)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will make a statement on the matters discussed, and the content of and conclusions from those discussions during his visit to the Cheshire offices of the Crown Prosecution Service in Chester on Friday 16 February. [151286]

The Solicitor-General: I visited the Chester office of CPS Cheshire in order to discuss the local agencies' performance in prosecuting persistent young offenders. I also discussed with the management team their progress with the recommendations of Sir Iain Glidewell, relations with the Press, progress on diversity issues and the findings from the very recent report by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate. I was told how CPS Cheshire intends to make use of the increased funds available for the next financial year and I left the office satisfied that good progress is being made with all the matters that we discussed.

Child Sex Offenders

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Solicitor-General what guidance is issued to the Crown Prosecution Service regarding the prosecution of those involved in illegal sexual acts performed on under-age children. [151356]

The Solicitor-General: As with any alleged offence, Crown Prosecutors review each case in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors. They apply both the evidential and public interest tests set out in the Code.

If there is a realistic prospect of conviction for a sexual offence, relevant considerations as to whether a prosecution is in the public interest include the age of the defendant, the age difference between the parties, whether there was a breach of trust and whether the child willingly entered into the relationship.

It would be rare that a sexual offence against a child by an adult would not be prosecuted on public interest grounds. In respect of unlawful sexual intercourse, the public interest requires a prosecution where the child victim is under 13 years of age unless exceptional circumstances exist.

Departmental Politics (Clwyd, South)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150916]

The Solicitor-General: In October 1999, in line with national policy, the Wrexham office of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), in liaison with the police and Wrexham Maelor magistrates court, introduced the Narey proposals. The North Wales Area, within which the Wrexham office falls, had been a Narey Pilot site since October 1998. All defendants charged with a criminal offence now make their first appearance before Wrexham Maelor magistrates court within 96 hours. This is in line with the Government's policy of speeding up and modernising the criminal justice system. Current figures indicate that around 40 per cent. of defendants now have their cases finalised at the first hearing. CPS North Wales is also piloting Statutory Time Limits in youth cases and has worked together with the other agencies locally to speed up youth justice, particularly those involving persistent young offenders. This has resulted in the target of 71 days being achieved in two of the quarters in the current year. Thereafter since May 1997, the Crown Prosecution Service has reduced the time taken to finalise prosecutions arising in the South Clwyd Area, especially cases involving young offenders. On 1 November 1999 the Wrexham Branch office altered its structure in line with the proposals contained in the Glidewell review. This enabled the CPS to place greater emphasis on more serious crime proceeding to the Crown court.

CPS North Wales is also piloting the Victim Notification arrangements and has established a Victim Information Bureau at Wrexham, which provides detailed explanations to victims when cases are dropped or charges substantially amended. Meetings are also offered to victims in certain cases and so far, since the commencement of the pilot in April 2000, seven meetings have been held.

Actions and policies of the Treasury Solicitor's Department and Serious Fraud Office affect my hon. Friend's constituency only indirectly.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Solicitor-General if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCO and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151347]

The Solicitor-General: The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers, Treasury Solicitor's Department, Serious Fraud Office and the Crown Prosecution Service have no existing contracts with SERCO and have not had any during the past three years.

Crown Prosecution Service (Guildford)

Mr. St. Aubyn: To ask the Solicitor-General whom he met at his meeting in Guildford at the Crown Prosecution Service at 9 am on 12 February; and what the purpose and content of the meeting was. [150660]

The Solicitor-General: On 12 February I visited Guildford to meet the staff of the Crown Prosecution Service, Surrey. The hon. Member was invited to accompany me, but unfortunately was not able to.

Prior to the visit, I chaired a ministerial meeting at 9 am, to review progress on the Youth Justice Pledge in Surrey. The meeting was hosted by the Chief Crown Prosecutor and attended by senior members of the criminal justice agencies in Surrey including Surrey Police, Surrey magistrates courts, the Court Service, Surrey Youth Offending Team, PA Consulting and CPS Surrey.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Child Support Agency

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints were lodged against the Child Support Agency in *(a)* 1999–2000 and *(b)* 2000–01; and for what reasons they were lodged. [151444]

Angela Eagle: The total number of letters of complaint received by the Child Support Agency in 1999–2000 was 21,015.

The total number of letters of complaint received between April 2000 and 31 January 2001 was 16,789. The categories are shown in the table.

Category of complaints	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[1]
Delay/failure to take appropriate action	12,001	8,652
Incorrect action	4,675	3,713
Communication	4,376	3,079
Policy	4,011	3,147
Complaints about staff	1,500	1,109
Disclosure of information	316	282
Good cause	174	40
Human Rights Act	0	77
Total	27,053	20,099

[1] Year to date

Note:

The total number of complaints is higher than the number of letters because some letters of complaint covered more than one subject.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when and how often child support cases are reviewed by the Child Support Agency. [151440]

Angela Eagle: Either parent can apply to the Child Support Agency (CSA) for their case to be looked at again if they think the latest decision on their case is wrong, or there has been a change in circumstances since their case was last considered.

The CSA can also revise or supersede a decision on a case, without an application from either parent, if it is clear that the decision needs to be changed.

Ms Roseanna Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security under what circumstances the Child Support Agency becomes involved in child maintenance cases. [151441]

Angela Eagle: Every child has the right to a decent start in life whether the parents live together or apart.

The Child Support Agency (CSA) will accept an application for child maintenance from a person with care or non-resident parent provided that they do not already have a court order or written maintenance agreement dated before April 1993. In Scotland, a child of 12 or over may also apply for child support maintenance provided there is no court order in place and at least one parent is living apart from them.

The CSA only has jurisdiction to assess and collect child support when the parent with care and child concerned are habitually resident in Great Britain or Northern Ireland. In cases where the non-resident parent lives abroad, the CSA can handle maintenance only if the non-resident parent is working for a UK-based employer.

A parent with care who is in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance, or who is the partner of someone who receives one of these benefits, can be required to co-operate with the Child Support Agency in seeking child maintenance, unless doing so would put themselves or their children at risk of harm or undue distress.

Pensions

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate for someone on earnings of £15,000 *(a)* the size of a contracted-out rebate for a final salary occupational scheme and *(b)* the proportion of the National Insurance contribution for someone on earnings of £15,000 that is contributed to SERPS if they are not contracted out. [151489]

Mr. Rooker: For someone with annual earnings of £15,000 in the 2000–01 tax year, the size of the contracted-out rebate for a final salary occupational scheme would be £529.74. The employee's share of the rebate would be £184.26. It is not possible to provide details of the proportion of the National Insurance contribution that is contributed to SERPS for someone on earnings of £15,000 who is not contracted out. This is because Class 1 National Insurance contributions are not separable into elements for the State Earnings Related Pensions Scheme (SERPS) or for other benefits paid out of the National Insurance Fund.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will calculate the outstanding liability to SERPS for each of the next 40 years if all workers turning 25 years were automatically contracted out of SERPS at the standard occupational pension rate. [150729]

Mr. Rooker: None.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has for funding the Citizens Advice Bureau from the Benefits Agency for promoting benefits take-up. [151368]

Mr. Rooker: We have no plans to do so.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how much the Government have allocated to promote benefits take-up; and how this money is spent. [151367]

Mr. Rooker: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) on 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 466W.

Departmental Policies (Copeland)

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Copeland constituency, the effect of his Department's policy initiatives and actions since May 1997 on pensioners living in Copeland, indicating *(a)* the numbers and *(b)* the percentage of pensioners who have been affected in each case; and if he will make a statement. [150676]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objective to combat poverty and promote security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Over 14,000 older people in Copeland have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Over 14,000 pensioners in Copeland will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic State pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition, we have introduced free TV licences for the over-75s, of whom we estimate there are about 4,700 in Copeland. Around 1,700 pensioner families in Copeland are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003, designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002, both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what is the identity of the private sector partner contracted to process claims for winter fuel payments for customers not already in receipt of a benefit; and what are *(a)* the terms of the contract in respect of the time scale for processing claims; and *(b)* the contractual arrangements for ensuring that the published helpline telephone number can cope with every inquiry from the public. [151434]

Mr. Rooker: The Private Sector Partner contracted to process claims for Winter Fuel payments is CAPITA Business Services Ltd.

Under Part II, paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, information is not available about the status of the contract, as it is commercial in confidence.

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what measures he is taking to ensure maximum take-up of the winter fuel payment for men aged 60 to 65 years. [149842]

Mr. Rooker: An information campaign commenced in April 2000 and continued throughout the year informing people of the changes to the Winter Fuel Payment scheme and what, if any, action was required of them. The campaign also encouraged people who were newly eligible for payments to make a claim. The campaign included: advertisements in national and local press; a dedicated leaflet and poster made available in a variety of venues, including local social security offices, post offices and doctors' surgeries.

A mailshot was also undertaken, beginning in early May, to people we could identify as being newly eligible inviting them to make a claim.

Full arrangements for the delivery of winter 2001 payments have yet to be determined.

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the north-east Derbyshire constituency, the effect on north-east Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150880]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in north-east Derbyshire since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive Child Benefit, and in north-east Derbyshire 11,124 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997, the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in north-east Derbyshire the number has reduced from 2,400 to 1,600. Since May 1997, the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in north-east Derbyshire from 1,000 to 600.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment

is £200 for households who qualify. Over 19,500 older people in north-east Derbyshire have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 18,100 pensioners in north-east Derbyshire will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over-75s of whom we estimate there are about 6,900 in north-east Derbyshire. 2,700 pensioner families in north-east Derbyshire are receiving the *Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in* April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002, both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Departmental Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will place in the Library results of the pilot stage of the Targeting Fraud television advertising campaign. [151455]

Mr. Rooker: A report on the pilot stage of the Targeting Fraud advertising campaign has been placed in the Library.

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150553]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM 4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Bristol, East since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Bristol, East 11,463 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997, the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Bristol, East the number has reduced from 3,700 to 2,400. Since May 1997, the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Bristol, East from 2,300 to 2,200.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Around 17,000 older people in Bristol, East have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 15,500 pensioners in Bristol, East will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over-75s of whom we estimate there are about 7,300 in Bristol, East. 2,700 pensioner families in Bristol, East are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002, both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Fraud

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many calls have been received by the Benefit Fraud Hotline in each month since September 1999. [150587]

Mr. Rooker: The information is in the table.

Month	*Total calls*
1999	
September	12,971
October	9,291
November	14,683
December	10,906

Month	Total calls
2000	
January	14,272
February	19,285
March	23,118
April	12,815
May	21,674
June	18,212
July	17,440
August	20,289
September	15,851
October	13,980
November	15,243
December	9,073
2001	
January	16,940

Notes:

1. Figures vary as some months are made up of four and some of five week periods.
2. Figures will also vary due to the hotline being closed over public holidays.

Minimum Income Guarantee (Leeds, Central)

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many pensioners in the Leeds, Central parliamentary constituency are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee. [150674]

Mr. Rooker: There are around 3,800 recipients of the Minimum Income Guarantee in Leeds, Central parliamentary constituency.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling error.
2. Pensioners are defined as where the claimant, and/or partner are aged 60 or over.
3. Figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
4. Cases are allocated to each parliamentary constituency by matching the postcode against the 2000 version 1 ONS Postcode Directory.

Source:

Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, November 2000:

Company Pensions

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will assess the benefits of introducing a pension fund safety net, similar to the Redundancy Payments Fund, to protect the pensions of employees whose pensions have been affected detrimentally by the insolvency of their employer. [150700]

Mr. Rooker: The consultation exercise on the paper "Security for Occupational Pensions" closed on 31 January. This consultation document sought views on a range of approaches to providing protection for pension scheme members' rights, including options such as a central discontinuance fund, compulsory scheme insurance as well as other possible measures. We are giving careful consideration to the responses received and will then decide on the best way forward.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what provisions are in place to protect employees whose pensions have been affected detrimentally by the insolvency of their employer. [150919]

Mr. Rooker: The Pensions Act 1995 brought in a number of measures to promote security for members of pension schemes, including the Minimum Funding Requirement which requires defined benefit schemes to hold a minimum level of assets to meet their liabilities.

In the event of a sponsoring employer's insolvency, the legislation requires that an independent trustee must be appointed. The role of the independent trustee is to ensure that the interests of the members are represented in insolvency proceedings and to make any necessary decisions about winding up the scheme. If on wind up the scheme is not fully funded on a Minimum Funding Requirement basis, the amount outstanding becomes a debt on the employer and the trustee must pursue recovery of this amount. Where the scheme finds itself in deficit due to fraud, compensation may be payable under the Pensions Compensation Scheme. Unpaid employer and employee contributions may be payable from the National Insurance fund through the Department of Trade and Industry's Redundancy Payments Service.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the powers of OPRA, or other relevant regulators, to require them to ensure the timeous winding up of company pension funds when the employer has become insolvent. [150697]

Mr. Rooker: We have extended and strengthened OPRA's powers with regard to schemes that have started to wind-up (including cases where the sponsoring employer is insolvent). There are a number of provisions in the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act 2000, under which draft regulations will be issued later this year to come into effect in April 2002.

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will review the performance of companies who manage company pension schemes; and if he will publish the results. [150699]

Mr. Rooker: We have no plans to review the performance of companies that sponsor pension schemes. The performance of companies in general is a matter for their shareholders.

Under the provisions of the Pensions Act 1995, pension schemes are required to have a schedule setting out the levels of contributions and the times when contributions should be paid. Companies are required to pay contributions in accordance with these schedules. If an employer fails to comply with the schedule this must be notified to the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (OPRA) who can, in certain circumstances, apply sanctions. If an employer fails to pay employee contributions within a set time OPRA can apply a civil or even criminal sanction on the employer.

Departmental Policies (Clwyd, South)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150909]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM 4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Clwyd, South since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Clwyd, South 8,101 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997, the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Clwyd, South the number has reduced from 1,400 to 1,000. Since May 1997, the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Clwyd, South from 1,200 to 700.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Around 14,000 older people in Clwyd, South have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 12,100 pensioners in Clwyd, South will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 4,600 in Clwyd, South. 2,400 pensioner families in Clwyd, South are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002 both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out, including statistical information, the effect on the Blackpool, North and Fleetwood constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150718]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Blackpool North and Fleetwood since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood 11,025 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997, the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood the number has reduced from 3,000 to 1,600. Since May 1997, the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood from 1,700 to 1,300.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Around 25,000 older people in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 23,600 pensioners in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood will benefit from the

substantial increases in the basic state pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition, we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 10,200 in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood. 3,700 pensioner families in Blackpool, North and Fleetwood are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002 both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Customer Helplines

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer of 8 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 470–71W, on customer helplines, if he will set out the *(a)* performance of the helplines and *(b)* targets set for them, for the last year for which figures are available. [148502]

Mr. Rooker: Performance of the helplines and the targets for the last year for which figures are available are as follows:

National Benefit Fraud Hotline

The performance in 1999–2000 against a target of 99 per cent. was 97.9 per cent.

CSA National Enqiry Line

In 1999–2000 the performance of 80 per cent. of calls responded to within 20 seconds was 28.19 per cent. The performance of calls to the Client Helplines (CHL) to be answered first time was 81 per cent. against a target of 80 per cent.

The percentage of customers surveyed on Quality Callbacks to be at least satisfied with the service they have received was 97.29 per cent. against a target of 90 per cent[1].

Benefit Enqiry Line

In 1999–2000 the percentage of calls answered within 30 seconds was 100 per cent[2]. The percentage of internal calls answered was 85 per cent. against a target of 90 per cent.

War Pensions Helpline

For the year ending 31 December 2000 the percentage of calls answered in 30 seconds was 100 per cent.

Public Enqiry Office

The average percentage of all calls answered in any one month during 1999 was 58.25 per cent. against a target of 65 per cent.

Child Benefit Centre

From September to December 2000 the number of calls to be taken per week was targeted at 42,000. The number of calls taken was 39,410. The performance against target was 92.3 per cent.

DLA/AA Customer Care Helpline

In 1999–2000 the percentage of calls aimed to be answered within 30 seconds was 18 per cent. against a target of 100 per cent[3].

To improve performance we have taken on new staff and introduced new technology as part of an on-going programme of planned improvements.

Minimum Income Guarantee Helpline

Winter Fuel Payment Leaflet Order Line

Winter Fuel Payment Helpline

New Deal for Line Parents Helpline

Pensions Info-Line

Mortgage Protection Line

Welfare Reform Order Line

The Inherited Serps Scheme Helpline.

The above helplines are contracted out to commercial organisations through the Central Office of Information. Figures are not calculated on a yearly basis and the information is not therefore available.

Notes:

[1] This followed contact with NEL, Client Helplines (CHL) and Face to Face.

[2] The Customer Charter states that they aim to answer calls within 30 seconds. Due to technical reasons BEL is unable to say whether or not they met this for the year 1999–2000.

[3] DLA/AA Customer Care Helpline. This year's target has been revised to a more realistic 60 seconds and further work is on-going to meet Cabinet office and DSS Call Centre Guidelines, the format of which is at present being finalised. In 1999–2000 Helpline answered 3,963,478 calls, an increase of 12 per cent. on the previous year when 3,513,902 calls were answered. The target of aiming to answer calls within 30 seconds was a BA generic target primarily aimed at switchboards and direct dialled numbers. It is based on the tenet 'answer a call within 5 rings' which takes approximately 30 seconds, but was not designed with call centres in mind.

Departmental Policies (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tooting parliamentary constituency, the effect of his Department's policies and actions since 1 May 1997. [149864]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000), sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Tooting since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about seven million families receive child benefit, and in Tooting 9,377 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Tooting the number has reduced from 3,900 to 2,000. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Tooting from 2,000 to 1,700.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Over 11,000 older people in Tooting have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 10,000 pensioners in Tooting will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic State pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over-75s, of whom we estimate there are about 4,500 in Tooting. 2,700 pensioner families in Tooting are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003, designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002, both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Departmental Policies (Pendle)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what initiatives embarked upon since May 1997 have benefited Pendle; and if he will make a statement. [149905]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000), sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Pendle since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over one million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit, Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child Benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about seven million families receive Child Benefit, and in Pendle 11,116 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over-50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Pendle the number has reduced from 1,500 to 1,300. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Pendle from 1,600 to 1,400.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty, so we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Over 16,000 older people in Pendle have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 14,200 pensioners in Pendle will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic State pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over-75s, of whom we estimate there are about 6,300 in Pendle. 2,800 pensioner families in Pendle are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003, designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002, both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Debt Accounting and Management System

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) what the savings were that the Debt Accounting and Management System was projected to achieve in *(a)* the first year of operation and *(b)* each of the four subsequent years; [151484]

(2) what the sums allocated to the Debt Accounting and Management System were in each year of its design and implementation; [151485]

(3) if he will list the private sector firms with which he has contracts for the strategic debt solution, stating in each case the monetary value and nature of the contract; [151487]

(4) what funds have been allocated by his Department for the strategic debt solution for each year between 1990–2000 and 2002–03; [151486]

(5) when the strategic debt solution began operation. [151488]

Mr. Rooker: The potential benefits that the Debt Accounting and Management System (DAMS) would provide in improved management of debt from first year of live running, initially planned for 1999–2000, are in the table.

£ million

	Savings area	
	Increased recoveries	*Administration savings*
1999–2000	15.43	9.70
2000–01	14.01	9.61
2001–02	9.01	9.31
2002–03	9.01	9.31
2003–04	9.01	9.31

Under part II, paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, information on the sums allocated to DAMS is not available as it is commercial in confidence.

There are no private sector firms with which the Department has contracts for the strategic debt solution. Following on from termination of DAMS development, in order to meet the demands of debt management, financial and business control, a fundamentally different strategy has been developed.

A Strategic Debt Solution (SDS) project was set up after DAMS. Its purpose was not to deliver IT but to take forward the operational control and compliance improvements, to maintain and improve business outputs following DAMS, and at the same time research, drive out and document root causes for weaknesses surrounding debt management and recommend strategic resolutions for these root causes.

The long-term vision is replacement of all legacy systems through service modernisation, but only after the debt organisation has undergone considerable business change and consolidation.

Funds were allocated for this work, to be taken forward as the SDS project as follows:

	£ million
1999–2000	0.936
2000–01	0.679

The Strategic Debt Solution Project commenced in October 1999 and completed in October 2000, having implemented a number of controls and business improvements following DAMS termination and also recommendations and a full study for a strategic direction for debt. A Debt Programme has been established to implement the business changes, starting with consolidation of the organisation under a dedicated line management.

National Pensioners Convention

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what response he plans to make to the petitions from the National Pensioners Convention forwarded to him on 8 November; and if he will make a statement. [150564]

Mr. Rooker: I replied to the National Pensioners Convention on 29 November 2000.

Industrial Injuries

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what studies his Department has undertaken on *(a)* privatising industrial injuries compensation and *(b)* the cost and extent of existing employer financed industrial injuries insurance. [151322]

Mr. Rooker: As part of our wider programme of Welfare Reform, we have examined the costs and benefits of an option for the modernisation of the Industrial Injuries scheme by replacing it with a no-fault compensation scheme fully funded by employers through the use of compulsory private insurance.

We continue to keep the industrial injuries scheme under review. Under the Employer's Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969, all employers (with specific exceptions) carrying out business in Great Britain are required to take out cover against liability for work-related bodily injury and disease. The cost of such insurance is a matter for employers and the insurance industry.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) of 30 January 2000, *Official Report*, column 140W, concerning industrial injuries benefits, what proportion of such benefits are industrial injuries compensation. [151321]

Mr. Rooker: The figure of £756 million given in my answer to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) was net of benefits recovered from compensation payments.

Gross expenditure on Industrial Injuries benefits in 1999–2000 was £787 million and the amount of benefits recovered from compensation payments was £32 million.

Note:

The figures do not sum due to rounding.

Ministerial Visits (Peterborough)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151033]

Mr. Rooker: None.

SERCO Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will list the contracts that exist between SERCO and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151348]

Mr. Rooker: There are no existing contracts between the Department and SERCO Ltd.

The only contracts awarded to SERCO during the last three years were in the year 1 January 1998 to 31 December 1998 and were a Review of IS/IT Projects and Consultancy support.

DEFENCE

Ground-based Theatre Air Defence

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the extent to which British forces can be provided with adequate ground-based theatre air defence against *(a)* aircraft, *(b)* Cruise missiles and *(c)* ballistic missiles in the event of an operational deployment where such cover is not by allies; and if he will make a statement. [143343]

Mr. Hoon: When deployed without support from our allies, UK forces would operate a concept of layered air defence. Point Defence is currently provided by a mixture of the Javelin and High Velocity Missile systems which are in service the with Army and Royal Marines. In addition we have a short range air defence capability which is provided by the Rapier air defence system in service with both the Army and RAF Regiment. All these systems have a capability against aircraft and Rapier has a limited capability against cruise missiles. Additional support could be provided by Naval systems which include Sea Dart and Seawolf. In the air we would operate the Tornado F3 and Sea Harrier FA2 fighter aircraft which would provide longer range defence against aircraft and a limited capability against cruise missiles. We continue to assess the potential role of theatre ballistic defence (TBMD) systems in countering missiles attacks but it remains our position that it would be premature to decide to acquire TBMD. Currently we would counter a ballistic missile threat through a broad range of offensive and defensive measures.

Opposition Policies (Costings)

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to the answer of the Minister for the Cabinet Office of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 47–48W, what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) advised upon in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings and relevant background documents in the Library; [146618]

(2) if special advisers in his Department have been involved in *(a)* co-ordinating, *(b)* costing and *(c)* presenting costings of policies of opposition parties; and if he will make a statement; [146674]

(3) pursuant to the answer of the Minister for the Cabinet Office, 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 48W, what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative Party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) co-ordinated in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings in the Library. [146675]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 183W.

Warship Building

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what financial inducements his Department has received in order to procure two extra ALSLs beyond the requirement identified in the Strategic Defence Review; [150279]

(2) what assessment his Department has made of the warship building capacity in the UK required to meet the future requirements of the Royal Navy; how this is affected by the ALSL procurement decisions; and if he will make a statement; [150273]

(3) what his estimate is of the additional cost of splitting the construction of four ALSLs between Swan Hunter and BAE Systems Marine rather than constructing all four ships on Tyneside; [150274]

(4) what the additional cost is of four ALSLs rather than two; [150275]

(5) what the value of the contracts placed with Swan Hunter and BAE Systems Marine is for each to supply two ALSLs; and what is the price differential between the two companies; [150276]

(6) on what grounds Appledore/BMT was not considered for the build of two additional ALSLs; [150277]

(7) what industrial factors were taken into account in his decision to allocate construction of two ALSLs to BAE Systems Marine; and if he will make a statement. [150278]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* The invitation to tender issued in April 2000 was based on our original requirement for two Alternative Landing Ship Logistics (ALSL) with an option for up to a further three. Bids were submitted by interested companies on this basis. In light of recent operating experiences, in particular in Sierra Leone and Mozambique, we decided to procure a further two ALSLs making four in total. These vessels will provide us with significantly enhanced operating capability, in particular increased lift capacity and the ability to off-load in a wider range of sea conditions. They will also provide better long-term value for money for the taxpayer than running a mixed fleet of two new ALSLs and three ageing LSLs until the latter are replaced. Funding for the extra vessels will come from the Defence Votes.

In deciding where to place the contract for the additional two ALSLs, all the shipyards associated with the final tender process were considered. A range of factors were taken into account including value for money considerations and operational benefits resulting from an early delivery. On balance, the best option was for two vessels to be built by Swan Hunter and two by BAE Systems Marine using a common design.

The estimated value of both contracts will be £300 million but this is dependent upon the successful conclusion of the negotiations currently under way with BAE Systems Marine. The price for the two vessels to be built by BAE Systems Marine at Govan will be governed by the firm price agreed for the two vessels being built at Swan Hunter.

The detailed costs associated with a split order are commercially sensitive as we are currently negotiating separately with Swan Hunter for lead yard service support to Govan, and with BAE Systems Marine for the build of the two additional ALSL vessels at Govan. This information is therefore withheld under Exemption 7 (effective management and operations of public service) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

We keep under review a broad assessment of whether there is sufficient capacity in UK shipyards to undertake our forward Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary shipbuilding programme. Our assessment indicates that there remains sufficient capacity in UK shipyards to undertake our current and forward warship building programme including all four ALSLs.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 1 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 262–63W, on Sierra Leone, for what reasons his Department *(a)* accepted the validity of the personal injury claim for one serviceman and *(b)* rejected the validity of the personal injury claims for 14 servicemen; what factors influenced that decision; and if he will make a statement. [150899]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has accepted liability for one claim for compensation from a serviceman suffering from malaria following deployment to Sierra Leone on the basis that he was not given an anti-malarial tablet until he had been in theatre for a few days and therefore was not afforded adequate protection.

Claims from 14 servicemen were repudiated on the basis that they were issued with anti-malarial tablets on 6 May 2000, prior to deployment the following day. The British National Formulary states that the anti-malarial tablets can be started

"up to one or two days before travel".

Thus, unlike the first case, the Ministry of Defence did not consider it had a legal liability to pay these servicemen compensation.

These decisions were based on legal advice.

Gurkhas

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many peacekeeping tours of duty Gurkha troops have made in the last five years. [151255]

Mr. Spellar: During the last five years, Gurkha units have made 24 separate peacekeeping tours of duty in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor and Cyprus. Gurkha soldiers have also assisted in establishing or keeping the peace on 14 operations in Sierra Leone, Turkey and Kuwait. A detailed breakdown of these tours is shown in the table.

Peace keeping tours of duty

Unit/Corps	*Number of Gurkhas*[1]	*Area*
1 RGR		
22 August-25 December 1997	182	Bosnia
20 April-4 January 1999	74	Bosnia
7 June-22 August 1999	610	Kosovo
2 PGR		
January-June 1996	154	Bosnia (3 RGR)
September-December 1999	291	East Timor
Queen's Gurkha Engineers		
March-September 1996	42	Bosnia
December 1997-January 1998	6	Cyprus
June-November 1999	72	Kosovo
August 2000-February 2001	83	Kosovo
November 2000-June 2001	11	Cyprus
December 1998-June 1999	6	Cyprus
Queen's Gurkha Signals		
April 1996-on going	8[2]	Bosnia
March 1999-on going	73[2]	Kosovo
October-December 1999	5	East Timor
Queen's Own Gurkha Transport Regiment		
9 November 1996–1 February 1997	70	Bosnia
28 August-19 October 1997	15	Bosnia
6 October 1997–22 April 1998	9	Bosnia
17 March-20 September 1999	124	Bosnia
5 August-4 November 1999	7	Kosovo
22 October-10 December 1999	2	East Timor
19 November-10 December 1999	3	Bosnia
Gurkha Reinforcement Company 1 HLDRS		
3 July 1998–13 June 1999	105	Bosnia (1 RS)
13 July-16 October 1999	105	Bosnia (1 RS)

Peace keeping tours of duty

Unit/Corps	*Number of Gurkhas*[1]	*Area*
Gurkha Reinforcement Company 2 PARA		
4 January-16 July 1999	105	Bosnia
Other Tours of Duty:		
1 RGR		
23 July-13 September 2001	6	Sierra Leone
February-April 2001	2	Sierra Leone
2 RGR		
July-September 2000	6	Sierra Leone
September-October 2000	8	Sierra Leone
October-November 2000	6	Sierra Leone
December 2000–10 April 200	84 completed 324 still deployed	Sierra Leone
Queen's Gurkha Engineers		
June-July 2000	10	Sierra Leone
Queen's Gurkha Signals		
May 1996-on going	6[2]	Turkey
November 1997-ongoing	24[2]	Kuwait
3 June-2 November 2000	15	Sierra Leone
2 November 2000-on going	29	Sierra Leone
Gurkha Reinforcement Company 1 R IRISH		
11 September-30 October 2000	32	Sierra Leone
11 September-30 November 2000	6	Sierra Leone
Gurkha Reinforcement Company 2 PARA		
5–25 May 2000	58	Sierra Leone

[1] Figures include all Regimental personnel whether British nationals or Nepalese
[2] On-going operation but personnel are replaced every 4 month

Depleted Uranium

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 519–20W, on depleted uranium, which units and sub units that served in the Balkans were not subject to pre-deployment course briefing on medical issues, including depleted uranium, *(a)* from June 1999 to August 2000 and *(b)* since August 2000; how many troops were involved; who decided to curtail the pre-deployment course briefing on medical issues; and what steps he is taking to ensure that the situation is not repeated. [150972]

Mr. Spellar: All units and sub-units deploying to the Balkans between 1 June 1999 and 12 September 2000 attended a course run by the Operational Training and Advisory Group (Warminster) (OPTAG(W)), previously called the United Nations Training and Advisory Team (UNTAT), prior to deployment. This included a general briefing on environmental industrial hazards, including radiological hazards, delivered by the Mobile Health Instructional Team (MHIT).

In view of the large number of operational deployments last autumn, the course for troops deploying to the Balkans was reduced in length to ensure that all troops received the best preparation for their deployment in the time available. OPTAG(W) considered the priority for topics to be included in the course and the medical briefing was dropped. This decision was taken by OPTAG(W) in the light of circumstances at the time and, in view of the fact that all troops receive an annual medical training package under unit arrangements.

The following units, or elements of the units, did not receive the MHIT briefing between 12 September and 13 December 2000 prior to deployment to the Balkans:

Unit

2nd Battalion The Light Infantry
2nd Battalion The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment
One squadron from the Queen's Dragoon Guards
33 Engineer Regiment
59 Commando Squadron Royal Engineers
4 Regiment Army Air Corps
3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
661 Squadron Army Air Corps
16 Signal Regiment
24 Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
33 Field Hospital
847 Naval Air Squadron
23 Pioneer Regiment
50 Independent Commando Squadron RE
4 General Support Regiment Royal Logistic Corps
8 Transport Regiment Royal Logistic Corps

Note:

Troops to be deployed as individual reinforcements are trained alongside units and sub-units.

Therefore, some 3,100 troops in these units and sub-units and some 400 troops who were deployed as individuals, did not receive the pre-deployment MHIT briefing. Instructions to reinstate the briefing were issued formally on 12 January, but action had already been taken to revise the course programme for the first OPTAG(W)

course after the Christmas and New Year break. This took place between 8–10 January; all troops participating in this course were given the MHIT brief.

As stated in my answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 519–20W, all troops deploying to Kosovo should have received briefing at unit level on depleted uranium in accordance with the instructions in the Mounting Order, although we now know that this process was not comprehensive.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many depleted uranium rounds have been discharged at the Dundrennan ranges; and when the last round was discharged at a hard target. [150939]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if a hard target Warrior at Dundrennan ranges is a casualty of depleted uranium shells from the Gulf War. [150940]

Mr. Spellar: There is no hard target Warrior vehicle at Kirkcudbright training area, nor are there any records to suggest that depleted uranium projectiles have ever been fired at a Warrior vehicle or any other hard target at Kirkcudbright. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the UK Warrior vehicles destroyed during the Gulf War were hit by depleted uranium projectiles.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library copies of all minutes made of meetings held between representatives from the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency and the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency since May 1997, in respect of the environmental monitoring programme of the test firing of depleted uranium shells at the Kirkcudbright test range. [145299]

Mr. Spellar: There has been one such meeting since May 1997. This was hosted by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) at East Kilbride. No formal minutes of the meeting were produced. I am, however, arranging for a copy of the SEPA letter recording the formal actions placed on DERA to be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what requests have been received from the European Commission for information gathered by monitoring programmes on exposure to depleted uranium of British troops who have served in the Balkans; what assessments of depleted uranium dangers are being undertaken by NATO; and if he will make a statement on the current state of knowledge gained from the United Kingdom depleted uranium monitoring programme. [145281]

Mr. Spellar: The European Commission has made no requests for information gathered by monitoring programmes on exposure to depleted uranium of British troops who have served in the Balkans.

The NATO Chiefs of Medical Military Services Committee (COMEDS) met on 15 January to discuss health concerns related to service in the Balkans. The COMEDS concluded that: there is no evidence of a link between depleted uranium and reported cancers; there is no indication of any atypical illness linked to the Balkans, and those soldiers with health complaints must be given the best appropriate medical care. The COMEDS have, however, made recommendations for further investigative work.

In recognition of the fact that recent press coverage concerning depleted uranium will have caused some concerns among our people, I announced an initiative to identify an additional appropriate voluntary screening programme for our service personnel and civilians who have served in the Balkans on 9 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 877–79. It is currently envisaged that this programme will also be available to Gulf veterans. The first phase of work has been completed and, on 13 February, we published a consultative document setting out the technical issues associated with such a programme, inviting advice and comment from a wide range of expert bodies. A copy of the document has been placed in the Library of the House.

UK Gulf veterans who are concerned that their health has been adversely affected by service during the Gulf conflict, including by possible exposure to DU, are entitled to seek a referral to the Gulf Veterans' Medical Assessment Programme for a full medical assessment. Any tests that are considered clinically appropriate by the examining MAP physician, including those to detect the presence of uranium, will be arranged.

Out of 3,000 patients examined by MAP physicians, two have exhibited symptoms that, in the judgment of the examining physicians, have indicated a clinical requirement for testing to detect uranium and have been tested. These test results show that uranium, in any form, is not a contributory factor to the patient's ill health.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what reports he has published explaining the risks associated with using depleted uranium munitions; and if he will make a statement. [150215]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence gave on 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 653W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Mr. Coaker), in which he states that the Ministry of Defence was publishing a paper that explained the Department's position on the risks posed by DU. This paper included reference to my Department's earlier paper published on 19 March 1999, entitled "Testing for the Presence of Depleted Uranium in UK Veterans of the Gulf Conflict: the Current Position". Copies of both these papers are available in the Library of the House and on the MOD website at www.gulfwar.mod.uk.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what evidence he bases his conclusions concerning the risks to human health from depleted uranium munitions; and if he will make a statement. [150531]

Mr. Spellar: The Ministry of Defence has followed the debate concerning depleted uranium (DU) and human health very closely. A great deal of material has been reviewed. I refer the hon. Member to the very authoritative and independent publications from the United States: notably the RAND report on DU issued in 1998, the US Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry "Toxological Profile for Uranium" of September 1999, and the Institute of Medicine's publication on Gulf

War and Health in September 2000. All of those reviews agreed that there was as yet no evidence to link exposure to DU with either cancer or diseases of the kind exhibited by Gulf veterans.

The medical evidence from the 1990–91 Gulf conflict further underscores the findings. The mortality data published by the Ministry of Defence on 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns 414–16W, show that overall, in the period 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2000, the mortality of UK Gulf veterans was only slightly greater then that of the Control group. There were 477 deaths in the Gulf cohort, compared to 466 in the control group. Within the overall figure, deaths from disease were lower in the Gulf cohort (168 compared to 208). Deaths from cancer were lower (69 compared to 77). In addition, we have the findings from the physicians at the Gulf Veterans Medical Assessment Programme (GVMAP) whose examination of over 3,000 patients has determined that the symptoms presented by individuals who had attended were not likely to have been caused by DU exposure. Furthermore, there is no indication of an increase in the incidence of illness among the GVMAP patients compared with the general population.

Other US work we keep under close review is that undertaken at the Baltimore Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Since 1993, a clinic based at the centre has run a DU follow-up programme for 33 US Gulf veterans (whose records showed they had been involved in friendly fire incidents involving DU), which includes 15 who have embedded DU shrapnel in their bodies. To date, any health impairments among those being monitored appear to be related to their original injuries rather than to DU. None of the 33 is excreting higher than usual levels of uranium, except those with embedded shrapnel. We continue to monitor the work.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the purpose of continued firing of depleted uranium ammunition at Dundrennan ranges. [150942]

Mr. Spellar: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Morgan) on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 87W, and 18 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 298W.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what premature explosions in the breech with depleted uranium ammunition have taken place at Dundrennan ranges; when they took place; and how and where the ensuing fragments were dumped. [150941]

Mr. Spellar: There have been no premature explosions in the breech with depleted uranium ammunition at the Kirkcudbright (Dundrennan) ranges. However, it is believed that there were some 79 occasions between 1983 and 1993 on which rounds partially broke up during firing. These were all at the Raeberry firing point, which is 180 metres from the cliff edge. In all cases, although some fragments hit the ground, the majority of the mass proceeded out to sea, a fact confirmed by radar and optical observations.

Gulf War

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many chemical mines the Iraqi Army laid on *(a)* land and *(b)* sea in the course of the Gulf War; where they were found; and what (i) advice and (ii) protection was made available to personnel clearing them. [150946]

Mr. Hoon: Analysis of the information available to the Government has produced no evidence that chemical weapons, including mines, were issued to operational Iraqi forces during the 1990–91 Gulf conflict. There is no indication that Iraqi laid chemical-agent-filled mines and the Iraqi Government have never declared that they hold or have developed such weapons. UK forces neither discovered nor cleared any such mines.

UK forces were, however, advised that the threat of Iraqi use of chemical mines was a possibility. An assessment contained in the diary of one of the UK Engineer Regiments in theatre in late January 1991 was that Iraq may deploy land mines containing up to 5kg of chemical agent, probably mustard gas or a variation of it, and that these may be laid some 15cm below the subsurface, and could be remotely detonated from a central point. This engineer unit was also advised that such mines might be protected by conventional anti-personnel and anti-tank mines in order to prevent their neutralisation.

We do not have details of what advice was provided on how to make such mines safe, or what protection was to be employed in the course of handling any chemical mines encountered. However, it is believed that personnel undertaking explosive ordnance disposal duties were made aware of the need to wear NBC protective clothing during the handling of chemical or biological warfare munitions of any type, and that this would therefore include any mines with a chemical-agent filling.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if his Department has plans to research chromosome 22 and 22/IE in Gulf War veterans; and what discussions it has had with *(a)* the US Department of Defense and *(b)* other agencies on this matter. [150943]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has no such plans and has had no discussions on this matter.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to make TH1 and TH2 tests available to Gulf War veterans; and what the cost of such tests would be per capita. [150944]

Mr. Spellar: My Department has no such plans.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if members of the armed forces who received immunisation in preparation for deployment during the Gulf war have access to their medical records on request. [150261]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* The Ministry of Defence handles requests for medical records in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. The Act allows an individual full and complete access to his medical records on written request. Access to any part of a health record may, however, be refused if, in the opinion of the appropriate health professional:

(a) disclosure of the record would be likely to cause serious harm to the physical or mental health of the individual or any other person; or

(b) the record contains information relating to or provided by another person who could be identified from that information, unless consent has been given or the person was a health professional involved in the treatment of the individual making the request.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decontamination facilities were available in the theatre of the Gulf War for personnel, vehicles and aircraft; in what quantities; and where they were located. [150945]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Dr. Vis) on 7 December 2001, *Official Report*, columns 455–56W, and to paragraphs 131–38 of the paper "British Chemical Warfare Defence during the Gulf Conflict (1990–91)", which is available in the Library of the House.

Defence Agencies

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list (1) the total expenditure of each defence agency in the last year for which figures are available, indicating expenditure in Scotland; [149568]

(2) the total value of the fixed assets of each of the defence agencies, indicating the value of each in Scotland. [149567]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Information on the assets and expenditure of each defence agency has been presented to Parliament, most recently for the year 1999–2000, and is available in the Library of the House. Many defence agencies have a significant presence in Scotland, and details of the associated fixed assets were provided following a special exercise, in a letter of 8 May 2000 to the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Welsh). A copy was also placed in the Library of the House. To identify the relevant portion of their expenditure would involve disproportionate cost.

Common Threat Assessment

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent steps have been taken to arrive at a common threat assessment with the UK's allies; and if he will make a statement. [150804]

Mr. Hoon: NATO undertakes periodic assessments, in consultation with Allies, of the threats to Alliance security. These assessments form one of the major inputs into Alliance defence planning.

Albanian Extremists

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his oral answer of 12 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 5, how many Albanian extremists operating in Kosovo and southern Serbia, who have been detained in possession of illegal weapons and handed over to the Americans at Camp Bondsteel, have been charged; and for what offences they have been charged. [150701]

Mr. Spellar: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Fighter Aircraft

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the RAF to take delivery of its first single-seater European fighter aircraft. [150725]

Mr. Hoon: Delivery of the first single-seater Eurofighter to the RAF is planned for March 2003. The first Eurofighter to be delivered, in June 2002, will be twin-seat.

HMS Tireless

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects HMS Tireless will be ready to resume her fleet duties; and if he will make a statement. [151436]

Mr. Spellar: The repair work to HMS Tireless is scheduled to be completed at the end of March and she will sail from Gibraltar as soon as possible thereafter. HMS Tireless will then resume fleet duties.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the total cost of work carried out on HMS Tireless; what the expected total cost is of bringing the submarine back in service; and if he will make a statement. [151435]

Mr. Spellar: As of December 2000 the cost committed on the repair work to HMS Tireless was approximately £1.8 million.

The estimated total cost of work is £2.5 million to £3.0 million. This includes Tireless' share of the cost of developing a generic solution for all submarines affected by this defect. In addition, the cost of supporting the boat's crew during the repair period and providing essential operational training in order to return the submarine to operational service is expected to amount to £0.6 million.

Armed Forces (Married Quarters)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force married quarters are occupied by cohabiting couples; and what Government policy is regarding the allocation of married quarters to members of the armed forces who are not married. [151354]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence uses marital status as the determinant in its policy when allocating married quarters. Married personnel, and lone parents with dependant children for whom they have prime responsibility, are currently entitled to Service Family Accommodation (SFA) and Substitute Service Family Accommodation (SSFA). Single personnel and lone parents are not authorised to cohabit with a partner in SFA or SSFA.

From time to time cases do come to light. Currently, in Great Britain, two suspected cases are being investigated and in two other cases irregular occupants, who may be cohabiting, are under notice to vacate.

MOD Police

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will announce a start date for the single-source document for terms and conditions for Ministry of Defence police officers. [151282]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) Policy and Procedures Manual, incorporating MOD police terms and conditions of service, was issued in electronic format on 10 May 2000. Distribution of the hard copy commenced in June 2000. Further chapters continue to be issued as soon as they are agreed with the Defence Police Federation. The manual became effective from 10 May 2000.

Military Pensions

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the indexation of military pensions for those who retired between 1964 and 1974. [151443]

Mr. Spellar: There are no plans to review the indexation of public sector pensions.

HMNB Clyde

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the single bed capacity of the barracks being constructed at HMNB Clyde for the Fleet Royal Marines Protection Unit; how much it has cost; and what is its completion date. [150947]

Dr. Moonie: The single bed capacity of the barracks being constructed at HMNB Clyde for the Fleet Royal Marines Protection Group is 216. The contract value of the construction is approximately £7 million and it should be completed in August 2001.

RM Condor

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for alternative units to use the accommodation at RM Condor when the Fleet Royal Marines Protection Unit completes its move to Faslane. [150948]

Dr. Moonie: As a result of an initiative emerging from the Strategic Defence Review, the Army is seeking to identify suitable locations for five planned new Army Medical Regiments in the UK, each comprising some 250 Regular personnel. RM Condor, Arbroath is being considered as a location for such a unit.

Even if Arbroath were finally selected as a future location for an Army unit of this sort, it would not form there until 2005 at the earliest.

Sonarbuoys

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel within the DPA are employed on sonarbuoy procurement; how many DPA personnel have been employed on sonarbuoy procurement for *(a)* three to five years, *(b)* five to seven years and *(c)* greater than seven years; and if he will make a statement. [150286]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently five personnel working full time on sonarbuoy procurement within the DPA. Of these, one has done so for over seven years (although not consecutive years) and the others each for less than three years. They are supported by a number of other colleagues from various functions on an occasional basis.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the price is of *(a)* UK and *(b)* US Navy passive sonarbuoys and (i) UK and (ii) US Navy sonarbuoys; and if he will make a statement. [150289]

Dr. Moonie: The prices paid by the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) for UK sonarbuoys are commercially confidential and are withheld under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Price information on US Navy sonarbuoys has been provided to the DPA on the basis that its confidentiality would be protected. Consequently, this information is withheld under the same exemption.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are for incorporating an SR3 ASSS capability in *(a)* RN helicopters and *(b)* VAV's; and if he will make a statement. [150287]

Dr. Moonie: There are no current plans to incorporate SR(SA)903 Active Search Sonarbuoy System on RN helicopters or Unmanned Air Vehicles (UAV).

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how interoperability aspects for SR903 are to be managed with *(a)* US forces and *(b)* European forces; and if he will make a statement. [150290]

Dr. Moonie: There is no requirement for the Active Search Sonarbuoy System (ASSS) to be interoperable with US or European forces, though SR(SA)903 ASSS will conform with NATO standards, thereby offering future potential for systems interoperability.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what is the current procurement strategy for SR903 Active Search Sonarbuoy System; for what reasons this has changed; and if he will make a statement. [150283]

Dr. Moonie: BAE Systems is the Prime Contractor for the Nimrod MRA4 and the SR(SA)903 Active Search Sonarbuoy System (ASSS) Risk Reduction Programme. The original strategy for the ASSS programme included a sub-contract competition between two consortia for the next phase of the ASSS programme, to fully develop and integrate the system into the Nimrod MRA4. Thomson Marconi Sonar Ltd.(TMSL) led one of the Consortia, with Ultra Electronics Limited leading the other. Subsequently TMSL advised my Department that, though they would complete their contracted activity during the Risk Reduction Phase, they did not intend to bid into the next, Demonstration and Manufacture, phase of the project. The Defence Procurement Agency is working with BAE Systems to review options and develop a proposal for the SR(SA)903 Demonstration and Manufacture phase.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding has been allocated for the acquisition programme for SR903; when he expects an operational capability to be available; what target was set for SR903 during the renegotiation of the MRA4 Nimrod programme; and if he will make a statement. [150288]

Dr. Moonie: A contract for the Demonstration and Manufacture phase to meet SR(SA) 903 Active Search Sonarbuoy System (ASSS) has yet to be awarded. Consequently, the funding allocation is withheld under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. ASSS performance targets are classified and are withheld under Exemption 1 of the

Code of Practice on Access to Government information. Renegotiation of the Nimrod MRA4 contract included an option to provide an ASSS capability at the Nimrod MRA4 ISD, contracted for March 2005.

Chinook Crash

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence from what distance helicopter ZD 576 could have detected the guidance beacon at Corran on 2 June 1994. [150413]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* There is no guidance beacon at Corran.

RAF Fylingdales

Mr. Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what payments have been received by his Department from the US military for use of facilities at RAF Fylingdales in each of the past three years. [150477]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* No payments have been received by the Ministry of Defence from the US military for use of facilities at RAF Fylingdales in any of the past three years.

Tour Cycle

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is regarding monitoring the cycle of tours while on peacekeeping duties and its effect on families and retention. [150659]

Mr. Spellar: We recognise that the welfare of service personnel and their families is vital for retention and, therefore, for operational effectiveness. The tour cycle is just one aspect of service life that bears on retention, and we already collect data on this and a range of other relevant factors. This includes continuous attitude surveys of the views of service personnel and their spouses, as well as those seeking premature voluntary retirement, to understand the factors that affect retention. However, we are concerned to ensure that monitoring arrangements are adequate and a number of changes are either in hand or under consideration to improve our capability to monitor individual separation.

Military Establishments (Northern Ireland)

Mr. William Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was spent on *(a)* capital works, *(b)* refurbishment of buildings and *(c)* repairs in respect of each (i) Army and (ii) other military establishment in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years and in the current year. [150921]

Dr. Moonie: The figures for the current year and last three years are in the table. It is not possible separately to identify "refurbishment of buildings" and "repair" costs, and these are shown together as "maintenance". The figures for the current year represent the forecast spend for this year, and include both actual spend to date and further spend anticipated by the end of the financial year. The "other military establishments" column includes the RAF, as well as Territorial Army and other volunteer reserves.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*Total*
Army					
Capital works	25.1	18.3	14.1	14.3	71.8
Maintenance	41.6	41.4	45.1	43.3	171.4
Other military establishments					
Capital works	2.2	0.7	1.5	9.0	13.4
Maintenance	3.2	3.4	3.2	3.3	13.1

Service Personnel

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military service personnel *(a)* resigned and *(b)* retired from each of the military services in the last 12 months. [148330]

Mr. Spellar: For the period 1 January to 31 December 2000 the outflow from UK regular forces is as follows:

	Naval service	*Army*	*RAF*
Trained outflow			
PVR[1]	1,489	5,758	1,847
Retirements[2]	1,240	2,048	1,731
Other[3]	858	2,118	331
Untrained outflow[4]	1,506	5,759	670
Total	5,093	15,683	4,579

[1] For military service personnel figures are quoted for the number leaving early on Premature Voluntary Retirement (Officers), and Premature Voluntary Release (Other Ranks). This results from the open engagement system which means servicemen can serve for 22 years. As these are not engagement periods as such those who leave earlier do so on Premature Voluntary Requirement.
[2] Defined as personnel leaving at the end of an agreed period of service.
[3] All other outflow of trained personnel. This includes medical, death, disciplinary, dismissal and services no longer required.
[4] No breakdown of this category is available.

Steel Production

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assessment he has made of the impact on the UK's defence industries of the decision of Corus plc to restructure its steel production; [149878]

(2) what proportion of steel in the production of military goods is sourced from the UK; [150209]

(3) what recent discussions he has had with Corus plc concerning the sourcing of steel from the UK for military production. [150208]

Dr. Moonie: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no discussions with Corus plc concerning the sourcing of steel from the UK for military production. We have not made any assessment of the impact on the UK's defence industries of the decision of Corus plc to restructure its steel production. Steel is a raw material and as such is not, in the main, purchased directly by the Ministry of Defence, but rather by the manufacturer of the end product. It is the responsibility of the relevant supplier to purchase the necessary steel from the source it considers offers the best long-term value for money, whether from UK or overseas suppliers. We have no reason to believe that the recent changes by Corus will affect their ability to do this. In view of this it is not possible to say what proportion of steel in the production

of military goods is sourced from the UK as this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

A400M

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the UK aerospace industry about the development costs of the A400M; and if he will make a statement; [150218]

(2) what discussions he has had with his European counterparts about the funding to Airbus Military for the development costs of the A400M; and if he will make a statement. [150219]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 13 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence has had no recent discussions with representatives of the UK aerospace industry or with his European counterparts on the development cost of the A400M. Officials have met with a number of companies recently, including Dowty Aerospace Propellers of Cheltenham, with which this issue was discussed. The negotiations which we and our partner nations are having with Airbus Military are on the basis of a commercial approach for a single phase development and production programme. Such an approach, coupled with open competition, does not involve a separate contracted development phase or access to detailed cost information.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many goats had to be killed on humane grounds after being used in the submarine escape and rescue research programme in each month since April 2000; what percentage this represents of all goats used; and if he will make a statement. [150723]

Dr. Moonie: The number of goats which were killed on humane grounds after being used in the submarine escape and rescue research programme during the period between April 2000 and the current date is as follows:

Year/month	*Number of goats humanely killed at end of experiment*
2000	
April	4
May	0
June	0
July	0
August	18
September	0
October	0
November	1
December	14
2001	
January	0
February	0

This represents some 63 per cent. of the total animals used between April 2000 and February 2001.

HMS Shetland

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the location of HMS Shetland is; and what duties she is carrying out. [151281]

Mr. Spellar: HMS Shetland is currently in Portsmouth undergoing maintenance, having recently returned from patrolling the part of British fishery limits that has been closed to fishing vessels as part of the North Sea Cod Recovery Plan. She is due to go on patrol again on 12 March. The likely patrol location will be the Western British fishing limits.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which live firing exercises HMS Shetland has carried out in the past three months; and where these exercises have taken place. [151280]

Mr. Spellar: During the last three months, HMS Shetland has conducted two periods of live firing. The first took place on 14 February 2001 in the North sea, and the second on 23 February 2001 in the south coast exercise area.

Service Personnel (Legal Proceedings)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel, and from which units, have been flown out of *(a)* Bosnia, *(b)* Kosovo and *(c)* other theatres of operation to give evidence in legal proceedings in the past year as (i) defendants and (ii) witnesses. [149354]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The information requested is not held centrally and cannot be provided in the format required.

Service Discipline Acts (Contractors)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances contractors working for his Department are subject to the Service Discipline Acts. [148204]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* Contractors working for the Ministry of Defence may be subject to the Service Discipline Acts in two instances. The first is where a contractor is authorised by the Defence Council to be attached to or to accompany British Forces not on active service outside the United Kingdom for the purposes of his profession or employment. The other case is in the rare event of members of the regular Armed Forces being on active service, either in the UK or overseas. In this instance, a contractor employed in the service of those forces, or accompanying them, would automatically be subject to Service Law.

Service Pensions

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning inequities in service pensions; and if he will make a statement. [149666]

Mr. Spellar: The Armed Forces Pension Scheme has compared favourably with public and private sector schemes over a number of years, reflecting the particular demands of a service career. This has been confirmed in the reports of the Armed Forces Pay Review Body. Minister and officials receive a steady flow of letters from

MPs and members of the public about the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. We also meet representatives of ex-service and widows' organisations on a regular basis.

Royal Auxiliary Fleet (Refit and Repair)

Ms Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the proposed refit and repair work for Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, with particular reference to the share of this work that will be allocated to Rosyth dockyard. [150120]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* It is our policy generally to award RFA refit and repair work on the basis of open competition between UK ship repair yards. We currently have no plans to allocate any such work, but we are keeping this under review to ensure value for money is achieved.

Operation Palliser

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the armed forces deployed on Operation Palliser have been discharged from the services on medical grounds; and if he will make a statement; [147563]

(2) how many members of the armed forces who served on Operation Palliser have since been discharged on medical grounds, listing in each case from which regiment and company they have been discharged, and the medical reason for discharge; and if he will make a statement. [148373]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* No members of the armed forces who were deployed on Operation Palliser have been medically discharged.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Select Committees (Membership)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Chairman of the Committee of Selection if he will list those hon. Members on the Government side, excluding Ministers and parliamentary private secretaries, who *(a)* have not served as a member of a Select Committee since May 1997 and *(b)* have served on more than one Select Committee in the same time scale, indicating the Committees on which each individual has served. [150858]

Mr. McWilliam: The Committee of Selection is responsible only for the nomination of the departmental Select Committees and the Domestic Committees of the House, under Public Business Standing Orders Nos. 142 and 152. There are many other Select Committees, including the Environmental Audit, European Scrutiny, Public Accounts and Standards and Privileges Committees which are appointed directly by the House without prior nomination by the Committee of Selection, and upon which the Committee of Selection does not hold information. However, for the purposes of this answer, all Select Committees—rather than merely those nominated by the Committee of Selection—have been included; where information is not held by the Committee of Selection it has been drawn from the Sessional Returns for 1997–98, 1998–99 and 1999–2000. The lists do not include Select Committees appointed for the consideration of Bills and draft Bills.

(a) The list of hon. Members on the Government side who have not served as members of a Select Committee since May 1997 is as follows. As requested, hon. Members who are known to have served, or be serving, as Ministers or parliamentary private secretaries have been excluded.

Mr. Douglas Alexander
Mr. Adrian Bailey
Mr. Kevin Barron
Mr. Tony Benn
Ms Judith Church
Mr. Frank Cook[1]
Mr. Jeremy Corbyn
Tom Cox
Mrs. Ann Cryer
Mr. Lawrence Cunliffe
Mr. Tam Dalyell
Mr. Denzil Davies
Mr. Terry Davis
Mr. Bill Etherington
Maria Fyfe
Mr. Roger Godsiff
Mr. Mark Hendrick
Mr. Barry Jones[1]
Mr. Eric Joyce
Mr. Kevin McNamara
Dan Norris
Mr. Edward O'Hara[1]
Mr. Tom Pendry
Mr. Kerry Pollard
Mr. Lawrie Quinn
Mr. Andrew Reed
Mr. John Robertson
Mr. Alan Simpson
Mr. Dennis Skinner
Mr. Llew Smith
Mr. Peter Snape
Mr. Peter Temple-Morris
Rudi Vis
Mr. Robert N. Wareing
Ms Rosie Winterton
Mr. Phil Woolas
Mr. James Wray

[1] Member of the Chairmen's Panel.

(b) The list of hon. Members on the Government side who have served on more than one Select Committee since 1997, either concurrently or consecutively, is as follows:

Member	*Committee*
Anderson, Mr. Donald	Foreign Affairs; Liaison
Atkins, Charlotte	Education and Employment; Selection
Beard, Mr. Nigel	Science and Technology; Treasury

Member	*Committee*
Bell, Mr. Stuart	Finance and Services; Liaison
Bennett, Mr. Andrew F.	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs; Liaison; Statutory Instruments
Benton, Mr. Joe	Education and Employment; Parliamentary Privilege (Joint Committee)
Bradley, Mr. Keith	Accommodation and Works; Finance and Services; Selection
Brown, Mr. Russell	Deregulation; European Scrutiny; Scottish Affairs
Browne, Mr. Desmond	Northern Ireland Affairs; Public Administration
Buck, Ms Karen	Selection; Social Security
Burgon, Mr. Colin	Accommodation and Works; Northern Ireland Affairs; Procedure; Statutory Instruments
Caplin, Mr. Ivor	Broadcasting; Modernisation of the House of Commons
Chaytor, Mr. David	Deregulation; Environmental Audit
Clarke, Mr. Eric	Broadcasting; Finance and Services; Liaison; Scottish Affairs
Clarke, Mr. Tony	Consolidation, etc., Bills (Joint Committee); Northern Ireland Affairs
Coleman, Mr. Tony	International Development; Treasury
Connarty, Mr. Michael	European Scrutiny; Information
Corbett, Mr. Robin	Home Affairs; Liaison
Crausby, Mr. David	Administration; Social Security
Davidson, Mr. Ian	Public Accounts; Selection
Dean, Mrs. Janet	Catering; Home Affairs
Drew, Mr. David	Agriculture; Modernisation of the House of Commons; Procedure
Dunwoody, Mrs. Gwyneth	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs; Liaison
Edwards, Mr. Huw	Modernisation of the House of Commons; Welsh Affairs
Fitzsimons, Lorna	Modernisation of the House of Commons; Procedure
Foster, Mr. Derek	Education and Employment; Liaison
Foster, Mr. Michael Jabez (Hastings and Rye)	Social Security; Standards and Privileges
Gardiner, Mr. Barry	Broadcasting; Procedure; Public Accounts
George, Mr. Bruce	Defence: Liaison
Gerrard, Mr. Neil	Environmental Audit; Information
Griffiths, Mr. Nigel	Procedure; Public Accounts
Hall, Mr. Mike	Administration; Modernisation of the House of Commons
Hall, Mr. Patrick	Consolidation, etc.; Bills (Joint Committee); European Scrutiny
Hepburn, Mr. Stephen	Administration; Defence
Hesford, Mr. Stephen	Deregulation; Health; Northern Ireland Affairs
Hinchliffe, Mr. David	Health; Liaison
Hodge, Ms Margaret	Education and Employment; Liaison
Hood, Mr. Jimmy	Defence; European Scrutiny; Liaison
Hope, Mr. Phil	Public Accounts; Selection
Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay	Catering; Trade and Industry
Iddon, Dr. Brian	Environmental Audit; Science and Technology
Illsley, Mr. Eric	Foreign Affairs; Procedure
Johnson, Miss Melanie	Home Affairs; Public Administration
Jones, Helen	Catering; Education and Employment; Public Administration
Jones, Mr. Jon Owen	Environmental Audit; Information
Jones, Mr. Martyn	Liaison; Welsh Affairs
Kaufman, Mr. Gerald	Culture, Media and Sport; Liaison
Kemp, Mr. Fraser	Public Administration; Selection
King, Mr. Andy	Deregulation; Social Security
Kumar, Dr. Ashok	Deregulation; Science and Technology
Lewis, Mr. Ivan	Deregulation; Health
Love, Mr. Andrew	Deregulation; Public Accounts
Mallaber, Judy	Education and Employment; Treasury
Marsden, Mr. Gordon	Deregulation; Education and Employment
Marshall, Mr. David	Liaison; Scottish Affairs
McDonagh, Siobhain	Health; Social Security
McKenna, Rosemary	Catering; European Scrutiny; Scottish Affairs; Statutory Instruments
McWilliam, Mr. John	Defence; Liaison; Selection
Moonie, Dr. Lewis	Finance and Services; Liaison
Moran, Ms Margaret	Northern Ireland Affairs; Public Administration
Morgan, Mr. Rhodri	Liaison; Public Administration
Mudie, Mr. George	Accommodation and Works; Finance and Services; Selection
Mullin, Mr. Chris	Home Affairs; Liaison
Naysmith, Dr. Doug	Deregulation; Social Security
O'Neill, Mr. Martin	Liaison; Trade and Industry
Organ, Mrs. Diana	Agriculture; Culture, Media and Sport; Statutory Instruments
Osborne, Ms Sandra	Information; Scottish Affairs
Palmer, Dr. Nick	Administration; European Scrutiny; Northern Ireland Affairs
Perham, Ms Linda	Accommodation and Works; Trade and Industry
Pike, Mr. Peter L.	Deregulation; Liaison; Modernisation of the House of Commons
Plaskitt, Mr. James	Consolidation, etc., Bills (Joint Committee); Treasury
Pound, Mr. Stephen	Broadcasting; Northern Ireland Affairs
Radice, Mr. Giles	Liaison; Treasury
Rammell, Mr. Bill	Education and Employment; European Scrutiny
Sawford, Mr. Phil	Environmental Audit; Information
Sheerman, Mr. Barry	Education and Employment; Liaison
Sheldon, Mr. Robert	Liaison; Standards and Privileges
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis	Foreign Affairs; Modernisation of the House of Commons
Steinberg, Mr. Gerry	Catering; Education and Employment; Public Accounts
Stewart, Mr. Ian	Deregulation; Information
Taylor, Mrs. Ann	Modernisation of the House of Commons; Privilege (Joint Committee)

Member	Committee
Thomas, Mr. Gareth (Clywd, West)	Social Security; Welsh Affairs
Turner, Mr. Dennis	Catering; Finance and Services; Liaison
Turner, Dr. George	Agriculture; Consolidation, etc., Bills (Joint Committee); Public Administration
Twigg, Mr. Stephen	Education and Employment; Modernisation of the House of Commons; Public Accounts
Walley, Joan	Environmental Audit; Trade and Industry
White, Mr. Brian	Consolidation, etc., Bills (Joint Committee); Deregulation; Public Administration; Statutory Instruments
Wicks, Mr. Malcolm	Education and Employment; Liaison; Social Security
Williams, Mr. Alan	Parliamentary Privilege (Joint Committee); Public Accounts; Standards and Privileges
Woodward, Mr. Shaun	Broadcasting; European Scrutiny; Foreign Affairs
Wright, Tony	Liaison; Public Administration

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Parliamentary Hours

Mr. Alexander: To ask the President of the Council what information she has collated on *(a)* sitting hours and *(b)* times of divisions in other Parliaments. [144422]

Mr. Tipping: Information on sitting hours in certain other legislatures may be found in pages 133–163 of Volume II of the Report of the Select Committee on Sittings of the House, (HC (1991–92)20-II), but I am not aware of any more recent published research.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council if the special advisers working for her will relinquish their posts when the next General Election is called. [149311]

Mr. Tipping: I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 130W.

Departmental Expenditure Limit (Privy Council Office)

Mr. Browne: To ask the President of the Council what proposals there are to amend the Privy Council Office departmental expenditure limit and running costs limit for 2000–01. [151188]

Mr. Tipping: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate for Class XVII, Vote 5, the Privy Council Office Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) for 2000–01 will be increased by £318,000 from £2,951,000 to £3,269,000 and the running costs limit will be increased by £318,000 from £2,991,000 to £3,309,000.

The increase will be comprised of a transfer from the Cabinet Office, Class XVII, Vote 1 of £20,000 in respect of running costs for 2 Carlton Gardens, and by a claim on the DEL reserve for unexpected increases in accommodation and running costs for the Privy Council Office of £298,000. The increase will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Departmental Policies (Bristol, East)

Jean Corston: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Bristol, East constituency, the effects on Bristol of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150557]

Mr. Lock: The Department is in the process of providing a new Civil Justice Centre to deal with all civil and family work in Bristol. The new court is required to replace the existing county court, which is located on a split site at the Guildhall and Greyfriars. The existing accommodation is in need of substantial repair and alteration to bring it in line with current requirements. In addition, leases on both buildings are due to expire in September 2004.

Providing a purpose-built court building on one site will also help improve operational efficiency. The new court will consist of eight civil courtrooms and six District Judge's Justice Rooms. This is based on workload forecasts for the next 25 years. In addition, the new building will accommodate other Court Service administrative staff currently located in other offices in Bristol (including the probate registry and regional administrative support offices).

The scheme for the new Civil Justice Centre is still at a relatively early stage, and negotiations with a provisional preferred bidder are continuing. A potential site in the centre of Bristol has been earmarked for the development, however a number of outstanding issues need to be resolved before this can be confirmed. The current intention is for negotiations to be concluded by September 2001, with the new building being ready for use by the end of 2003.

The Bristol Community Legal Service Partnership (CLSP), which covers Bristol, East, is one of 160 CLSPs throughout England and Wales. Membership of the Bristol CLSP includes representatives of Bristol City Council, Advice Centres for Avon, Bristol Mediation, Disability Advice and Information Service, Age Concern and the LSC. The CLSP has developed a referral system for all advice providers in Bristol that is currently being piloted. Links are being forged with the Health Authority and with other Regeneration Partnerships, especially in relation to advice provision in the Barton Hill area of Bristol, East.

Throughout Bristol, the Legal Services Commission has let contracts to legal and advice service providers with a total first year value in excess of £1.7 million. Specifically, in the Bristol, East constituency, the Legal Services Commission last year let three contracts—to two firms of solicitors:

Ledbury Raskin—Family (plus tolerance) & Immigration

Leung & Co.—Immigration

and to one not-for-profit advice agency:

Bristol Debt Advice Centre.

The total first-year value of these contracts amounts to over £120,000.

Credit Referencing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the law whereby there is no obligation on a credit card company to alter their credit referencing files after losing a court case [150857]

Dr. Howells: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that credit card companies do not keep credit reference files. Instead they usually obtain such information from credit reference agencies. These agencies have to comply with the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. The latter requires that information is accurate and held no longer than necessary.

I therefore have no current plans to review this subject.

Departmental Policies (Clwyd, South)

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Clwyd, South constituency, the effects on Clwyd, South of her Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150915]

Jane Kennedy: The organisation of the magistrates courts in North Wales has been restructured to provide for more efficient and effective management and improve working with other agencies in the criminal justice system.

Clwyd, South is covered by three Community Legal Service Partnerships; Wrexham, Denbighshire and Powys. However, Clwyd, South only partially covers each of these local authority areas. There are currently 165 CLSPs throughout England and Wales, and 15 of these are based in Wales.

Throughout Wrexham 13 agencies have been awarded contracts with the CLS. The suppliers are located in the centre of the city, but provide services to residents of all Wrexham wards. This includes 11 solicitors, one housing specialist and one Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB). The total value of the contracts awarded amount to over £373,000.

Within Denbighshire 10 solicitor firms and two not-for-profit organisations have been awarded contracts whose total value amounts to over £273,000. While many of the law firms draw clients from the more populated areas to the west of the local authority area, people to the south can access advice from South Denbighshire CAB. As there are no law firms in the south of Denbighshire, some people in this area tend to access advice services in Wrexham.

In the north of Powys four agencies have been awarded contracts whose total value exceeds £60,000. Some residents in the north of Powys are likely to access services from Oswestry. There are four organisations in Oswestry awarded CLS contracts and the value of these contracts amount to over £88,000.

Custody and Contact Arrangements

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she will make proposals to improve court procedures in respect of custody and contact arrangements in cases of family breakdown; if they will include arrangements for better protection of children and vulnerable spouses; and if she will make a statement. [150801]

Jane Kennedy: The Government are currently considering a number of ways in which court arrangements in respect of residence and contact for children could be improved. One area of particular concern is unnecessary delay in children's cases. A scoping study to determine the need for reform of court procedures, in order to reduce delay, is currently being considered. On the specific issue of protecting children and vulnerable spouses, the Lord Chancellor has welcomed the report of the Children Act Sub-Committee on child contact and domestic violence and is currently considering, with the President of the Family Division, what further action may be necessary. The Sub-Committee will also shortly produce a consultation paper on the equally sensitive area of the facilitation and enforcement of contact orders. In all these areas the Government regard the interests and welfare of the child as paramount.

Judicial Behaviour

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions in the last 12 months she has reprimanded members of the judiciary for their behaviour *(a)* in court and *(b)* outside; and if she will make a statement. [150891]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor, as head of the judiciary, is responsible for dealing with all matters of judicial conduct. He takes a firm line with any Judge whose behaviour falls short of what both he and the public expects. There have been seven instances in the past 12 months where the Lord Chancellor has had sufficient cause to reprimand a Judge for his or her behaviour. Six of these cases concerned behaviour in court, and one concerned behaviour outside court. These reprimands have either been in the form of a letter from the Lord Chancellor or, at his instigation, at a meeting between the Judge and the Presiding Judge. In a further case, the Lord Chancellor decided not to re-appoint a Deputy District Judge for a final possible year.

Family Graduated Fees Scheme

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will assess the final comments he invited the Family Law Bar Association to provide, before seeking to implement any new family graduated fees scheme. [150663]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor and I are considering the comments made by the Family Law Bar Association in response to the Lord Chancellor's final proposals on the structure of the scheme and rates to be

paid and on the draft regulations to bring the scheme into force. The Lord Chancellor has previously agreed revisions to the structure of the scheme to address a number of concerns raised by the Bar Council and the Family Law Bar Association.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations the Lord Chancellor has had with the Family Law Bar Association regarding a new family graduated fees scheme. [150662]

Jane Kennedy: The Lord Chancellor and I have consulted extensively with the Bar Council and the Family Law Bar Association. The main consultation period was extended by a number of weeks at the request of the Bar Council to allow further time for consideration of the Lord Chancellor's proposals. Following the consultation exercise, the Lord Chancellor has met with the chairman of the Bar Council on several occasions to discuss the concerns raised by the Family Law Bar Association.

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the IT projects the Lord Chancellor's Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if he will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151467]

Mr. Lock: The following is a list of the IT projects the Lord Chancellor's Department plans to undertake in the next year. Probity and value for money in contracting for IT projects is ensured through compliance with EC public procurement rules, UK Government domestic procurement policy and best practice guidance, government accounting rules and national audit requirements.

I am pleased to say that the Lord Chancellor's Department has already implemented a number of the recommendations outlined in the report "Successful IT—Modernising Government in Action", which was published in May 2000, and will continue to work towards full implementation.

Project	*Commencement padate*	*Completion date*	*Cost (£)*	*Comment*
IMS (Itineraries Management System)	Not yet finalised	March 2002	800,000	Currently in the specification stage. No contract awarded, completion and cost figures are estimates only.
CLAT 2 (Centralisation of Crown Court Legal Aid)	Not yet finalised	February 2002	[1]—	Currently in the specification stage, no contract awarded; go-live is an estimate only. No cost information is available, as indicative prices have not yet been sought from suppliers.
XGSI (connection to Government secure Intranet for transmission of confidential material)	April 2001	Not yet known	[1]—	The full scope of the project is currently being finalised. PFI suppliers are preparing design and costs for a range of options and we are therefore not yet in a position to confirm completion date or cost.

[1] Not yet known

Mr. Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151514]

Mr. Lock: The following is a list of the IT projects currently undertaken in the Lord Chancellor's Department. Probity and value for money in contracting for IT projects is ensured through compliance with EC public procurement rules, UK Government domestic procurement policy and best practice guidance, Government accounting rules and National Audit requirements.

I am pleased to say that the Lord Chancellor's Department has already implemented a number of the recommendations outlined in the report "Successful IT—Modernising Government in Action", which was published in May 2000, and will continue to work towards full implementation.

Project	*Completion Date*	*Cost*	*Comment*
MIS (Management Information System)	Late 2002	£14 million	MIS is being implemented in three phases. The completion date shown reflects the expected implementation date for Phase 3.
CLAT (Criminal Legal Aid Transition)	March 2001	£575,000	—
LIBRA	Late 2003	£318 million	LIBRA is a PFI project. The completion date relates to the physical rollout of the service. The cost shown relates to the provision of the service over the life of the contract (i.e. 2013) and includes physical rollout and ongoing service charges.
CAFCASS (Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service)	April 2001	£5.8 million	IT Infrastructure project initiated by the Lord Chancellor's Department. CAFCASS will become an NDPB from 1 April 2001.

Project	Completion Date	Cost	Comment
CaseMan+	June 2002	£7.5 million	This project is being implemented in two Phases. The date shown relates to the implementation of Phase 2.
The Crown Court Programme	2005	Between £94 million–£125 million	The CCP incorporates a number of projects. These have not been broken down as the exact nature of each has yet to be settled. The Programme covers case progression, in-court workstations, digital audio recording, electronic presentation of evidence and provision of information to court users and the public.
MANIFEST (Estates Management Finance System)	April 2001	£4.23 million	—
JUROR (computerised jury summoning and management system)	May 2001	£3.9 million	—
IRIS (Immigration Appellate Authority database system)	Summer 2001	£10 million	IRIS implemented in four Phases. Completion date shown refers to implementation of Phase 4.
IAA Judicial Support Services (IT for Judiciary and Voice Recognition)	Early 2002	Not yet known	Final costs not yet known as the pilot is still in the very early stages of development.
PREMA PILOT (allows solicitors to apply by email directly to judges about cases proceeding in Preston County Court)	August 2001	£65,000	
LINE·ISSUE (allows anyone to commence and progress specified civil cases using the internet)	Early 2002	£2 million	Time scales and costs are indicative only as the project is only just reaching project initiation phase.
ARAMIS (outsource of PGO's IT services to LCD's existing PFI supplier)	Not yet known	Not yet known	Proposals are being sought form PFI providers for the outsourced provision of IT services to Public Guardianship Office, Court Funds Office and Office of the Official Solicitor and Public Trustee (following the re-structuring of the Public Trust Office). Proposals have been submitted but no decision has been taken on whether to proceed or on the scope of proposal to be accepted. Therefore no cost of completion data is available and no contract has been awarded.
MERIS (Mental Health Renaissance Information System)	March 2003	£3.2 million	Costs quoted are estimates based on project investment appraisal.
Electronic Records Management (Public Guardianship Office)	September 2003	£500,000	Costs quoted are estimates based on project investment appraisal.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the contracts that exist between Serco and his Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151339]

Mr. Lock: The Lord Chancellor's Department replies on behalf of its agencies and HM Registry, the Public Record Office and the Northern Ireland Court Service.

No contracts exist or have been entered into with Serco in the last three years. However, contracts have been entered into with companies which are similarly named. Details are listed as shown:

Serco Ltd. January 1998 to December 2000

Gross value £6,232.68 (Refuse collection)

Serco Systems Ltd. June 1998 to January 2000

Gross value £80,891.71 (Security Telecommunications equipment)

Justices of the Peace

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women who were appointed justices of the peace for the Greater London area during the last 12 months were from an ethnic minority background. [151016]

Jane Kennedy: In the 1999–2000 financial year (the latest figures available) 38 people (14 men and 24 women) from an ethnic minority background were appointed as justices of the peace in the Greater London area out of a total of 175 appointments made; that is 21.7 per cent. of the total.

Ministerial Visits

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the Ministers in her Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough unitary authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151030]

Jane Kennedy: No Lord Chancellor's Department Ministers visited any of the constituencies in the Peterborough unitary authority are between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Helen Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what proposals there are to amend the Lord Chancellor's Department departmental expenditure limit and running costs limits for 2000–01. [151285]

Mr. Lock: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class V, Votes 1, 2 and 3 the Lord Chancellor's Department's Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £29,818,000 from £2,638,861,000 to £2,668,679,000.

The increase is the net effect of:

take up of year end flexibility to meet increased capital charges on the civil estate, to fund Change Programme, to meet increased expenditure on the Libra project, for legal aid expenditure and other running costs expenditure (£23,437,000)

funding of the Children and Family Court Advisory Service and Support Service (CAFCASS) from both Home Office (£3,000,000) and Department of Health (£3,000,000)

a contribution towards the costs of inspection for the Youth Justice Board from the Home Office (£23,000)

the costs of recruiting and re-appointing panel members for the Unified Appeals Tribunals from the Department of Social Security (£73,000)

funding relating to the Unfair Contract Terms project from the Department of Trade and Industry (£8,000)

a transfer relating to the Publication of Local Authority Reports project from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (£11,000)

a contribution towards the costs of District Judge redeployment from the Home Office (£467,000)

a transfer relating to CMF2 Interface Development funding for the JUROR and the Phoenix interface from the Home Office (£32,000)

a transfer in respect of Armed Forces Discipline Act from the Ministry of Defence (£340,000)

following deferral in the responsibility for Warrant Enforcement a transfer to the Home Office (-£860,000)

a contribution towards the costs of IBIS (Integrating Business and Information Systems) Criminal Justice Systems Unit to the Home Office (-£200,000)

relating to the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) a transfer to the Home Office (-£23,000)

in respect of modernising the courts, grants from the Civil Service Modernisation Fund (£510,000).

The increase will be offset by transfers from other Departmental Expenditure Limits as stated, and a charge on the DEL Reserve and will not therefore add to the planned total of public expenditure.

The running cost limit for Lord Chancellor's Department Class V, Vote 1 will be increased by £30,885,000 from £611,797,000 to £642,682,000. The increase is in respect of:

take up of end of year flexibility arrangements (£20,240,000)

release of funds from the Departmental Unallocated Provision (£2,308,000)

additional VAT recoveries on contracted out services (£8,084,000)

transfer from the Home Office in respect of contribution to the costs of inspection for the Youth Justice Board (£23,000)

transfer from the Department of Social Security relating to the costs of recruiting and re-appointing panel members for the Unified Appeals Tribunals (£52,000)

transfer from the Department of Trade and Industry relating to the Unfair Contract Terms project (£8,000)

transfer from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions relating to the Publication of Local Authority Reports project (£11,000)

transfer from the Ministry of Defence relating to Armed Forces Discipline Act (£340,000)

wider market initiative receipts (£42,000)

transfer to the Home Office relating to contribution towards the costs of the IBIS (Integrating Business and Information Systems) Criminal Justice Systems Unit (–£200,000)

transfer to the Home Office relating to the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) (–£23,000).

The running cost limit for Northern Ireland Court Service, Class V, Vote 2 will be increased by £3,538,000 from £33,566,000 to £37,104,000. The increase is a result of:

take up of year end flexibility (£122,000)

additional VAT recoveries on contracted out services (£543,000)

costs of Omagh bomb inquest (£1,613,000); and increase in capital charge (£1,000,000) to be sourced from surplus Appropriation in Aid

modernising the courts from the Civil Service Modernisation Fund (£260,000).

The running cost limit for Public Records Office, Class V, Vote 3 will increase by £4,778,000 from £27,698,000 to £32,476,000. This increase is as a result of:

take up of year end flexibility (£500,000)

lottery grant from the Heritage Lottery fund in respect of the project to microfilm WW1 Soldiers' Documents (£620,000)

wider markets initiative receipts (£450,000)

additional VAT recoveries on contracted out services (£400,000)

receipt from the Modernising Government Fund (£250,000).

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 27 February 2001

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

NATO

1. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he discussed the structure, functions and membership of NATO when he met the US President and Secretary of State. [149700]

Mr. Vaz: When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met Secretary of State Powell in Washington on 6 February both agreed that maintaining NATO as an effective transatlantic military alliance is fundamental to European security.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made it clear in his joint statement with President Bush on 23 February that this Government are committed to a stronger Transatlantic Alliance and that NATO will remain the essential foundation of transatlantic security.

Middle East

9. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to meet the new Israeli administration to discuss the middle east peace process. [149710]

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects to meet the new Israeli administration to discuss the Middle East peace process. [149735]

Mr. Wilson: I have seen the Israeli Ambassador several times since taking up my post. I hosted a lunch for Eitan Bentsur on 15 February.

23. **Mr. Bercow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the middle east peace process. [149725]

32. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the prospects for permanent peace in the middle east. [149734]

Mr. Wilson: The cycle of violence is undermining the confidence of both sides in the peace process. I am encouraged by Prime Minister Designate Sharon's statement that he plans to continue with the peace process and to ease the conditions for Palestinians. However, the closures in the Occupied Territories breed resentment and fuel violence. The UK continues to urge both sides to take the steps needed to restore calm and re-engage in whole-hearted peace efforts.

35. **Mr. Jim Murphy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts he has had with the Israeli Government and Palestinian authority since the Israeli prime ministerial election. [149738]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met the new Israeli Ambassador on 14 February and Prime Minister Sharon's special envoy, Eitan Bentsur, on 15 February. He also met with the Palestinian General Delegate on 15 February.

Syria

13. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations have been made to the Syrian regime about the sheltering of Aloïs Brunner. [149714]

Mr. Vaz: We have not made representations to the Syrian Government about Aloïs Brunner. There is general agreement that he is almost certainly dead. Inquiries in recent years by the French and German Governments and by journalists have failed to produce evidence of his whereabouts.

Guatemala and Belize

14. **Mr. McWilliam:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent talks held in Miami on the border dispute between Guatemala and Belize. [149715]

Mr. Battle: We welcome the talks between Belize and Guatemala held under the auspices of the Organisation of American States (OAS). After a constructive meeting in Miami on 16 and 17 January they signed a Plan of Action to implement an Agreement on Confidence Building Measures which they had agreed in Washington on 8 November 2000.

At further talks in Washington on 5–7 February they agreed a process for addressing the substantive aspects of their border dispute. They have agreed to hold a Ministerial meeting in Washington on 21–23 May.

We welcome the constructive spirit in which these talks are being conducted.

Turkey

15. **Mr. Leigh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives of the Government of Turkey. [149717]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had a bilateral meeting with Foreign Minister Cem in the margins of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Vienna in November. They also met briefly at the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting in Brussels in December, and are both attending the North Atlantic Council in Brussels today. FCO Ministers are also in regular contact with the Turkish Ambassador in London.

India (Export Licences)

16. **Mr. Ian Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's role in processing export licences for sales to India; and how many such applications are currently awaiting processing by his Department. [149718]

Mr. Wilson: As an adviser to the DTI, we consider all export licence applications on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national export licensing criteria. In 2000, the FCO processed over 1,200 export licence

applications for India. As of 20 February, the FCO was considering 34 Standard Individual Export Licence applications for India and 23 Open Individual Export Licences which included India as a destination.

Egypt

17. **Mr. Blunt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement about the UK's relations with Egypt. [149719]

Mr. Wilson: The British Government have excellent relations with the Government of Egypt. UK/Egypt trade relations are also very strong and continue to grow; we are now the largest non-Arab investor in Egypt. I visited Egypt last month.

Ecuador

18. **Mr. Allan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had regarding the political situation in Ecuador. [149720]

Mr. Battle: I spoke to the Ecuadorean Ambassador about the political situation in his country when he called on me on 1 February.

The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir John Kerr, also held wide-ranging discussions with Ministers and senior officials when he visited Ecuador on 14–15 January.

We have been following recent events closely and are pleased to note that the recent disputes between the Government and protesters over the economic reform measures have been settled.

Kashmir

19. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Kashmir. [149721]

Mr. Wilson: We have welcomed the recent developments in Kashmir, including the announcement by the Indian Prime Minister on 22 February to extend the ceasefire by Indian security forces until the end of May. We believe this indicates a commitment to finding a peaceful solution to the Kashmir conflict. We hope that the ceasefire, and the Pakistani Government's policy of maximum restraint, will help create the conditions for a settlement to be reached. We call on both Governments to continue to build on the desire for peace in Kashmir and resume their dialogue to find a solution. We also urge the militants to respond positively and end their violence.

NHS Recruitment

20. **Mr. Hammond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations his Department has received from other Governments regarding recruitment on behalf of the NHS of staff in their countries. [149722]

Mr. Wilson: The recruitment of staff for the NHS is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and his Department. However, we have received a number of representations on the international recruitment of medical staff as part of our normal bilateral dialogues with other countries.

Recruiting medical staff from around the world to help improve the NHS presents an opportunity further to encourage international co-operation and exchange. But we also need to ensure that this recruitment does not undermine local health care systems in developing countries. The 1999 NHS Guidance on International Recruitment states that NHS employers should not actively recruit from developing countries that are experiencing shortages of their own.

Pollution and Contamination

21. **Mr. Cousins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps *(a)* the UK and *(b)* the European Union are taking to tackle environmental pollution and nuclear contamination problems in the former Soviet central Asian republics. [149723]

Mr. Battle: We are aware that water quality is one of the major environmental problems in Central Asia. The UK, in co-operation with other international donors, is encouraging improved regional water co-operation. We will also be supporting a project in the Nura-Ishim river basin in Kazakhstan to reduce industrial pollution levels.

We will be supporting a £600,000 project to produce a land use plan for the nuclear test site at Semipalatinsk in Kazakhstan. We are also considering funding a decommissioning plan for the Aktau Nuclear Power Plant, and UK experts are transferring technical know-how to the plant.

The EU is supporting various projects to tackle environmental problems in Central Asia, such as water management and air pollution. It is also helping to fund the safe enclosure of the Aktau plant.

Charter of Fundamental Rights

22. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he plans to have with his European counterparts regarding the status of the EU charter of fundamental rights. [149724]

Mr. Vaz: The Charter was proclaimed as a political declaration at Nice in December. It was agreed that the status of the Charter would be reviewed at the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004.

European Intergovernmental Conference

24. **Mr. Evans:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place on the agenda for the next IGC in respect of European integration. [149726]

26. **Mr. Gerald Howarth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place concerning the agenda for the 2004 IGC in relation to institutional reform. [149728]

Mr. Vaz: A Declaration in the Treaty of Nice sets out four issues to be discussed by the next Intergovernmental Conference in 2004. These are a more precise delimitation of competencies between the European Union and member states, the status of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, simplification of the Treaties, and the role of national Parliaments in European architecture.

The Declaration also called for a deeper and wider debate on the future of the European Union, and mandated the Swedish and Belgian Presidencies to initiate a wide-ranging discussion with all interested parties, including representatives of national Parliaments, members of civil society and the candidate states. The Swedish Presidency will report on this process to the Gothenburg European Council in June.

Chile

25. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the decision of Judge Guzman in Chile to bring charges against ex-President Pinochet in connection with the caravan of death. [149727]

Mr. Battle: On 31 January Judge Guzman charged ex-President Pinochet with being the co-author of 57 deaths and 18 kidnappings perpetrated by the so-called "Caravan of Death" in Chile. We believe that those responsible for such atrocities should be brought to justice and we support the Chilean authorities in their pursuit of the due process of Chilean law.

East Timor

27. **Mr. Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the international community in East Timor, with particular reference to the international court it has set up there. [149729]

Mr. Battle: With the full support of the international community, the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNAET) is establishing institutions and preparing the ground for elections and independence later in the year.

We welcome recent progress made by the UNAET Prosecutor General in bringing to account those responsible for committing crimes in East Timor. We call on the UN, the East Timorese leadership and the Indonesians to build on their achievements and to maintain momentum.

Philippines

29. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in the Philippines. [149731]

Mr. Battle: We are pleased to see the recent political crisis resolved peacefully, in accordance with the Philippines' democratic traditions. We note President Arroyo's pledges for good governance and poverty alleviation. We welcome her resumption of peace negotiations with the rebel groups. We look forward to working closely with her Administration.

Missile Defence

30. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with the United States Administration on proposed anti-missile defence systems. [149732]

Mr. Vaz: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary recently held discussions in Washington with Vice-President Cheney, National Security Adviser Rice and Secretary of State Powell on a range of issues including National Missile Defence.

These discussions, and those my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had last week with President Bush, clearly demonstrated the constructive approach being taken by the Bush Administration. The US Administration reaffirmed their commitment to a National Missile defence system but stressed their willingness to take their time to consult Allies, Russia and others. They confirmed that no decision had yet been made on the development or deployment of a specific system. It is therefore too early to assess any implications for the UK.

Burma

31. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the emerging dialogue between the Burmese regime and opposition figures. [149733]

Mr. Battle: We cautiously welcome reports that the Burmese regime have had a series of contacts with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. We hope that these will eventually be broadened to include the ethnic minorities and lead to a lasting peaceful solution to the political problems in Burma. But the UK will not soften its policy until there is real progress in Burma.

Colombia

33. **Mr. John Cryer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the US Government regarding the implementation of Plan Colombia by the Colombian Government. [149736]

Mr. Battle: We have had regular discussions with the US Government regarding the implementation of Plan Colombia. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster intends to discuss developments in Colombia with the new US Administration in March, as well as development of the separate EU package.

Democratic Republic of Congo

34. **Mr. David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the ambassador of the Democratic Republic of Congo; and what topics were discussed. [149737]

Mr. Wilson: My hon. Friend the Member for Neath (Mr. Hain) met the Chargé d'Affaires for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) when the DRC Foreign Minister visited the UK in December. The Special Representative for the Great Lakes met him on 2 February. On both occasions discussions focused on relaunching the Lusaka peace process.

Pakistan

36. **Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Pakistani Government concerning

the arrest, detention and beating of two Christian young men for distributing the video film "Jesus" in Jacobabad. [149739]

Mr. Wilson: We are aware that Khalid and Nasir Masih were arrested on 11 January for distributing videos and literature to the Christian community in Jacobabad. Our High Commission in Islamabad continues to raise our concerns over the position of religious minorities with the Pakistani authorities and maintains regular dialogue with Christian and human rights groups.

Iraq (Exports)

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what goods subject to strategic export controls have recently been approved for export to Iraq. [151647]

Mr. Battle: Following consultation with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, the Department of Trade and Industry recently approved a licence to export computer equipment, including 10 Fujitsu Siemens Scenic ED-1170A computers and two Fujitsu Siemens Lifebook C-6545 Notebook computers, controlled under the Dual Use Items (Export Control) Regulations 2000, to Iraq for the use by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in its humanitarian activities. The export of these goods to Iraq has been approved by the UN Sanctions Committee.

Hong Kong

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he will publish the next report to Parliament on Hong Kong and the Sino-British Joint Declaration. [151648]

Mr. Battle: The eighth report in this series, covering the period July-December 2000, was published today and copies have been placed in the Libraries of the House. A copy of the report is also available on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website (www.fco.gov.uk). The report includes a foreword by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary. I commend the report to the House.

Council of the European Union

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for March and the major European Union events for the period between 31 March and August. [151649]

Mr. Vaz: The information is as follows.

To date we have received the detailed agendas for the following Council meetings in March:

8 March—Brussels—Environment Council

1. Directive on type-approval of two and three wheeled motor vehicles (common position)
2. 6th Environment Action Programme (policy debate, public)
3. Integration of environmental aspects into other policy areas, strategy for sustainable development (information from Presidency and Commission)
4. World summit on sustainable development, 2002 (presentation by Commission, information by Presidency)
5. White Paper on Chemicals strategy (policy debate)
6. Climate Change (council conclusions, preparation for COP6)
7. Commission Communication on Bathing Water policy (exchange of views)
8. Commission Green paper on integrated product policy (presentation)
9. Presidency reports on state of play on:

Directive on public access to information

Directive on public participation

Directive on waste electrical and electronic equipment, and draft directive on restriction of use of hazardous substances in electrical and electronic equipment

Decision on the list of priority substances for water policy

Directive on recreational craft

Directive on non-road mobile machinery (auto-oils)

Recommendation on Integrated Coastal Zone Management

10. (possibly) Commission proposals on labelling and traceability of GMOs (Commission presentation)
11. AOB, including a request from the Netherlands for information on measures to reduce emissions of VOCs, in line with the Council minutes statements in June 2000

12 March—Brussels—Internal Market/Consumer Affairs/Tourism Council

1. The Cardiff economic reform process—Internal Market aspects

Council conclusions

2. The European Council in Stockholm, 23–24 March—Internal Market aspects

Policy debate

3. Commission Strategy for removing barriers to trade in services

Orientation debate

4. Commission Strategy for Better Lawmaking—Simplification of Legislation

Presentation by the Commission

5. Strategy for integration of environmental protection and sustainable development into Internal Market policy

Information by the Presidency

6. (possibly) Parallel imports/Exhaustion of trademark rights

Orientation debate

7. Community patent

Orientation debate/Progress report

8. (possibly) Community Design

Adoption

9. (possibly) European Company Statute

Adoption

10. (possibly) Strategy for Customs Union

Resolution

11. Public procurement

Orientation debate

12. eEurope Action Plan

Progress report

Exchange of views

13. (possibly) White Paper on Chemicals Strategy—internal market and consumer aspects

Presentation by the Commission

14. Food law and establishing the European Food Authority

Orientation debate

15. Proposal on food supplements

Political agreement/Common position

16. Distance marketing of consumer financial services

Political agreement

Other business

1–3 March—Uppsala—Informal Research and Education Council

6 March—Brussels—Employment and Social Affairs Council

12 March—Brussels—ECOFIN Council

15–16 March—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council

19 March—Brussels—Agriculture Council

19–20 March—Brussels—General Affairs Council

21 March—Brussels—Fisheries Council

23–24 March—Stockholm—European Council

31 March-1 April—Brussels—Informal Meeting of Ministers of the Environment.

No Agendas for the above are available at present.

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 April and August 2001 (certain relevant events are also included: the list is based on the information available at the date of issue).

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
April		
5–6	Brussels	Transport/Telecommunication Council
8–10	Brussels	General Affairs Council
8–10	Brussels	Agriculture Council (Informal)
24–25	Brussels	Agriculture Council
May		
5–6	Nykoping	Gymnich
7	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
7	Brussels	Employment and Social Council (possible)
14–15	Brussels	General Affairs Council
14–15	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
22–23	Brussels	Agriculture Council
28–29	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
31	Brussels	Development Council
31	Brussels	Health Council
June		
5	Brussels	ECOFIN
5	Brussels	Internal market/Consumer Council
7–8	Brussels	Environment Council
11–12	Brussels	General Affairs Council
11–12	Brussels	Accession Ministerial Conference
11	Brussels	Employment/Social Affairs Council
15–16	Gothenburg	European Council
18	Brussels	Fisheries Council (possible)
19–20	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	ECOFIN Council (possible)
21	Brussels	Culture Council
25–26	Brussels	General Affairs Council
26	Brussels	Research Council
27–28	Brussels	Transport/Telecommunications Council
July		
6–7	Brussels	Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council
10	Brussels	ECOFIN Council
13–14	Brussels	Regional Territories Council (Informal)?
16–17	Brussels	General Affairs Council
20	Brussels	Budget Council
23–24	Brussels	Budget Council
August		
There are no European Councils scheduled for August		

Death Penalty

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs at what stage it is Her Majesty's Government's policy to make representations against the use of the death penalty in cases of British nationals being tried overseas. [151836]

Mr. Wilson: Our overriding objective is to avoid the execution of British nationals. We will now express our opposition to the death penalty and its use on a British national at whatever stage and level is judged appropriate from the moment when the imposition of a death sentence on a British national becomes a possibility. Our previous policy was to make these representations only when the judicial process had been exhausted.

We have already taken action under the new policy in the case of Krishna Maharaj. Baroness Scotland, the Minister responsible for Consular matters, has written to the Florida State Attorney setting out the UK's opposition to the death penalty and requesting that the death sentence not be pursued in his case.

PRIME MINISTER

Chemical Industry

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister what meetings he has had with representatives of the chemical industry in the last 12 months; and what future health and environment legislation was discussed at them. [151298]

The Prime Minister: I have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals. As with previous Administrations, it is not my practice to provide details of such meetings.

Downing Street

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Prime Minister what the total expenditure on 10 Downing street and the Prime Minister's office was, in *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000; and what his estimate is for 2000–01. [151372]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 21 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 347W and on 2 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 575W. The cost for the full year 1997–98 was £7.3 million. The cost of my Office from 1 April 2000 to 31 December 2000 was £8.3 million.

As a result of a change in accounting policy, figures before 1997–98 and after 1 April 1997 are not exactly comparable, but for completeness, the recorded cost of the Prime Minister's Office in 1996–97 was £7 million.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Departmental Policies (North-East Derbyshire)

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will set out, with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the North-East Derbyshire constituency, the effect on North-East Derbyshire of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [150885]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Details of the effects of a range of the Department's policies on the North-East Derbyshire constituency and on Derbyshire LEA have been placed in the Library.

CABINET OFFICE

Devolution

Mr. Quinn: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent guidance has been offered to Government Departments on issues relating to devolution. [151646]

Marjorie Mowlam: I am today placing in the Library two further Devolution Guidance Notes which have recently been completed: DGN5—"The Role of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Post-Devolution"—and DGN9—"Post-Devolution Primary Legislation Affecting Wales". These guidance notes will be made available on the Cabinet Office internet site at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk.

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Mr. Pound: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans she has to change the 2000–01 departmental expenditure limit or running costs limit for the Cabinet Office. [151199]

Mr. Ian McCartney: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimates:

The Departmental Expenditure Limit for Cabinet Office (Class XVII. Vote 1, Vote 3, Vote 4) will be increased by £1,290,000 from £260,259,000 to £261,549,000 and the gross running costs limit will be increased by £6,440,000 from £113,754,000 to £120,194,000.

This is mainly to take account of the following changes:

(a) A transfer payment from Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Class x, Vote 2) (£470,000) for digital certificates; a payment from Home Office (Class IV, Vote 1) (£559,000) for the News Co-ordination Centre and associated contingency arrangements; a payment from Ministry of Defence (Class VI, Vote 1) (£4,000) and Foreign Office (Class VII, Vote 1) (£52,000) for BBC monitoring service; and a payment to Privy Council Office (Class XVII, Vote 5) (£20,000) towards 2 Carlton Gardens.

(b) In addition to these changes additional income from the Confiscated Assets Fund towards the cost of setting a Unit to assist with anti-drugs co-ordination internationally (£225,000).

The increase will not add to the planned total of public expenditure.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Pensions

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times in each of the last five years there have been claims for unpaid pension contributions to company pension funds from the redundancy fund set up under the Employment Rights Act 1996. [150698]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The table shows the numbers of workers for whom claims for pension scheme contributions have been made against the National Insurance Fund.

Year	*Number*
1998	367
1999	414
2000	387

I regret that corresponding figures are not available for earlier years.

Telehouse West Building

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when a decision will be taken on standby generation for the proposed Telehouse West building in the East India Docks. [151776]

Mr. Hain: I have today given clearance under Section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 to Telehouse Europe. Telehouse have been progressively developing their facilities at East India Docks. This standby facility, of around 30 MW, will supply the electricity needs of the proposed Telehouse West building in the event of a supply interruption. Such standby facilities are designed to ensure continuity of electricity supplies in the event of a partial of total interruption.

Copies of the press notice and decision letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Chemical Weapons Convention

Mr. Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will make appointments to the Chemical Weapons Convention National Authority Advisory Committee. [151779]

Dr. Howells: I have appointed Dr. T. D. Inch, formerly Secretary-General of the Royal Society of Chemistry, as chairman of this committee for a further period of four years.

I have also re-appointed four members and appointed three new members to the committee, as follows:

Mr. Ian Kenyon[1]—Formerly Executive Secretary, Preparatory Commission for the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Dr. Colin Kinnear[1]—Health, Safety and Environmental Manager, Asahi Glass Fluoropolymers

Mrs. Moira McMillan—Director, British Coatings Federation

Dr. Kenneth Patterson[1]—Site Process Safety Manager, Hickson and Welch

Mr. Julian Perry Robinson—Senior Fellow, Science Policy Research Unit, University of Sussex

Dr. Peter Plant—Formerly Insecticides Manufacturing Manager, Astra Zeneca

Dr. Richard Worswick—Chief Executive, the Laboratory of the Government Chemist

[1] New appointments

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Local Radio Stations

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will relax ownership rules for local radio stations. [151550]

Janet Anderson: The White Paper "A New Future for Communications", which the Government published for consultation in December, states that we will consider, with the Radio Authority, the possibility of devising a new regime for radio ownership to replace the current rules. We will decide how to proceed in the light of responses to the White Paper.

Channel 4

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the proceeds that would be realised from privatising Channel 4. [151547]

Janet Anderson: We have not estimated the proceeds that might be realised from privatising Channel 4.

Television Licences

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people who were previously entitled to a £5 television licence have applied for the free television licence introduced in November 2000. [151447]

Janet Anderson: Applications for free television licences for people living in accommodation which qualifies for the Accommodation for Residential Care (ARC) concessionary licence scheme are made by housing managers when existing ARC licences fall due for renewal, rather than by individual residents. Information provided by the BBC, which is responsible for the administration of both concessionary schemes, indicates that since November 2000 applications have been received from about 10,500 residential and nursing homes and sheltered housing schemes. A number of these applications have still to be processed but approximately 44,500 residents have so far benefited from a free TV licence. The renewal cycle for ARC licences is spread across the year, on a monthly basis, and the BBC expects approximately 500,000 residents to qualify in total.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Departmental Expenditure Limit

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what proposals he has to amend his Department's expenditure limit and running cost limit for 2000–01. [151777]

Mr. Rooker: Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary Supplementary Estimate for Class XII, Vote 3, the Department of Social Security Departmental Expenditure Limit for 2000–01 will be increased by £66,361,000 from £3,590,339,000 to £3,656,700,000.

The increase is the net effect of additional Comprehensive Spending Review funding of £30,000,000 (running costs), and an increase of £20,000,000 (running costs) for the additional costs associated with the winter fuel payments. Other changes result from a net transfer of £14,315,000 (running costs), mainly for the administration costs of the ONE project, offset by a corresponding reduction on Class I, Vote 3 (Employment Service), a transfer of £1,334,000 (running costs) for expenditure on New Deal for Communities, offset by a corresponding reduction on Class III, Vote 1 (Housing, construction, regeneration, regional policy, planning and countryside and wildlife, England), a transfer of £1,065,000 (running costs) for the cost of collecting expenses associated with road traffic accidents, offset by a corresponding reduction on Class II, Vote 1 (Hospital, community health, family health and related services, England), a transfer of £200,000 (running costs) towards the administrative costs of the Teenage Pregnancy Unit, offset by a corresponding increase on Class II, Vote 2 (Department of Health administration, miscellaneous health and social services, England), a transfer of £99,000 (running costs) towards the administrative costs of making winter fuel payments, offset by a corresponding increase in Department of Health and Social Services (Northern Ireland) and an increase of £173,000 (running costs) for the cost of collecting expenses associated with road traffic accidents in Scotland and Wales. There is also an increase of £7,206,000 (running costs) associated with services provided to other Government Departments on a repayment basis, an increase of £7,178,000 (running costs) arising from increased payments of Value Added Tax on contracted out services, an increase of £500,000 (running costs) associated with expenditure on sub-let accommodation, a reduction of £1,289,000 (running costs) following a reclassification to other current expenditure and an increase of £1,081,000 (other current expenditure) arising from increased secondments. Appropriation in Aid increased by £32,389,000.

Changes in the Welfare to Work provision arise from an increase of £1,276,000 in the administration costs of measures to help unemployed people move from Welfare to Work, of which £776,000 is under the End Year Flexibility Scheme as set out in Table 7 of the Public Expenditure Outturn White Paper, Cm 4812, published on 18 July 2000, an increase of £1,212,000 in the administration costs of measures to help people with a disability or long term illness move into or remain in work, a transfer of £156,000 towards the cost of the innovative scheme lead by the Prince's Trust in respect of the New Deal for Disabled People, offset by a corresponding increase on Class 1, Vote 3 (Employment

Service) and a transfer of £306,000 towards the administrative costs of New Deal for Partners of Unemployed People, offset by a corresponding reduction on Class I, Vote 3 Employment Service.

As a result of these changes and the reclassification of £6,500,000 to running cost related receipts the running cost limit of this Department will be increased by £58,799,000 from £3,219,522,000 to £3,278,321,000 and the running costs limit of the Welfare to Work programme will be increased by £2,638,000 from £13,996,000 to £16,634,000.

Increases will be offset by transfers or a charge to the DEL Reserve and will not, therefore, add to the planned total of public expenditure.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many people are claiming the minimum income guarantee in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* each region of Great Britain and *(c)* each parliamentary constituency. [151778]

Mr. Darling: The information has been placed in the Library.

Departmental Policies (Norwich, North)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Norwich, North constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151141]

Mr. Rooker: The Department's policies and initiatives have made a significant contribution to the Government's overall objectives of:

Eradicating child poverty in 20 years, and halving it within 10;

Promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age while protecting the position of those in greatest need; and,

Combating poverty and promoting security and independence in retirement for today's and tomorrow's pensioners.

These goals are being pursued nationwide and our achievements are set out in our annual "Opportunity for all" reports. Our second report, "Opportunity for all—One year on: making a difference" (CM4865, September 2000) sets out what progress has been made in the past year, as well as highlighting what more needs to be done. Nationwide statistical information is necessarily more complete than constituency level data, but the following provides a comparative guide to the effect of the Department's policies and actions in Norwich, North since May 1997.

Measures in our first four Budgets will lift over 1 million children out of poverty. These include record increases to Child Benefit and Working Families Tax Credit, increases in the income-related benefits, the minimum wage and tax changes.

Child benefit will be worth £15.50 a week for the eldest child and £10.35 a week for other children from April 2001: nationally about 7 million families receive child benefit, and in Norwich, North 11,145 families benefit.

We now have the lowest unemployment rate in 25 years. The New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, the over 50s and partners of the unemployed to move from benefit into work. In the period since May 1997 the number of people claiming Jobseekers' Allowance nationally has reduced from 1,562,400 to 1,044,900; in Norwich, North the number has reduced from 2,800 to 1,700. Since May 1997 the number of lone parents who claim Income Support has decreased from 1,013,500 to 894,100 nationally and in Norwich, North from 1,600 to 1,100.

Older people are disproportionately affected by fuel poverty. So we have introduced Winter Fuel Payments to help with their heaviest fuel bill. This winter, the payment is £200 for households who qualify. Over 21,000 older people in Norwich, North have received a Winter Fuel Payment for this winter.

To demonstrate our commitment to combating pensioner poverty, this year we will spend £4.5 billion extra in real terms on pensioners. Some 19,400 pensioners in Norwich, North will benefit from the substantial increases in the basic State pension this April and next; this year's increase is £5 a week for single pensioners and £8 for couples. In addition we have introduced free TV licences for the over 75s of whom we estimate there are about 7,800 in Norwich, North. 2,700 pensioner families in Norwich, North are receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee, which we introduced in April 1999 to help our poorest pensioners. From April they will be at least £15 a week, or £800 a year, better off in real terms as a result of Government measures since 1997.

Other reforms in the pipeline include: the new Pension Credit in 2003 designed to ensure that pensioners benefit from their savings; the launch of Stakeholder Pensions in April this year; and the introduction of the State Second Pension in April 2002 both of which will help provide greater security for tomorrow's pensioners.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many complaints were made against the Benefits Agency in regard to Disability Living Allowance in each of the last three years; how many such cases have been investigated by the Ombudsman; in how many cases was compensation awarded; and what the *(a)* highest and *(b)* average level of compensation was. [150594]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of Disability Living Allowance is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Anthony Steen, dated 26 February 2001:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking how many complaints were made against the Benefits Agency in regard to Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in each of the lat three years; how many such cases have been investigated by the Ombudsman; in how many cases was compensation awarded; and what the (a) highest and (b) average level of compensation was.

The information you requested is not available in exactly the format you want. The information that is available is as follows.

1. Number of complaints made in respect of DLA by letter, telephone or in person:

	Number
April 1998 to March 1999	4,276
April 1999 to March 2000	10,656
April 2000 to December 2000	10,467

These numbers include complaints about standards of service and cases in which dissatisfaction has been expressed with the outcome of benefit decisions.

There has been a steady increase in the number of complaints throughout this period. Between April 1999 and June 2000, this can be attributed to an increase in work on hand before and after the introduction of DMA and it should be noted that the figures have steadily decreased each month since July 2000. Changes to DLA procedures led initially to a significant increase in the time taken to process each case, which created a temporary backlog of work. This was tackled as a priority and is now under control.

The information about DLA Ombudsman cases and special payments is not kept separately from Attendance Allowance (AA) cases.

2. Number of DLA and AA cases investigated by the Ombudsman:

	Number
April 1998 to March 1999	137
April 1999 to March 2000	119
April 2000 to January 2001	149

3. The total number of DLA and AA Special Payments made:

	Number
April 1998 to March 1999	535
April 1999 to March 2000	659
April 2000 to January 2001	869

4. The value of DLA and AA Special Payments:

£

	Highest award	*Average award*
April 1998 to March 1999	10,000	499.00
April 1999 to March 2000	7,134.50	262.14
April 2000 to January 2001	14,556.50	320.75

I hope this is helpful.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security when Mr. Smith of Ferndown will receive his Winter Fuel Payment; and when Mrs. Smith will receive her Winter Fuel Payment for 1998 and 1999. [151433]

Mr. Rooker: The administration of Winter Fuel Payments is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the Chief Executive of the Benefits Agency. She will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Alexis Cleveland to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 26 February 2001:

The Secretary of State for Social Security has asked me to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question asking when Mr Smith of Ferndown will receive his winter fuel payment; and when Mrs Smith will receive her winter fuel payment for 1998 and 1999.

Mr Smith requested his claim on 16 January 2001. His application has now been Processed and is awaiting a decision on entitlement. Mr. Smith will receive notification of his entitlement and any payment due by the end of February.

Mrs Smith's claim form was issued to her on 23 January 2001. Her application has been partially processed, however her date of birth has not been verified. Mrs Smith has been requested to submit her birth certificate so that her claim can be processed in full.

I hope this reply is helpful.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The hon. Member for Leicester, East

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) discussed potential conflicts of interest with the Permanent Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he was the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department. [150664]

Mr. Lock: It is the normal practice of the Permanent Secretary to discuss with Ministers, when they are appointed, whether they have any potential conflicts of interest. Such discussions took place with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) when he became Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department. Chapter 9 of the Ministerial Code sets out the circumstances in which Ministers should take the advice of their Permanent Secretary if they identify a potential conflict of interest. Such matters are confidential between the Permanent Secretary and the Minister concerned.

Tribunal Funding

Ms Coffey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans there are to extend public funding for proceedings before the VAT and Duties Tribunal, the General and Special Commissioners of Income Tax and the Protection of Children Act Tribunal. [151775]

Mr. Lock: The Lord Chancellor has today issued for consultation a direction which extends publicly funded representation to some tribunals: certain proceedings before the VAT and Duties Tribunal, certain proceedings before the General and Special Commissioners of Income Tax and all proceedings before the Protection of Children Act Tribunal.

The direction will authorise the Legal Services Commission to fund legal help and legal representation in these proceedings, subject to applications passing the statutory tests of an applicant's means and the merits of the case.

The Commission will be able to fund representation in proceedings before the VAT and Duties Tribunal and the General and Special Commissioners of Income Tax, in the minority of those proceedings which concerns the imposition of penalties which may be considered criminal in ECHR terms. This will ensure that the Government's commitments under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights are met in full.

Although the Protection of Children Act Tribunal does not impose financial penalties, we consider that the overwhelming importance of the proceedings to the

individuals involved means that legal representation should be provided at public expense to those who cannot afford it.

The consultation period will last one month. We intend to bring in the new arrangements with effect from 2 April 2001. Copies of the direction have been placed in the Library of the House.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

1A Page Street, Westminster

Mr. Beith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what has been the cost of works carried out to the building at 1A Page street, Westminster, since his Department took occupation of it; and what proportion of these costs was met at public expense. [151463]

Mr. Morley: Works carried out by the Department at public expense since we took occupation total £615,883 (including fees for surveyors etc. and VAT). Of this, £228,376 will be recovered from the developer for remedial work which we have carried out on his behalf to minimise disturbance to staff in the building. The non-recoverable work was necessary to provide facilities for the workgroups in the building and to meet the changing needs.

The developer and his contractor continue to be responsible for all external areas of the building (including the glazing) and are responsible for correcting defects. We have no details of the cost of this remedial work, which is not at public expense.

Beef Industry

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what assessment he has made of the effect on the British beef industry of the EU Commission proposals on beef to go before the Council of Ministers on 26 and 27 February; and if he will make a statement. [151122]

Ms Quin *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Commission proposals are for a seven point plan to address the serious disruption of the beef and veal market resulting from the BSE crisis.

The Commission's stated aim is to limit production in order to reflect the fall in demand for beef in many EU member states. The impact on the UK beef industry of these proposals is currently being evaluated, taking into account its special characteristics and the importance of safeguarding our extensively reared, grass fed production.

Flood Prevention

Paddy Ashdown: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what the total expenditure by his Department on flood prevention was for *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03 and *(d)* 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [150419]

Mr. Morley: Following increases in both of the last two spending reviews and the announcements of an additional £51 million in November and a further £6.6 million in January, the current MAFF spending plans for flood defence and coast protection are as follows:

£ million

	2000–01	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Grant and supplementary credit approvals for capital improvements, catchment plans etc.	71	96	106	114
Emergency response and repair	5	7	—	—
Other (including storm tide forecasting service)	6	6	8	8
Total	82	109	114	122

These increases provide evidence of the Government's commitment to sustaining flood and coastal defences.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Paul Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to reimburse local authorities for their expenditure on supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. [151650]

Mr. Straw: I have today laid before the House a Special Grant Report which sets out the arrangements for reimbursing local authorities in England for the costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum seeking children as a result of their duties under the Children Act 1989.

The Special Grant Report explains the areas of expenditure which will be eligible for the grant and the time scales for local authorities to make their claims.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) for what reasons maternity grants for asylum seekers are issued in the form of vouchers; [150964]

(2) for what reasons maternity grants in the form of vouchers for asylum seekers are deemed to expire after one month. [150965]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 ends asylum seekers' entitlement to all social security benefits and is replaced by a system of support in kind, with small cash payments. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has on a phase basis assumed responsibility for supporting all new eligible asylum seekers and this support is provided mainly by way of vouchers. The maternity payment is provided in the same way.

The maternity payment vouchers have a four week expiry date because the maternity grant is provided to assist with the initial costs of provision for a new baby.

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his strategic policy team was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150369]

Mr. Straw: The Head of the Strategic Policy Team took up post in April 2000. The rest of the team was then recruited, the last member joining in October 2000.

The team is an integral part of the Home Department, producing research and advice for Ministers. Its first major piece of work has been co-ordinating the production of "Criminal Justice: The Way Ahead", which was laid before Parliament on 26 February.

The team comprises eight departmental members of staff, seven of whom are full time. It employs one full time agency secretary. Where it examines issues cutting across more than one Department, it may involve staff from other Departments or from outside Government on secondment for the length of the project in question. For example, in its current work on criminal justice, it has received secondments for short periods of two officials from the Lord Chancellor's Department and one from the Crown Prosecution Service.

Special advisers contribute to the team's work as necessary in the same way as to that of other parts of the Department, and consistent with the Model Contract for Special Advisers.

Naturalisation Application

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy that time spent considering a previous unsuccessful application for naturalisation should be deducted from the average waiting time for a decision in a subsequent naturalisation application. [150376]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* Where the normal criteria for granting priority are met, a subsequent application would normally be started ahead of its turn in the queue. In some instances the work done on the initial application may facilitate determination of a second application.

Departmental Entertainment Costs

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total gross running cost to his Department was in the last 12 months of entertaining by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials. [149046]

Mr. Straw: The provisional total gross running cost to my Department in the last 12 months to 31 January 2001 of entertainment by Ministers was £6,234 and by officials was £160,095. Modest hospitality is provided for official visitors and guests, for example overseas delegations, in circumstances which are beneficial to the interests of the Department and in discharge of my responsibilities as a Cabinet Minister.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported cases involving domestic violence there were in England and Wales during the last 12 months. [151013]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office. However, estimates for the numbers of domestic violence offences in 1999 are available from the 2000 British Crime Survey (BCS). Figures are also available from returns submitted to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary relating to domestic violence 'incidents' notified by police forces in England and Wales (whether or not they are subsequently recorded as crimes).

The best estimate from the BCS is that there were 761,000 offences of domestic violence in 1999. Returns from the police indicate that there were 398,670 incidents notified to the police in 1999–2000. The BCS figure is higher than that from police 'incident' returns because not all victims will report what happened to the police. The BCS figure is an estimate only. As it is derived from a sample, it is subject to sampling error. Also, some respondents may be unwilling to reveal experience of domestic violence to interviewers. A different—more confidential—approach to measuring domestic violence in the 1996 sweep of the BCS produced higher estimates than from the conventional approach, as used to derive the 761,000 incidents in 1999.

The BCS and police figures cover incidents against men and women. In the BCS, 74 per cent. of the offences involved women as victims (around 560,000 incidents). This information is not available from the police 'incident' returns.

Child Abuse

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent reports he has received from Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary on the cost-effectiveness of police trawling investigations relating to child abuse allegations. [151277]

Mr. Charles Clarke: There have been no reports from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary on the cost-effectiveness of child abuse investigations. The police have a duty to investigate all allegations of child abuse fully and thoroughly, and in accordance with the law. It is for individual Chief Constables to decide on the most appropriate methods of investigation in each case.

I have been in discussion with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary about what more can be done to ensure that the procedures in place for conducting these very difficult investigations are fair and robust.

ACPO are currently drawing up a manual for Senior Investigating Officers working in child abuse cases, which will include a section on good practice in tracing potential witnesses and obtaining corroborative evidence. This will provide detailed operational guidance on how to conduct such investigations, while recognising that investigators must follow emerging evidence and treat each case on its merits. In parallel with this, an inter-agency working group is currently reviewing the procedures for investigating the abuse of children in care or looked

after children in the context of taking forward the Government's response to the Waterhouse Report "Lost in Care". This review will lead to the development of practical, procedural guidance to the police and social services on the handling of complex abuse investigations.

Both sets of best practice guidance should be completed by the end of March. Together they will provide a coherent policy framework for how to conduct child abuse investigations, building on best practice drawn from around the country and ensuring that the necessary procedures are in place to safeguard against the risk of false allegations.

Prison Visits

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the Boards of Visitors which have published their annual report in each of the last five years. [151495]

Mr. Boateng: Boards of Visitors annual reports are not published documents. They are made to the Secretary of State who permits the Board to publish their annual report, if they wish, subject to the removal of any material which is confidential. Boards are, however, encouraged to publish their reports and the Boards which have done so over the past five years are shown in the table.

Board	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Acklington	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Albany	No	No	No	No	No
Aldington	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	[3]—
Altcourse	[2]—	[2]—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ashfield	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	Yes
Ashwell	No	No	No	No	Yes
Askham Grange	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aylesbury	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Bedford	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes
Belmarsh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Birmingham	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blakenhurst	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Blantyre House	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Blundeston	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brinsford	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bristol	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brixton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Brockhill	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Buckley Hall	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bullingdon	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Bullwood Hall	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Camp Hill	No	No	No	No	Yes
Canterbury	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Cardiff	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Castington	No	No	No	No	Yes
Channings Wood	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Chelmsford	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Colchester	[2]—	Yes	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—
Coldingley	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cookham Wood	No	No	No	Yes	No
Dartmoor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Deerbolt	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Doncaster	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dorchester	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dover	No	No	No	No	Yes
Downview	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Drake Hall	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Durham	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
East Sutton Park	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eastwood Park	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Elmley	No	No	No	No	No
Erlestoke	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Everthorpe	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Exeter	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Featherstone	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Feltham	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ford	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Forest Bank	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	[2]—	Yes
Foston Hall	[2]—	[2]—	Yes	Yes	Yes
Frankland	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Full Sutton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Garth	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gartree	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Glen Parva	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gloucester	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Grendon/Spring Hill	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Guys Marsh	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Haslar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hatfield	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Haverigg	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hewell Grange	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
High Down	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Highpoint	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Hindley	No	No	No	No	No
Hollesley Bay	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Holloway	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Holme House	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hull	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Huntercombe	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kingston	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kirkham	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Kirklevington Grange	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lancaster Castle	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lancaster Farms	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Latchmere House	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Leeds	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leicester	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Lewes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Leyhill	No	No	No	No	Yes
Lincoln	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lindholme	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Littlehey	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Liverpool	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Long Lartin	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Lowdham Grange	[2]—	[2]—	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Low Newton	No	No	No	[1]—	[1]—
Maidstone	No	No	No	No	Yes
Manchester	No	No	No	No	[1]—
Moorland	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Morton Hall	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
The Mount	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
New Hall	No	Yes	Yes	No	[1]—
Northallerton	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
North Sea Camp	No	No	No	No	[1]—
Norwich	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Nottingham	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Onley	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Parc	[2]—	[2]—	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Parkhurst	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Pentonville	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Portland	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Preston	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Ranby	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Reading	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Risley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rochester	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Send	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shepton Mallet	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shrewsbury	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Stafford	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Standford Hill	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Stocken	No	No	No	Yes	[1]—
Stoke Heath	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Styal	No	No	No	No	[1]—
Sudbury	No	No	No	No	[1]—
Swaleside	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—

Board	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Swansea	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Swinfen Hall	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Thorn Cross	No	No	No	Yes	[1]—
Usk/Prescoed	No	Yes	No	Yes	[1]—
The Verne	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wakefield	No	No	No	No	[1]—
Wandsworth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Wayland	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Wealstun	No	No	No	Yes	[1]—
Weare	[2]—	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Wellingborough	No	Yes	Yes	No	[1]—
Werrington	No	No	Yes	No Report	[1]—
Wetherby	Yes	No	No	No	[1]—
Whatton	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	[1]—
Whitemoor	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Winchester	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Wolds	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	[1]—
Woodhill	No	No	Yes	No	[1]—
Wormwood Scrubs	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Wymott	No	No	Yes	Yes	[1]—

[1] Not yet received
[2] Prison not open
[3] Prison closed

Note:
For some of the 2000 reports indicated above the date of publication will be after the disclosure of this information.

Opposition Policies

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) pursuant to the answer of the Minister for the Cabinet Office of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 47–48W, what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative Party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) co-ordinated in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings in the Library; [146673]

(2) if special advisers in his Department have been involved in *(a)* co-ordinating, *(b)* costing and *(c)* presenting costings of policies of opposition parties; and if he will make a statement; [146672]

(3) pursuant to the answer of the Minister for the Cabinet Office of 11 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 47–48W, what costings of *(a)* Liberal Democrat and *(b)* Conservative Party policies his Department has (i) undertaken and (ii) advised upon in the previous 12 months; and if he will place copies of such costings and relevant background documents in the Library. [146664]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), on 14 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 183W.

DEFENCE

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the contracts that exist between Serco and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151350]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not readily available in the form requested. However, since 1 April 1998, the Ministry of Defence has placed 107 contracts with Serco companies, of which 69 are extant. I will write separately to my hon. Friend with a list of such contracts and will place a copy of my letter in the Library of the House. The information sought on the number of contracts placed by the Department's executive agencies and associated public bodies with Serco companies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mustard Gas

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what evidence his Department has *(a)* collated and *(b)* evaluated regarding the burning of mustard gas at military establishments and its effect upon neighbouring civilian populations. [148906]

Dr. Moonie: Following the decision by the United Kingdom to abandon its offensive chemical weapons capability in 1956 there was a requirement to dispose of the stockpile of the chemical blister agent mustard which had been built up at the time of World War II.

In accordance with the practice of the day these stockpiles were burnt in either open pits or incinerators. No evaluations were made at the time of the effects on neighbouring civilian populations. However, the RAF has conducted extensive research into its historical disposal of chemical weapons.

Today any historical chemical weapons which are recovered are taken to CBD Porton Down for safe disposal. Part of the disposal process of any of these weapons which contain mustard includes incineration. This is undertaken in an on-site incinerator which meets all the standards set by the Environment Agency.

Depleted Uranium

Valerie Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what checks are carried out on *(a)* batches of depleted uranium raw material and finished ammunition and *(b)* imported ammunition; [150081]

(2) what checks are undertaken to ensure that depleted uranium used for ammunition manufacture is not contaminated with other radioactive materials. [150080]

Mr. Spellar: It has long been known in the scientific community, the nuclear industry and by the Ministry of Defence that depleted uranium (DU) might contain minute traces of isotopes other than U-238, U-235 and U-234.

Two types of DU based ammunition are in-service with British Forces: the UK manufactured 120mm anti-armour round and the US manufactured 20mm RN Phalanx round.

My Department procures all ammunition to given specifications. It is the manufacturers' responsibility to establish the suitability of raw materials used in manufacture.

Phalanx ammunition is sold to the UK via the US Department of Defence (DOD). All of DOD's DU comes from three Department of Energy (DOE) gaseous diffusion plants: Paducah, Kentucky; Oak Ridge, Tennessee; and Portsmouth, Ohio. All three of these plants received recycled uranium that contained trace amounts of transuranics.

RO buy their DU from Starmet Corporation who in turn buy it from DOE. They have no practical way of determining exactly where the input material came from. They believe that it was mostly from Paducah, Kentucky, but it was all produced at their plants at Concord and Barnwell in the US.

Starmet have found traces of transuranic elements in their DU. However, the amounts were so small that the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission simply amended Starmet's licence to accommodate the traces. Given that the amounts of contaminates are so small, and pose no additional risk to health, it is not considered worthwhile to try to remove them.

On receipt by my Department, and periodically thereafter, all ammunition, including that containing DU, is subject to inspection in accordance with stringent guidelines. Where appropriate, in-service surveillance, proof and maintenance firing is undertaken to ensure that the ammunition continues to meet the required quality standards throughout its life. Before issue for use, DU ammunition is inspected, and the radiation dose rates are monitored to ensure that it meets transportation criteria. DU ammunition is also subject to regular dose rate monitoring in accordance with Departmental procedures while in storage depots.

There are no specific checks undertaken which determine whether or not the DU contained in UK in-service ammunition is contaminated with other radioactive materials. However, any significant increase in the quantity of high activity radionuclides would be detected by our routine radiation monitoring.

In view of the recent public interest in DU contamination by other radioactive materials, my Department intends to confirm the data provided by the manufacturer which was published on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 519–22W. We will analyse the composition of CHARM 3 ammunition using an independent laboratory, and publish the results.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the personnel who have contracted malaria as a result of deployment to Sierra Leone did not receive anti-malarial treatment until they were in Sierra Leone; and if he will make a statement. [150672]

Dr. Moonie: As of 21 February, there were 113 confirmed cases of malaria among Service personnel who deployed to Sierra Leone. On the basis of the investigations undertaken by my Department, of these 113 cases, there are no more than 10 personnel who did not receive their anti-malarial treatment until after arriving in Sierra Leone. In all but one case this was as a result of their deploying at very short notice. Within 24 hours of these personnel arriving in theatre, however, the French drug Savarine was procured locally and distributed. Steps were immediately taken to procure Mefloquine, the preferred anti-malarial treatment, from the UK and all personnel taking Savarine transferred to Mefloquine within four days. The other individual was temporarily absent from his unit on duty just prior to deploying and missed the issue of Mefloquine. He was issued with Mefloquine as soon as the problem came to light between two to five days after his arrival in theatre.

No anti-malarial drug is 100 per cent. effective and the degree of protection can be subject to a wide range of factors; for example, the geographical location, the season, and the activities undertaken by the individuals concerned. Therefore, as well as anti-malarial drugs, other types of protection and environmental controls are used. Even with such precautions, however, malaria is not wholly preventable.

Tank Fleets

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 631W and his subsequent letter, (1) if he will list the serviceability targets for each year from 1995 to 2001 inclusive for *(a)* Warrior variants, *(b)* Challenger 1, *(c)* Challenger 2, *(d)* Saxon variants, *(e)* AVF 430 variants, *(f)* Sabre, *(g)* Striker, *(h)* Scimitar, *(i)* Spartan, *(j)* Sultan, *(k)* Samaritan and *(l)* Samson; and if he will make a statement; [151037]

(2) on what date the decision was made to change the system of fully operational serviceability targets for the Army tank fleet from readiness in 24 hours to immediate availability; for what operational reasons; and if he will make a statement. [151038]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The decision to change the system of reporting equipment availability was taken in May last year. The change was made following the adoption of the Formation Readiness Cycle which places different units in the Army at different readiness states. Some of these states require equipment to be available immediately (ie capable of undertaking the task to which it has been allocated), while for others a much longer lead time will be acceptable.

The serviceability targets for the equipment types listed by the right hon. and learned Member, which reflect this change in the reporting system, are shown in the table.

Percentage

Vehicle type	*Serviceability target 1995–2000*	*Immediate availability target 2000 to date*[1]
Warrior Variants	75	75
Challenger 1[2]	80	80
Challenger 2[3]	80	80
Saxon Variants	70	70
AFV430	70	70
Sabre	70	70
Striker	70	70
Scimitar	70	70
Spartan	70	70
Sultan	70	70
Samaritan	70	70
Samson	70	70

[1] This target is set by the Equipment Managers and applies to all vehicles regardless of the readiness state of the Unit to which they are allocated.
[2] Challenger 1 withdrawal programme is almost complete.
[3] Challenger 2 was introduced into service in 1998.

BAE (Redundancies)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received concerning planned job redundancies at BAE military manufacturing plants in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [150724]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Since the announcement by BAE Systems concerning restructuring was made on 10 January 2001, my Department has received a number of representations. At the time of the announcement the company said that it was not in a position to state how their cost reduction measures would effect each site within their business or impact upon employment. We have asked the company to keep us informed, and are monitoring the situation closely.

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the conclusions of the Review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. [151044]

Mr. Spellar: We have concluded the internal phase of our Review of the Armed Forces Pension Scheme and I hope to make an announcement shortly on arrangements for public consultation on the resulting proposals.

RAF Fylingdales

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the annual expenditure incurred at RAF Fylingdales has been in each year since 1997; and if he will indicate under which budget heading in his Department's expenditure plans the investment in Fylingdales is listed. [151597]

Mr. Hoon: The annual expenditure incurred at RAF Fylingdales for each year since 1997 was some £12 million for 1997–98, £11 million for 1998–99 and £13 million for 1999–2000. It was charged to the Strike Command Top Level Budget, details of which can be found in the relevant year's Supply Estimates for the Ministry of Defence, copies of which are in the Library of the House.

HEALTH

French Beef

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will take steps to suspend the import of French beef until French herds are proved to be BSE-free; and if he will make a statement; [144101]

(2) if the Government will impose a precautionary ban on French beef imports until an assessment can be made of the risks to the consumer. [144390]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* The Government are advised on matters of food safety by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

The FSA has examined the issue of the safety of beef from France. Dr Christl Donnelly of Imperial College, London has made an assessment of the risks to the consumer from BSE arising from imports of French beef. The results were published in "Nature" on 14 December 2000. The study concluded that if the United Kingdom's over-thirty-month (OTM) rule is fully enforced there is virtually no risk from BSE in French beef imported into the UK. If the OTM rule is only 75 per cent. enforced, then risks posed by British and French meat sold in the UK would be the same. The FSA estimates that OTM enforcement levels in the UK are above 75 per cent.

In these circumstances, the FSA concluded that a ban on the importation of beef from France would not be proportionate to the risk and could not therefore be justified. Nevertheless, the FSA is keeping the position under constant review, taking account of the latest available scientific and other information. The FSA will issue revised advice whenever necessary.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what investigation the Food Standards Agency has undertaken concerning the scientific grounds for banning French beef imports. [144336]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* The Government are advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that its decision not to recommend a ban on the importation of beef from France is based on two key regulatory requirements, namely the controls on specified risk materials (SRM), and the over-thirty-month (OTM) rule, and on a scientific assessment of the risks of BSE associated with French beef.

European Union rules, which took effect from 1 October 2000, now require the removal of SRM from beef carcases in the country of origin, and United Kingdom legislation prohibits the import of beef containing SRM. The OTM rule prohibits the sale for human consumption of beef from animals over the age of thirty months at time of slaughter. This rule applies equally to beef from cattle that are slaughtered in the UK (with minor exceptions) and to imported beef (again with minor exceptions).

The scientific assessment of the risks of BSE to consumers in the UK arising from French beef was given in a study by Dr. Christl Donnelly of Imperial College London. The results of that study were published in "Nature" on 14 December 2000. The study concluded that if the OTM rule is fully enforced there is virtually no risk from French beef imported into the UK. If the OTM rule is only 75 per cent. enforced, then risks posed by British and French meat sold in the UK would be the same. The FSA estimates that OTM enforcement levels in the UK are above 75 per cent.

The FSA continues to keep the position under constant review, taking account of the latest available scientific and other information. The FSA will issue revised advice whenever necessary.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* membership, *(b)* duration, *(c)* itinerary and *(d)* cost were of the recent Food Standards Agency mission to France to investigate BSE controls. [144342]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 8 January 2001]:* The Food Standards Agency has advised that the delegation from the agency which met officials of the French Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to discuss BSE controls in France comprised David Statham (Director of Enforcement), David Noble (then Director of Legal Services), Chris Lawson (then Head of Meat Hygiene Division), Peter Hewson (Head of HQ Veterinary Team), Leonie Austin (then Head of Media Relations), Jane Downes (Acting Director of Veterinary Services, Meat Hygiene Service) and David Carruthers (Head of the Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy food safety branch). The delegation was accompanied by David Barnes (First Secretary (Agriculture)) from the British Embassy in Paris and an interpreter.

The delegation arrived in Paris on the evening of 28 November 2000, stayed overnight at the Hotel Saint James and Albany, and then travelled to the Agriculture Ministry at 251, rue de Vaugirard, arriving at 8.30 am. After the conclusion of the meeting at about 11.30 am, the delegation returned to the British Embassy and from there departed from Paris that afternoon.

The total cost of the visit, including travel expenses, hotel accommodation and the services of the interpreter, was £3,860.

BSE

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those animals besides cattle and sheep, which are being investigated by the Food Standards Agency for the presence of BSE and TSEs. [144871]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 11 January 2001]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that it does not carry out any surveillance for BSE or other Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathies in any animals, apart from cattle aged over thirty months entering the food chain. The testing of any other animals for the presence of these diseases is a matter for the Agriculture Departments.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to stop the import of BSE-contaminated meat; and if he will make a statement. [149471]

Ms Stuart: The Government are advised on matters of food safety by the Food Standards Agency (FSA).

British consumers are protected against the dangers of BSE in beef by two key measures: the controls on specified risk materials (SRM), and the over-thirty-month (OTM) rule.

It is illegal to import beef with any SRM attached. Where imported beef with SRM attached is discovered, it is seized by the relevant enforcement authorities and either destroyed or returned to the supplier, depending on the circumstances involved. Following the discovery of remnants of spinal cord in a number of consignments of beef imported recently from Germany, the FSA has instructed the Meat Hygiene Service and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland to ensure that all consignments of beef imported from Germany are now inspected in licensed meat plants. The FSA has also written to local authorities to advise them that all meat plants under local authority supervision which are likely to receive consignments of German beef should be subject to further random checks, in which any beef from Germany should be inspected.

The OTM rule prohibits the sale for human consumption of beef from animals over the age of thirty months at time of slaughter. This rule applies equally to home produced and imported beef, with the exception of beef from 14 specified non-EU countries with no history of BSE. In November 2000 the FSA instructed local authorities and the Meat Hygiene Service to step up their OTM rule enforcement checks in respect of imported beef. The responses from the enforcement authorities show a high level of compliance with the OTM rule.

Wheelchairs

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the numbers of wheelchairs *(a)* supplied and *(b)* kept in storage in Cornwall in the last year for which figures are available. [147835]

Mr. Hutton: 5,523 residents in Cornwall have a wheelchair issued by the Disablement Services Centre at Derriford Hospital. In 2000, 1,680 wheelchairs were issued of which 50 per cent. were new and 50 per cent. reconditioned. A number of wheelchairs are held in store at any one time, in the course of transfer to new users, or during repair.

Beef Imports

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of beef imports from Germany are subject to BSE checks of the kind that resulted in the recent discovery of specified risk material contamination in Northern Ireland. [147860]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 30 January 2001]:* As a general rule, fresh meat imported into the United Kingdom from other European Union member states is subject only to random spot checks at places of destination. The responsibility for ensuring that only meat which complies with EU hygiene and BSE controls is exported to other member States rests with the competent authorities in each member state.

However, following the discovery of remnants of spinal cord in a number of consignments of beef imported recently from Germany, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) has instructed the Meat Hygiene Service and the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland to ensure that all consignments of beef imported from Germany are now inspected in licensed meat plants. The FSA has also written to local authorities to advise them that all meat plants under local authority supervision which are likely to receive consignments of German beef should be subject to further random checks, in which any beef from Germany should be inspected.

In addition, the FSA has also vigorously taken up the problem of the contaminated beef with both the European Commission and the relevant German authorities.

Blackpool Victoria Hospital Trust

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Blackpool Victoria Hospital Trust will receive the capital investment to develop its new cardio-thoracic facilities. [147240]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 31 January 2001]:* The recommendations for developing cardiac services across the north-west have been accepted in full. Discussions are now progressing well with a view to developing the business case for the Specialist Cardio-Thoracic Centre which will be based at the Blackpool Victoria Hospital. It is hoped that the new unit will be operational by 2005, subject to the availability of capital.

Sight Impairment

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many laser treatments took place to correct sight impairment in each health authority in England in each year since 1995. [150199]

Mr. Hutton: Information about laser eye surgery in National Health Service hospitals in England for the years 1995–96 to 1999–2000 has been placed in the Library.

School Dental Service

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many school pupils by health authority were both inspected and reinspected by the school dental service in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [150393]

Mr. Hutton: The information for England has been placed in the Library.

The tables show, for children aged five to 15, the number of screenings by the Community Dental Service (CDS) and the number of episodes of care in the CDS following screening programmes and following recall by the CDS. The number of episodes of care is not available before 1992–93. The information is shown by district health authority up to 1995–96 and by health authority thereafter.

As part of the Dental Strategy we will work with the dental profession to clarify the aims and objectives for school dental screening, so that current best practice in encouraging treatment where necessary after screening becomes routine for all CDS and school dental screening programmes.

Misoprostol

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospitals which *(a)* have been, *(b)* are and *(c)* plan to be involved in trials of Misoprostol; what evidence he has collated concerning the drug's effects during the first stages of labour; what representations have been made to the Government on the subject of Misoprostal; if he will review the Government's policy on the use of Misoprostol; and if he will make a statement. [150386]

Ms Stuart: Misoprostol is not currently licensed for the induction of labour. The Department has asked the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to provide clinical guidelines on the induction of labour and their report is expected this summer.

Our view is that until such time as the NICE guidelines are issued, use of misoprostol for the induction of labour should only be administered under properly managed clinical trials where the risks and benefits of the drug are fully explained and understood by women.

Since March 1998, the Medicines Control Agency has received and approved 22 notifications for clinical trials of misoprostol in the United Kingdom from consultant obstetricians and gynaecologists. These notifications have been made under the provisions of the Doctors and Dentists Exemption Scheme. Details of clinical trials, including data collated during trials, are not normally released, without the consent of the parties concerned, as there are legitimate commercial and other confidential interests which cannot be disclosed. Such interests are recognised in the current administrative Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and also in the Freedom of information legislation.

Medicine Ingredients

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to review their policy concerning the listing of ingredients of animal origin on medicine labels; and if he will make a statement. [150430]

Ms Stuart: The labelling of medicinal products for human and animal use is governed by European law, which requires all labels to show certain information including a qualitative and quantitative statement of active ingredients and a list of other key ingredients. It is not possible to introduce a requirement for labels to identify those ingredients of an animal origin without an amendment to European law.

ICD Implants

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what provision he is making to implement the NICE recommendation to increase the use of ICDs from 17 per million population to 50 per million; [150860]

(2) if he will list the number of ICD implants per million population by *(a)* health authority and *(b)* regional health authority. [150859]

Mr. Denham: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidance on the appropriate use of implantable cardioverter defibrillators (ICDs) has been circulated very widely: copies were sent to health authorities, National Health Service trusts, general practitioners and many other health professionals, as well as to community health councils and patients' groups. Additional resources have been made available within health authority unified allocations to support the implementation of NICE recommendations generally. Implementation of this NICE guidance on the use of ICDs will lead to an increase in the number of ICDs implanted but, as NICE acknowledge, we will need to develop the capacity to achieve this increase in implantation rates. This will be taken forward within the overall programme of work to improve and expand services for coronary heart disease (CHD) in line with the CHD National Service Framework.

Comprehensive data about implantation rates by region or health authority are not available. The most recent national figures relate to 1998 and show the rate then, as stated in the question, as 17 per million population.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 49W, on the Medicines Control Agency, if he will state for each request for information made under the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information since 1997 which was not met under the specified 20 days *(a)* the specific number of days taken for each request, *(b)* the reasons each request was not met under the specified time and *(c)* what steps are being taken to ensure that requests for information are routinely met within the specified time limit. [150455]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* The information requested is in the table.

Reference Number	Number of days taken to reply	Reason request was not met within 20 working days
OG/97/05	23	Resource priorities
OG/97/12	38	Request required searches of all relevant MCA databases
OG/98/18	38	Request raised 10 separate issues requiring input from across MCA. Also raised policy issues as per 98/24
OG/98/22	38	An MCA internal procedures document required updating before copy could be provided as requested
OG/98/23	127	Request raised five separate issues, some spanning 1987 to early March 1998, which needed search of archived papers. Also raised policy issues as per 98/24
OG/98/24	123	Raised issues of policy which needed to be resolved before reply could be sent
OG/98/30	24	Resource priorities
OG/98/37	83	As per OG/98/24
OG/98/44	66	As per OG/98/24
OG/98/49	35	Request raised four separate issues requiring search of third party papers
OG/98/51	128	Request raised six separate issues requiring search of third party papers
OG/98/55	29	Resource priorities
OG/98/64	[1]—	Reply subsumed into action re: OG/98/24
OG/98/67	30	Reply subsumed into separate correspondence outwith the Code
OG/98/69	21	Resource priorities
OG/98/73	23	Resource priorities
OG/98/76	[2]—	Request cleared by telephone but no record of data made at time
OG/98/78	31	Request raised 13 separate issues requiring search of archive papers
OG/98/79	33	Resource priorities
OG/99/03	169	Request sought replies to consultation exercise. The consultation period had been extended beyond the expiry of the 20 days and then large number of replies had to be checked for confidentiality, copied and collated before reply could be sent
OG/99/04	175	As OG/99/03
OG/99/09	86	Request raised 24 separate issues requiring search of archived papers
OG/99/11	23	Information sought not held centrally by the MCA
OG/99/13	31	Resource priorities
OG/99/24	26	Request sought replies to consultation exercise and replies had to be checked for confidentiality, copied and collated before reply could be sent
OG/99/31	35	Resource priorities
OG/99/37	28	Resource priorities
OG/99/45	33	Partial reply sent within 20 days but supplementary information required to complete reply
OG/99/46	62	Involved correspondence with third parties to determine material to be disclosed
OG/99/48	64	Request raised 11 separate issues requiring search of archived papers
OG/99/50	43	Request raised several separate issues requiring search of archived papers
OG/00/02	64	Resource priorities
OG/00/05	38	Resource priorities
OG/00/20	71	Multiple queries requiring advice from third parties
OG/00/22	129	Multiple queries requiring advice from third parties
OG/00/23	[3]—	Involves large amount of data and correspondence with third parties to determine material to be disclosed
OG/00/25	[3]—	Involves large amount of data and correspondence with third parties to determine material to be disclosed
OG/00/27	[3]—	Involves correspondence with third parties to determine material to be disclosed

[1] Not applicable
[2] Not known
[3] Outstanding

Following a recommendation from the Ombudsman, the Medicines Control Agency is currently reviewing its procedures for handling requests under the Code. In addition the Agency is examining the information held by the MCA (which currently totals around 400 different types) to determine, for example, what can be routinely published or what could be pre-prepared in anticipation of requests. This work will intensify over the coming months in preparation for the implementation of the Freedom of Information legislation. These initiatives will streamline arrangements for dealing with requests for information and enable a greater number of inquiries to be answered within 20 working days.

Pharmaceuticals

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the cost of pharmaceuticals in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and other European Union countries; and if he will make a statement. [150666]

Ms Stuart: Regular comparisons are made between the prices of medicines in these countries and the results published in "The Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme: Report to Parliament". The most recent edition of this (the fourth report) was published in December 2000. Copies are in the Library and the text is also on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/pprs/pprs-reports.htm.

The medicines compared (which are those with the highest sales to the National Health Service) are branded rather than generic, because in many countries unbranded generic medicines are not available.

Haemophilia

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will estimate the additional cost to the NHS of treating all adults with haemophilia in England who are receiving plasma treatment products with recombinant genetically engineered products; [150862]

(2) how many adults with haemophilia in England are receiving *(a)* plasma-derived haemophilia treatment products and *(b)* recombinant treatment products. [150864]

Mr. Denham: Based on figures provided by the United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation, we estimate that approximately 13 per cent. of adult haemophilia A patients and 4 per cent. of haemophilia B patients in England are currently receiving recombinant clotting factors. We estimate the additional cost of providing all adult haemophilia patients with recombinant clotting factors at around £50 million per annum.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what differences there are between the provision of recombinant genetically engineered haemophilia treatment products for *(a)* adults and *(b)* children in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland. [150865]

Mr. Denham: In England, all new haemophilia patients and children under 16 are treated with recombinant clotting factors. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland provide, or are in the process of providing, recombinant clotting factors for all haemophilia patients.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what counselling and advice his Department has made available to haemophilia patients who have received treatment products which are traced to a blood donor who has died of vCJD. [150861]

Mr. Denham: The United Kingdom Haemophilia Centre Doctors Organisation, in consultation with the Department, has agreed a policy of giving all haemophilia patients information about such incidents and offering them a choice to know if they or their children received implicated clotting factors. Counselling and advice to patients will be provided by haemophilia centres.

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151506]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Project Name	*Expected Completion Date*	*Estimated Cost (£000)*
Children In Need 3	August-2001	174
Children Looked After 4	April-2001	182
DH Communications Unit Resource Management System	March-2002	393
Care and Health Information Portfolio 4	May-2001	289
Computer Aided Facilities Management System	June-2001	122
Computerisation of Medical Benefits System	June-2001	380
Food Standards Agency (IT Infrastructure set-up & Relocation)	May-2001	1952
Financial Infromation Management System (Phase 1)	October-2001	870
Interim NHS Benchmarking System	February-2001	301
Internet Data Collection for Local Authorities	March-2001	114
NHS Estates Knowledge Database	February-2001	206
NHS Estates Business Systems	April-2001	720
Research and Development Programme Management System	April-2002	426
Management of Electronic Documents Strategy	April-2003	2500
Regional Office Historic Data Project	November-2001	234
Remote Working Improvements Project	December-2001	150
National Care Standards Commission IS Infrastructure	April-2002	19600
National Care Standards Commission Registration and Inspection Package	April-2002	1500
National Care Standards Commission Finance Package	April-2002	1000
National Care Standards Commission Pay and Personnel System	April-2002	250
Medical Devices Agency Integrated System for Information Sharing	March-2001	191
NHS Pension Agency E-Pensions Zone	June-2001	493
Public Health Laboratory Service CoSurv/lablink	March-2002	112

There are many smaller projects where the total project costs are less than £100,000. A full-list of these could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the IT projects his Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if he will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151478]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Department's programme for 2001–02 has not yet been finalised but priority will be given to projects that support the NHS Plan.

Child Abuse

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance is issued to nurses about reporting to the police cases where, in the course of their duty, a nurse strongly suspects a child of being a victim of sexual abuse. [151355]

Mr. Hutton: Nurses are well placed to identify when a child may be suffering, or be at risk of significant harm. Like any other professional, a nurse must take appropriate action in accordance with locally agreed procedures, if he or she believes that a child is at such risk. This may involve a referral to local child protection services, which may include the police who then inquire as appropriate into the circumstances of the case.

The "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidance, published by the Government in 1999, and "Child Protection—Guidance for Senior Nurses, Health Visitors and Midwives and their Managers", a report of the Standing Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Committee, published in 1997, together set out in detail the crucial role that nurses play in child protection.

We are currently developing supplementary guidance to "Working Together" which will focus on the role of all health professionals in child protection.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if full multidisciplinary investigations are carried out in accident and emergency departments of all cases where babies have been shaken. [151374]

Mr. Hutton: If a member of staff working in a hospital accident and emergency department believes that a child may be suffering, or may be at risk of suffering, significant harm appropriate action must be taken immediately in accordance with local procedures. This may involve a referral to local child protection services, which may include the police who then inquire as appropriate into the circumstances of the case.

The "Working Together to Safeguard Children" guidance, published by the Government in 1999, sets out how all agencies with child protection responsibilities should work together to safeguard children and promote their welfare. We are currently developing supplementary guidance to "Working Together" which will focus on the role of all health professionals in child protection.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information on specific treatment services provided to children at risk of abusing other children within the Quality Protects Programme is available. [151378]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not seek from local authorities specific information on what services are made available under the Quality Protects Programme to children at risk of abusing other children.

However, children at risk of abusing other children are likely to have considerable, and often complex, needs. Local authorities are expected to work closely with their partner agencies to ensure that such children receive support and treatment based on their assessed needs.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future programme for research into the incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment in the UK. [151380]

Mr. Hutton: We are committed to researching into the nature and extent of child abuse and its causes. Development of policy aimed at tackling child maltreatment is informed and influenced by published research in this complex field such as that carried out by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. The revised "Working Together to Safeguard Children" (1999) guidance on child protection reflects the key messages from a programme of research studies into child protection issues commissioned by the Department of Health, "Child Protection: messages from research" (1995).

We regularly commission research into the needs of children and the impact of services which aim to promote and safeguard the welfare of children. The total cost of this programme for the current financial year is approximately £2.5 million. Projects considering the causes, directly or in part, of child abuse include: a study of the onset of sexually abusive behaviour in boys who were sexually abused in early childhood; a study aimed at advancing knowledge about the psychological maltreatment of a specific group of children: those singled out from their siblings and rejected by their birth parents and the comparative costs and outcomes of different interventions for sexually abused children.

Meat Cutting Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what restrictions exist on butchers to provide meat cutting services to other outlets; and if he will make a statement. [151358]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* In order to provide cutting services to other outlets, butchers need to have their premises licensed as cutting plants under the red meat or poultry meat hygiene and inspection Regulations, which implement European Union Directives. The Regulations only exempt butchers who cut meat for sale from their own premises directly to the final consumer.

However, under guidance originally issued by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to cater for trading practices in Great Britain, exempt butchers may supply their other branches or mobile shops with up to 50 per cent. or 1 tonne (whichever is the lesser) of their production per week, provided the rest is sold from the premises where the meat is cut. In England and Wales, exempt butchers may also use shops not in their ownership as subsidiary outlets, provided they retain ownership of the meat until its sale to the final consumer, subject to the overall 50 per cent. or 1 tonne weekly limit.

Physical Punishment (Children)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish a response to the submissions received on his consultation document on the physical punishment of children. [151377]

Mr. Hutton: We will publish our response to the consultation on the physical punishment of children later this year.

Prescription Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of prescriptions in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [151524]

Ms Stuart: The table gives details of the net ingredient cost of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England. The majority of these will have been prescribed by general practitioners.

Net ingredient cost of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England, 1979 to 1999

£ million

Year	*Community pharmacists and appliance contractors*	*Community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration*
1979	592	n/a
1980	716	n/a
1981	834	n/a
1982	977	1,035
1983	1,096	1,162
1984	1,181	1,257
1985	1,250	1,333
1986	1,366	1,459
1987	1,537	1,644
1988	1,737	1,865
1989	1,882	2,027

Net ingredient cost of prescriptions dispensed in the community in England, 1979 to 1999

£ million

Year	Community pharmacists and appliance contractors	Community pharmacists and appliance contractors, dispensing doctors and personal administration
1990	2.079	2,243
1991	2,334	2,520
1992	2,639	2,858
1993	2,903	3,159
1994	3,115	3,405
1995	3,362	3,681
1996	3,654	4,007
1997	3,976	4,367
1998	4,285	4,701
1999	4,836	5,291

Notes:
1. 1979 to 1990 data are from the Prescription Pricing Authority PD1 series of forms.
2. 1991 to 1999 data are from the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) system.
3. 1979 to 1981 data for dispensing doctors and personal administration are not available.
4. Net ingredient cost (NIC) refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs of fees. It does not include any adjustment for income obtained where a prescription charge is paid at the time the prescription is dispensed or where the patient has purchased a pre-payment certificate.

Asylum Seekers (Unaccompanied Children)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if unaccompanied asylum seeking children are supported in the same way as children ordinarily resident in the UK under the Children Act 1989. [151379]

Mr. Hutton: Local authorities have the same duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of unaccompanied asylum seeking children as they do for the indigenous population of children in need. All local authorities have a duty under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 to provide services for all children in need in their area, including accommodation and support. There are currently approximately 6,000 unaccompanied asylum seeking children in the United Kingdom, the majority of whom are aged 16 and 17. They are generally provided with support under Section 17 of the Children Act, with those aged under 16 being formally looked after under Section 20 of the Act.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were awaiting NHS treatment on 1 January in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [151521]

Mr. Denham: Hospital waiting list information collected centrally shows the position at the end of each quarter. The table shows the number of people waiting for admission to hospital, either as an ordinary or day case, on 31 December each year since 1989.

Patients awaiting admission to hospital

As at 31 December	Number
1989	971,845
1990	965,520
1991	950,098
1992	977,189
1993	1,065,782
1994	1,070,492
1995	1,054,948
1996	1,104,983
1997	1,261,915
1998	1,173,598
1999	1,108,006
2000	1,034,381

Source
Trust based KHO7 returns

We promised to reduce NHS waiting lists and this we have done. At the end of December 2000 the waiting list was 123,600 below the March 1997 level we inherited.

Post-natal Depression

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what systems are in place to ensure early detection of post-natal depression in mothers of young babies; and what support is given to such mothers. [151376]

Mr. Hutton: The National Service Framework for mental health sets out at standards two and three the action needed to deliver better primary mental health care, and to ensure consistent advice and help for people with mental health needs, including primary care services for individuals with severe mental illness. The NSF requires health authorities to have protocols agreed and implemented between primary care and specialised services for the management of post-natal depression by April 2001. Work is being taken forward following publication of the NHS Plan and through the Workforce Action Team, to agree the workforce and education requirements to deliver the NSF, and to strengthen mental health in primary care.

Compensation

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS paid in compensation payments in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [151287]

Ms Stuart: Figures on the amounts included in the National Audit Summarised Accounts for clinical negligence payments for the last five years are as follows:

	£ million
1994–95	160
1995–96	173
1996–97	235
1997–98	144
1998–99	221

Figures for 1999–2000 are not yet available.

Because of changes to accounting practice required by the National Audit Office these data are not directly comparable.

Information on the non-clinical schemes is not available.

Accident and Emergency Units

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many accident and emergency units there were in the NHS in each year since 1991–92; [150387]

(2) how many accident and emergency units were in operation in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [151531]

Ms Stuart: The information is not available in the form requested.

The Department collects information centrally on the number of National Health Service trusts with one or more accident and emergency service. Information for 1996–97 to 1999–2000 is available via the annual Körner return KH03 "bed availability and occupancy". Copies are available in the Library.

Eye Tests

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of eye tests was in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [151528]

Mr. Denham: National Health Service sight tests are provided by community opticians at no charge to the patient. Prior to 1989 there was universal entitlement but, from 1 April 1989, eligibility was restricted to children, people on low incomes and people suffering from or predisposed to certain eye diseases. With effect from 1 April 1999 we restored eligibility to everyone aged 60 or over so that less than 50 per cent. of the population now has to pay for private sight tests. The cost of a private sight test varies between optical practices.

Dental Costs

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of a session of dental treatment was in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [151530]

Mr. Hutton: The average gross cost per course of treatment in the General Dental Service is shown separately for children and adults in the table for England for each of the years 1979 to 1999–2000.

General Dental Service: Average gross cost in £ per course of treatment from 1979 to 1999/2000—England

Year	*Children*	*Adults*
1979	6.60	13.78
1980	7.59	16.88
1981	8.63	19.38
1982	9.13	21.16
1983	9.73	22.32
1984	10.15	24.07
1985	10.52	24.79
1986–87	11.75	27.11
1987–88	13.01	29.41
1988–89	14.96	31.82
1989–90	16.49	33.30
1990–91	17.40	35.13
1991–92	18.81	36.11
1992–93	23.32	34.77
1993–94	25.32	31.93
1994–95	26.39	33.16
1995–96	28.07	33.26
1996–97	28.44	33.58
1997–98	26.05	32.52
1998–99	28.52	33.53
1999–2000	29.88	34.82

The figures from 1990–91 onwards are affected by the introduction of the new dental contract in October 1990. Under the contract, part of dentist's remuneration come from registration payments rather than from treatment fees. For children, certain treatments were covered by these registration payments and no longer claimed for separately in courses of treatment. Since 1996–97, some of these children's items are again claimed for separately.

Nurse Recruitment

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses were recruited in each year since 1983; and if he will make a statement. [151529]

Mr. Denham: Information on the total number of nurses recruited into the National Health Service is not collected centrally.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Highways Expenditure

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the levels of spending on highways per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years. [150017]

Mr. Hill: The tables showing capital and current expenditure figures by Highways Authorities for the current year available have been placed in the Library of the House. Both tables include Staffordshire. The figures are derived from DETR/Government Office for London capital and revenue estimated outturn figures.

Figures for the three previous years were included in my reply to the hon. Member on 10 November 1999, *Official Report,* column 601W.

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the levels of spending on highways per head of population in *(a)* Staffordshire and *(b)* each other county of England (i) in the current year and (ii) in each of the last three years, distinguishing in each case the element represented by standard spending assessment. [148292]

Mr. Hill: The tables showing capital and current expenditure figures for the current year available have been placed in the Library of the House. Both tables include Staffordshire. The figures are derived from DETR/Government Office for London capital and revenue estimated outturn figures.

Figures for the three previous years were included in my answer of 10 November 1999, *Official Report,* column 601W.

Standard Spending Assessment

Funding for current expenditure on local authority highways is provided by central Government through the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). RSG covers routine maintenance on all local authority roads, part of the structural maintenance on non-principal roads, and an element for capital replacement of street lighting.

Highways Maintenance Standard Spending Assessment (HMSSA) is the figure used to calculate the highways element of the Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The largest single factor used in the calculation of HMSSA is the

length and class of roads in each local authority's network. Other factors include average winter weather, levels of traffic volume, and population.

RSG provides the financial basis for local authorities to provide essentially similar levels of service. However, it is for local authorities to prioritise their use of the money available to them, and authorities may use part of the highways maintenance element for other services.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money was allocated to local authorities for road maintenance in each of the past five years in *(a)* North Somerset and *(b)* England. [150069]

Mr. Hill: The table shows capital allocation figures for highway maintenance, and figures for Highway Maintenance Standard Spending Assessment, for North Somerset and England, for the years in question.

Highway maintenance allocations for North Somerset and England

£ million

	Highway maintenance (capital allocation)		*Highway maintenance SSA*	
	North Somerset	*England (total)*	*North Somerset*	*England (total)*
1996–97	0.591	186	6.416	1,759
1997–98	0.668	200	6.316	1,759
1998–99	0.594	180	6.281	1,767
1999–2000	0.686	240	6.295	1,813
2000–01	0.895	301	6.576	1,858

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what monitoring his Department carries out of local authorities in their provision of best value regarding road maintenance; and if he will make a statement. [150028]

Mr. Hill: We introduced a number of Best Value Indicators in 2000–01 which measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the highway maintenance function, including the condition of principal and non-principal roads, efficiency of street lighting, cost of highway maintenance, duration of temporary traffic controls caused by local authority road works on traffic sensitive roads, and time taken to respond to dangerous defects, in each highway authority.

Local authorities are required to publish details of their performance against these indicators in their annual Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP). They are also required to set realistic targets for all their services. These plans and targets are subject to scrutiny by the District Auditor.

The Government have set specific targets in the 10-Year Plan for Transport for halting the decline in road condition, and have made provision for this in the Local Transport Plan settlement. Best Value Indicators are one method by which the performance of highway authorities will be monitored.

National Air Traffic Services

Ms Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to ensure that there are sufficient personnel available in NATS to maintain necessary service levels while training occurs for the new en route centre at Swanwick. [149849]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: It is essential that air traffic controllers are trained to a high standard to operate the system at the Swanwick centre.

NATS have told us that the staffing situation with regard to manning of West Drayton while at the same time training for the Swanwick centre is tight but manageable. The training of controllers for the New En Route Centre commenced on 2 January 2001 and will be complete in January 2002. NATS has some 360 air traffic controllers available to meet a budgeted requirement for 300 controllers in the Area Control operation at the London Area and Control Centre at West Drayton and the surplus is participating in the training programme on a rotating basis. By June of this year, the actual number of West Drayton controllers is expected to increase to 374.

A3, Hindhead

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what information he has collated about accident rates on the A3 in the Hindhead area in the past three years. [150302]

Mr. Hill: As part of the recently completed road based study of the A3 at Hindhead, accident data were collected for a three-year period from late 1996 to late 1999. There are clusters of accidents on the single-carriageway sections and at the Hindhead crossroads but they are not markedly different from clusters elsewhere on similar roads. The number of accidents along the A3 between the scheme over the past three years is as follows:

Year/location	*Fatal*	*Serious*	*Slight*
1996–97			
Single-carriageway section	1	5	24
Hindhead	0	2	1
Total	1	7	25
1997–98			
Single-carriageway section	1	5	30
Hindhead	0	0	4
Total	1	5	34
1998–99			
Single-carriageway section	0	3	22
Hindhead	0	0	2
Total	0	3	24

Diabetes

Mr. Browne: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received from Phil Gallie MSP about licence restrictions for people with diabetes. [150815]

Mr. Hill: We have received no representations from Phil Gallie MSP on this issue.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his

estimate is of the length of time that a vessel could maintain traces of radiation having been used to dump nuclear waste at sea. [150797]

Mr. Meacher: Vessels used for sea dump in the North Atlantic were subject to licence under the Dumping at Sea Act 1974. Such licences contained a provision requiring the ships, on completion of sea dump operations, to be monitored and, if necessary, cleaned by a qualified person until free from significant radioactive contamination to ensure the ships could be returned to unrestricted use with other cargoes. The statutory limits of residual non-fixed radioactive contamination and radiation levels applicable at the time remain essentially the same to date, ie non-fixed contamination limits of 4 Bq/cm^2 (10^{-4} μCi/cm^2) for beta/gamma and low toxicity alpha emitters, 0.4 Bq/cm^2 (10^{-5} μCi/cm^2) for all other alpha emitters, and a surface radiation limit of μ5 Sv/h (0.5 mrem/h).

Sea dump operations ceased in 1982 with the last operation of the MV Gem, which was certified free from significant radioactive contamination on 15 August 1982 by observers from the UK Atomic Energy Authority and the Nuclear Energy Agency of the OECD.

Council Housing (Birmingham)

Dr. Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the resources available to Birmingham city council to improve its council housing stock. [150675]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Capital investment by local authorities is financed by support from central government and from their own resources. The size of their overall programme, the total for housing and the proportion of this spent on the council housing stock are for authorities to decide.

Government support for housing investment by Birmingham for 2001–02 totals £90.2 million, which is two and a half times the allocation for 1997–98. Around half of the 2001–02 allocation is being provided through new Major Repairs Allowance, which provides resources to meet the on-going capital costs of maintaining the council housing stock.

Birmingham are working on proposals for stock transfer. If this proceeds it should secure resources to enable catch-up repair work and modernisation work to be completed in 10 years.

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) when he expects the decision on the refranchising of the East Coast main line to be taken; [151252]

(2) what steps he is taking to investigate the reasons for the delay in the refranchising of the East Coast main line; and if he will make a statement. [151251]

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if bidding for the East Coast main line franchise has been suspended; and if he will make a statement. [151328]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* On 14 February the Strategic Rail Authority announced a pause in the franchise replacement process for the East Coast main line as a result of the increased cost estimates for upgrading the line that Railtrack has now provided.

My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has asked the Chairman of the SRA, Sir Alastair Morton, to advise him urgently of the reasons for the increase in Railtrack's cost estimates and why this information has only become available at this late stage.

It would be inappropriate to speculate on any implications for the replacement process for the East Coast main line franchise until the SRA has discussed the cost estimates with Railtrack.

A27

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much public money was spent on work relating to *(a)* possible improvements to the A27 Lewes to Polegate and *(b)* the A27 Polegate bypass between 1 January 1989 and 30 April 1997. [150833]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Mr. Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from John Kerman to Mr. Norman Baker, dated 27 February 2001:

The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions has asked the Highways Agency's Chief Executive, Tim Matthews, to reply to your question about the amount of public money which was spent on work relating to (a) possible improvements to the A27 Lewes to Polegate and (b) the A27 Polegate bypass between 1 January 1989 and 30 April 1997. Mr. Matthews is currently on leave and I am replying on his behalf.

I am afraid that the financial records kept before the Agency was established in April 1994 do not allow us to disaggregate expenditure on these two schemes. The amount spent on work on them from 1 April 1994 to 30 April 1997 is:

(a) the possible improvements to the A27 Lewes to Polegate—£935,545

(b) the A27 Polegate bypass—£1,445,572.

Traffic Movements

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is his Department's policy to encourage heavy traffic to use local roads as a diversion from trunk roads. [151329]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Trunk roads are intended as through routes for heavy traffic. It is not the Department's policy to encourage heavy traffic to divert to local roads, although in the event of an incident these can be used as a temporary diversion.

Rail Services (Penalties)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much money has been levied in fines and penalties for late performance on Railtrack and the train operating companies by the Rail Regulator since May 1997; and if he will set out the date and amount of each fine. [151330]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* On 24 November 1999, the Rail Regulator made an enforcement order imposing a penalty of £10.8 million on Railtrack. Railtrack has sought mitigation and is to provide the Regulator with further information to enable him to make a final decision. The imposition of penalties on train operators for late performance is a matter for the Strategic Rail Authority, not the Regulator.

Cycle Storage Lockers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if it is the policy of Her Majesty's Government to remove cycle storage lockers from main railway stations; and if he will make a statement. [151324]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* No. The provision of cycle storage facilities at their 14 main railway stations is a matter for Railtrack. I understand that their policy is to provide for such facilities wherever possible. Railtrack is currently carrying out an audit of cycle facilities at all their stations to determine whether greater provision is needed.

A36(T)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for what reason he has decided to de-trunk the A36(T); and how much he estimates this will save his Department in the first three years of de-trunking. [150460]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The A36/A46 route was identified as a non-core route for de-trunking in the White Paper "A New Deal for Transport", which set out the factors taken into account in defining the core trunk road network (paragraph 3.130). Following consultation with regional planning bodies on the proposed core/non-core split a further study of the role of the A36/A46 was carried out. This study concluded that the proportion of core route traffic on the route is low although it recognised that the A46/A36 met to some degree the criteria for core route status. In view of the short journey length of the majority of the traffic and in particular the need for local initiatives to manage the impact of heavy goods vehicles on the route the Secretary of State decided to confirm its status as a non-core route.

De-trunking is not an exercise to save money. We are committed to a fair transfer of resources to local highway authorities taking over de-trunked routes and arrangements for ensuring this have been discussed and agreed with the Local Government Association.

Furthermore, in the light of the major study which we commissioned to look at alternative ways of dealing with the city's transport problems following the cancellation of the A36 Salisbury Bypass in 1997, we announced in the local transport settlement last December £13.7 million to be spent over the next five years on integrated transport measures from the Salisbury Package included in Wiltshire County Council's local transport plan. We also provisionally accepted the proposals for the Brunel Link and Harnham Relief Road, estimated to cost £13 million, which are also part of the Package.

Partnership Programme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what proportion of the funds allocated to the Powershift cleaner fuels programme has been spent to date in the 2000–01 financial year, broken down by fuel type of conversion. [150643]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* My Department is providing Powershift with a total of £9.9 million this financial year. In the period 1 April 2000 to 16 February 2001 grants totalling £7.2 million towards the cost of purchasing cleaner fuel vehicles had been offered and accepted with £2.1 million so far actually paid. Information on the detailed breakdown by fuel type is being prepared and I will write to the hon. Member.

Road Traffic Accidents

Sir Nicholas Lyell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many road traffic accidents which have given rise to *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* personal injury occurred in each of the past five years for which figures are available; how many of each of the above categories of road traffic accidents occurred in areas subject to (i) a 30 mph speed limit, (ii) a 40 mph speed limit, (iii) a 50 mph speed limit, (iv) subject only to national speed limits for the relevant category of road and (v) on motorways subject only to the 70 mph speed limit; and in how many of each of the above categories of accident excessive speed was a significant cause of the accident. [151283]

Mr. Hill: The information requested is shown in the table. It is not known in how many of the accidents in each category excessive speed was a significant cause.

Road accidents in Great Britain: 1999

Speed limit (mph)	*Fatal accidents*	*Other injury*	*All personal injury*[1]
30	1,077	151,638	152,715
40	267	18,284	18,551
50	91	3,901	3,992
60 or 70			
Non-motorways	1,526	48,812	50,338
Motorways	176	8,942	9,118
All roads[2]	3,138	231,910	235,048

[1] Includes fatal accidents

[2] Includes unknown and other speed limits

Farm Vehicles

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if farm vehicles exempt from vehicle excise licences will be required to display a number plate; and if he will make a statement. [151158]

Mr. Hill: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the pre-Budget statement his intention to exempt tractors and certain other agricultural vehicles from the payment of vehicle excise duty, subject to consultation. There is already a wide range of vehicles exempted from the payment of vehicle excise duty, including vehicles operated by the emergency services and those constructed before 1 January 1973. Generally, the requirement to display a licence, (including, in

the case of exempt vehicles, a "nil licence") and the requirement to display number plates are quite separate and there are no plans to alter these arrangements.

Flood Prevention

Paddy Ashdown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the total expenditure of his Department on flood prevention work was *(a)* through local authority finance, *(b)* through all forms of central Government finance for (i) 2000–01, (ii) 2001–02, (iii) 2002–03 and (iv) 2003–04; and if he will make a statement. [150418]

Ms Armstrong: The funding allocated by the Flood Defence and Coast Protection SSA blocks for 2000–01 and 2001–02 is set out in the table. Decisions about the level of the Flood Defence and Coast Protection SSA blocks for subsequent years have not yet been taken; therefore no figures can be provided for 2002–03 or 2003–04.

£ million

Year	*Flood defence SSA*	*Coast protection SSA*
2000–01	246.825	10.275
2001–02	257.700	10.700
2002–03	n/a	n/a
2003–04	n/a	n/a

DETR does not provide any other funding for flood prevention work. All other central Government support for flood prevention work is provided by MAFF as set out in an answer to PQ 150419 given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food today, *Official Report*, column 602W.

Highways Agency

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Highways Agency Business Plan will be published; and what targets he has set for the Highways Agency for 2001–02. [151738]

Mr. Hill: Key targets set for the Highways Agency are included in the Agency's Business Plan which will be published tomorrow. A copy will be placed in the Library.

These targets are:

to maintain the network so that the proportion requiring maintenance within the next year is held between 7 and 8 per cent.;

to upgrade, and have operational with agents, the Highways Agency Pavement Management System;

to put in place a computer based road structures asset management system (Structures Management Information System);

to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured on motorways and trunk roads by 416 to 4,575 (compared with the 1994–98 average of 4,991);

to reduce the slight casualty rate to 21.59 slight casualties per hundred million-vehicle km (compared with the 1994–98 average of 22.14);

to complete at least 10 early action schemes aimed at improving safety;

to complete at least 11 early action schemes aimed at tackling congestion;

Install at least 68 motorway Close Circuit TV cameras;

to achieve an average annual target of 90 per cent. across the six environment programme sub-indicators;

to install automatic hold up warning systems on at least 128km of motorway length; and

to achieve at least 13 of the 15 Targeted Programme of Improvements scheme milestones listed in the Business Plan;

to put the Agency's property to economic use ensuring that the percentage of vacant residential properties at the end of the year does not exceed 15 per cent. of the residential portfolio, and the percentage of vacant habitable properties empty for more than six months at the end of the year does not exceed 3 per cent. of the residential portfolio.

2001–02 is the first full year of the implementation of the Government's 10-Year Plan for Transport. These targets reflect the progress which the Highways Agency will deliver in contributing to the objectives of providing a safe, well maintained and less congested strategic road network.

National Bus Company (Pensions)

Ms Rosie Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the progress being made in the legal proceedings initiated by the National Bus Company pension trustees to determine eligibility of the different categories of beneficiary for a share of the settlement sum paid over by the Government in July 1999. [151739]

Mr. Hill: As I reported to the House in replying to the Adjournment debate held on 25 January, these proceedings were commenced in October 2000. I understand that a case conference was held on 9 February. As a result, the parties concerned are required to participate in discussions during March with a view to agreeing a settlement of the outstanding issues and to report back to the court. I urge all those involved to do their utmost to reach agreement within that time scale.

I also understand that, if—as I hope very much will not be the case—agreement is not reached and a full trial is necessary, a timetable has been set for this to commence in the autumn and to last around five weeks. It would obviously involve significant legal costs which could amount to several million pounds and this, combined with the further potential delay, underlines the need for every effort to be made to reach an early agreement in the forthcoming discussions.

Bus Subsidies

Mr. David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 220W, if he will make a statement on the results of the latest round of the rural bus challenge competition, and on the allocations to local authorities. [151774]

Mr. Hill: Following careful consideration of the 137 bids submitted by local authorities to the Rural Bus Challenge 2000, on 19 February we announced approval for the 51 projects as listed. Funding for the successful bids will total up to £21.2 million.

That announcement also detailed increased Local Authority Rural Bus Subsidy Grant allocations for 2001–02, totalling £41.5 million and indicative allocations totalling £47.5 million for 2002–03 and £48.5 million for 2003–04. The full list is as follows:

Rural bus challenge 2000

Authority	*Project name*	*Award total (£)*
Bedfordshire	The Potton Area 'Countryside Link' Project	555,575
Cambridgeshire	Cambridgeshire Rural Links	260,000
City of York	Enhanced Connexions	235,858
Cornwall	The DIRECT Project	845,000
Cumbria (North West Partnership)	Clubcard—Smartcard Vision	Up to 800,000
Derbyshire	Southern Derbyshire Rural Access Initiative (continuation)	600,000
Devon	Life in the Bus Lane—North Devon (Buses are Cool)	300,000
Dorset	Blackmore Vale Accessible Community Transport Scheme	462,000
East Riding	Howdenshire Community Transport Partnership	400,000
East Sussex	Moving Forward—Community Buses for Rural Transport Partnership	773,820
Essex	Dengie Plus: Building on Success	1,113,805
Greater Manchester	Expansion of Rural Shared Taxi	288,000
Hampshire	Testbed	990,165
Herefordshire	Transport Co-ordination Project	129,452
Hertfordshire	HAD—"Out of Hours Transport Services"	209,781
Kent	Deal Area Responsive Transport (DART)	453,000
Lancashire	Carnforth Connect	660,500
Leicestershire and Rutland	Leicestershire and Rutland Cross County	1,619,000
Lincolnshire	Tardis	547,000
Milton Keynes	Nippa Service	160,154
Norfolk	North Walsham "Bitternlink"	276,528
	Leisure and Learning Links	250,825
North Lincolnshire	A1077 Villages, Bus Service Route 350	114,313
North Yorkshire	Travelinks	602,000
	South Selby Taxibus	267,000
	Stationlink and Sherburn area village bus	253,000
Northamptonshire	Corby Rural Dial-a-Ride	50,900
Northumberland	Phone and Go	731,700
Nottinghamshire	Renew Retford—NEWark	492,000
Plymouth	Enhanced Rural Service Access and Quality	214,800
Redcar and Cleveland	Improving Access Arrangements to Housing in Skelton	20,000
Shropshire	Rural Real-Time bus passenger information project	282,697
Somerset	South Somerset	182,344
South Gloucestershire	Rural Community Transport	348,000
South Yorkshire	Bradfield and Worrall	611,714
	Clayton-with-Frickley Taxibus	62,705
Staffordshire	Moorlands Traveller East Project	118,000
Stockton-on-Tees	Thorpe Thewles-Stillington Taxi	12,000
Suffolk	Bike and Bus Butty	275,424
Surrey	Waverley Transport Solutions	404,025
Telford and Wrekin	Wrekin Connect—The Lawley Express Partnership	184,000
Thurrock	The Rural Bus Club	288,270
Torbay	Continued Development of the 'Hospital Hopper' Project	81,800
Tyne and Wear	Regional Communication Infrastructure/TransStop	560,150
Warwickshire	Stratford on Avon Accessible Community Buses	159,792
West Berkshire	Demand responsive services—Extension to Taxibus Service	101,500
West Midlands	The Heart of England Project	417,000
West Sussex	One Step Beyond	313,388
West Yorkshire	The Hebden Bridger	917,320
Wiltshire	Bradenstoke and Bradford on Avon A2B	213,076
Worcestershire	Worcester Easylink	994,000
		Up to 21,203,381

Rural bus subsidy grant

£

Local authority	*Amount allocated in 2000–01*	*2001–02 allocation*	*Indicative allocation 2002–03*	*Indicative allocation 2003–04*
Counties				
Bedfordshire	442,974	565,644	647,424	661,054
Buckinghamshire	561,112	716,497	820,087	837,352
Cambridgeshire	790,268	1,009,112	1,155,007	1,179,323
Cheshire	612,812	782,514	895,648	914,504
Cornwall	1,221,068	1,559,210	1,784,638	1,822,209
Cumbria	957,384	1,222,506	1,399,254	1,428,712
Derbyshire	714,122	911,879	1,043,717	1,065,690
Devon	1,409,020	1,799,210	2,059,337	2,102,692

Rural bus subsidy grant

£

Local authority	*Amount allocated in 2000–01*	*2001–02 allocation*	*Indicative allocation 2002–03*	*Indicative allocation 2003–04*
Dorset	579,362	739,801	846,760	864,586
Durham	604,510	771,913	883,515	902,115
East Sussex	559,229	714,092	817,335	834,542
Essex	1,050,249	1,341,087	1,534,979	1,567,295
Gloucestershire	794,084	1,013,984	1,160,584	1,185,018
Hampshire	894,468	1,142,167	1,307,299	1,334,822
Hertfordshire	443,714	566,589	648,505	662,158
Kent	1,289,989	1,647,217	1,885,369	1,925,061
Lancashire	751,438	959,529	1,098,256	1,121,377
Leicestershire	556,163	710,177	812,854	829,966
Lincolnshire	1,194,385	1,525,138	1,745,640	1,782,390
Norfolk	1,594,337	2,035,846	2,330,185	2,379,242
North Yorkshire	1,380,246	1,762,468	2,017,283	2,059,752
Northamptonshire	696,765	889,715	1,018,349	1,039,788
Northumberland	476,343	608,253	696,194	710,850
Nottinghamshire	522,686	667,430	763,926	780,008
Oxfordshire	926,906	1,183,588	1,354,709	1,383,229
Shropshire	630,354	804,914	921,287	940,682
Somerset	1,017,790	1,299,640	1,487,539	1,518,856
Staffordshire	809,149	1,033,221	1,182,602	1,207,499
Suffolk	1,201,593	1,534,342	1,756,174	1,793,147
Surrey	610,684	779,797	892,538	911,328
Warwickshire	596,387	761,540	871,643	889,993
West Sussex	579,324	739,752	846,704	864,530
Wiltshire	786,146	1,003,848	1,148,983	1,173,172
Worcestershire	675,505	862,568	987,277	1,008,061
Metropolitan areas				
Greater Manchester	132,321	168,964	193,392	197,464
Merseyside	83,474	106,590	122,000	124,569
South Yorkshire	338,768	432,581	495,122	505,546
Tyne and Wear	82,047	104,768	119,915	122,439
West Midlands	86,800	110,837	126,862	129,532
West Yorkshire	555,733	709,628	812,225	829,325
Unitaries				
Bath and North East Somerset	139,970	178,731	204,572	208,878
Blackburn with Darwen	39,026	49,833	57,038	58,239
Bracknell Forest	40,038	51,125	58,517	59,749
Bristol	6,522	8,328	9,532	9,733
Darlington	48,352	61,742	70,668	72,156
East Riding	534,364	682,342	780,994	797,436
Halton	12,685	16,198	18,540	18,930
Hartlepool	16,872	21,544	24,659	25,178
Herefordshire	522,462	667,144	763,598	779,674
Isle of Wight	159,271	203,377	232,781	237,681
Medway	87,475	111,699	127,848	130,540
Middlesbrough	11,542	14,738	16,869	17,224
Milton Keynes	71,496	91,295	104,494	106,694
North East Lincolnshire	42,652	54,463	62,338	63,650
North Lincolnshire	257,450	328,744	376,273	384,195
North Somerset	132,855	169,646	194,173	198,261
Peterborough	84,040	107,313	122,828	125,414
Plymouth	9,756	12,458	14,259	14,559
Poole	7,421	9,476	10,846	11,074
Redcar and Cleveland	56,497	72,142	82,573	84,311
Rutland	107,010	136,644	156,399	159,692
South Gloucestershire	191,415	244,422	279,760	285,650
Stockton-on-Tees	33,832	43,201	49,447	50,488
Stoke-on-Trent	5,423	6,925	7,926	8,093
Swindon	55,773	71,218	81,514	83,230
Telford and The Wrekin	76,048	97,107	111,147	113,487
Thurrock	38,176	48,748	55,796	56,970
Torbay	8,384	10,706	12,254	12,512
Warrington	59,644	76,161	87,172	89,007
West Berkshire	232,602	297,015	339,957	347,114
Windsor and Maidenhead	50,584	64,592	73,930	75,487
Wokingham	77,436	98,880	113,176	115,558
York	73,216	93,491	107,008	109,261
Total	32,499,998	41,500,000	47,500,000	48,500,000

Fish Farming

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many environmental statements have been submitted under the *(a)* Environmental Assessment (Salmon Farming in Marine Waters) Regulations 1988 and *(b)* Environmental Impact Assessment (Fish Farming in Marine Waters) Regulations 1999. [149201]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* I have been asked to reply.

Between the regulations coming into force and 1 July 1999 no environmental statements were received. Since July 1999 this has been a matter for the Scottish Executive.

TREASURY

Budget

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many in-year amendments were made to the UK Budget in the latest year for which figures are available, broken down by *(a)* transfers between Departments, *(b)* new resources, *(c)* transfers from reserve and *(d)* other transfers, across all Departments. [151227]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Changes made to published plans for 1999–2000 are explained in Chapter 2 of "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2000–01", Cm 4601, April 2000.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what was the underspend in each financial year in the total budget of UK Departments as a percentage of the UK Budget; and what the equivalent figures are for the Scottish DEL for each year for which figures are available since 1971. [151223]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Given changes in the system of public expenditure control, comparison of outturn against budgetary measures over time are not meaningful. Under the current system, detailed breakdown of outturn against provision is given in July in "Public Expenditure Provisional Outturn", last published in July 2000 for financial year 1999–2000. There are equivalent tables in previous editions of the same publication for each financial year since 1994–95.

UK Reserve

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* the total amount of the UK reserve in cash and real terms, *(b)* the annual draw on the reserve in cash and real terms and *(c)* the annual draw by the Scottish Office and Scotland Office in cash and real terms was in each year since 1971. [151230]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government do not publish figures for allocations from the Reserve overall as it is an administrative tool in controlling overall spending, rather than a budget in its own right. Individual allocations to the Scotland Office and the Scottish Office will be apparent from Estimates laid at the time to draw down those allocations.

Finance Act 1997

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what cost/benefit analysis he has undertaken of the effect of section 42 of the Finance Act 1997; and if he will make a statement. [150541]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* No such analysis has been undertaken since this was a measure to counter potential tax avoidance.

Labour Costs

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is the total share of the annual budget of each of the UK departments accounted for by labour costs. [151224]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Treasury publishes aggregate paybill figures which are set out in "Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2000–01" (Cm 4601), a copy of which is in the Library. However, each Department publishes details of its own expenditure in the departmental annual reports, which are also held in the Library.

Scottish Executive

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the basis is for the calculation of the allocation of resource placed at the disposal of the Scottish Executive for meeting capital charges under the new system of resource account budgeting; and how this sum will be accommodated in future years. [151229]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The treatment of capital charges is described in the Statement of Funding Policy published in July 2000.

Capital Projects

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public sector capital projects involving private finance *(a)* completed, *(b)* planned and *(c)* under way, indicating the start dates and estimated completion dates of each; what total estimated capital investment is included in these projects; what annual public expenditure is required to service these projects in cash terms for each year of their life; and what the total lifetime cost is of (i) each project, (ii) each sector's projects and (iii) in total in cash terms. [151225]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information sought is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

However, in line with our normal practice, we shall be publishing in the Budget information on private sector capital deployed in support of PFI signed deals and deals about to be signed, broken down by Department, and on the Government's aggregate service payment commitments under signed PFI contracts.

Earnings (Scotland)

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many and what percentage of taxpayers in Scotland earned income over *(a)* £30,000, *(b)* £40,000, *(c)* £35,000, *(d)* £45,000, *(e)* £50,000, *(f)* £60,000, *(g)* £70,000, *(h)* £80,000, *(i)* £90,000 and *(j)* £100,000 in the most recent year for which figures are available. [151222]

Dawn Primarolo: A distribution of taxpayers in Scotland is published in Inland Revenue Statistics table 3.11. A copy is in the Library of this House.

Barnett Formula

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the categories are of comparable expenditure by English and other UK Departments used in the calculation of the Barnett formula; what the total expenditure is in each of these categories; what share of that spending is allocated to Scotland; what the spending from each category is allocated to Scotland; and what the total amount in each category is in cash terms in each year for which figures are available. [151221]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Information on categories of comparable spending in UK Departments, expenditure in each category, and the Scotland comparability percentages were set out in Annexe C of the Statement of Funding Policy published in July 2000. Spending is allocated to Scotland in the form of the aggregate Departmental Expenditure Limit, which the Scottish Executive then allocates to programmes according to its own priorities. The Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limits, along with the Departmental Expenditure Limits for UK Departments, were published in the Government's 2000 Spending Review in July 2000.

Tax Credits

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated percentage reduction will be in the total tax bill for an individual earning *(a)* £10,000, *(b)* £15,000, *(c)* £20,000, *(d)* £25,000, *(e)* £30,000 and *(f)* £35,000 as a result of the proposed children's tax credit. [151226]

Dawn Primarolo: A children's tax credit worth up to £8.50 per week will be equivalent to reductions in an individual's income tax as set out in the table.

Earnings	*Percentage tax cut*
£10,000	44
£15,000	21
£20,000	14
£25,000	10
£30,000	8
£35,000	6

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost of administering family credit and the Working Families Tax Credit was in each year since 1988 broken down, where appropriate, into the costs to central Government and the cost to businesses. [151461]

Dawn Primarolo: Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) was introduced in October 1999. For information on costs from that date, I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgend (Mr. Griffiths) on 13 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 103W.

I understand from the Department of Social Security that the estimated annual costs for Family Credit in Great Britain are given in successive DSS Departmental Reports; and that no estimates are available of the cost to businesses.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are expected to receive the new children's tax credit in the Glasgow parliamentary constituencies in the next financial year. [151619]

Dawn Primarolo: An estimate of the number of families in Glasgow constituencies who will be eligible to claim the children's tax credit (CTC) is unavailable, but an estimate of the number of families in Scotland who will be eligible to claim CTC is 400,000.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many cases he has been informed of in which an employer has charged employees for the payment of tax credits; and what action he has taken against the companies involved. [151458]

Dawn Primarolo: Unauthorised deductions from wages are prohibited by general employment law. The January 2001 edition of the Inland Revenue's "Employer's Bulletin" reminded all employers that they must not charge their employees for paying tax credits through the payroll.

National Insurance

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the change in revenue resulting from a reduction in the NIC rate by 1 per cent. assuming *(a)* the upper earnings limit remains as it is, *(b)* the upper earnings limit is set at the threshold of the higher rate of income tax at £575 per week and *(c)* the upper earnings limit is abolished. [151424]

Dawn Primarolo: The full-year effects in 2001–02 of making the changes are set out in the table.

	Full-year effect in 2001–02 of a 1% reduction in the employee rate of National Insurance Contributions	*Cost (£ billion)*
(a)	With the upper earnings limit at £575 per week	2.80
(b)	With upper earnings limit set at the income tax higher rate threshold (equivalent to £652.60 per week)	2.90
(c)	With no upper earnings limit	3.25

The estimates show the reduction in gross employee contributions only—rebate rates have not been affected.

Widows and Widowers

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards the taxation of, and benefits available to, widows and widowers. [150856]

Dawn Primarolo: From 9 April 2001, the Government are introducing a new system of bereavement benefits which for the first time will be available to men as well as women. The new benefits are a lump-sum bereavement

payment, bereavement allowance and a widowed parents allowance. Bereavement benefits are payable so long as the deceased spouse has paid enough National Insurance contributions and other conditions are met. Women currently receiving widows' benefits will not be affected by these changes.

Bereavement allowance and widowed parents allowance will be taxable as are the current widows' benefits. The Bereavement Payment is not taxable. Widows and widowers who have children can also be eligible for the Children's Tax Credit and the Working Families Tax Credit.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 28 February 2001

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Tyre Dumping

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (1) if he intends to introduce a scheme to help farmers with the cost of removing illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres from agricultural land; [150810]

(2) if he will make a statement on the cost to farmers of removing illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres from agricultural land in the latest year for which figures are available. [150809]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides the Environment Agency and local authorities with powers to require the removal of waste dumped in contravention of waste controls; or to remove it and recover their costs from those responsible. However, farmers of land which is the subject of fly-tipping cannot be required to remove the waste or to pay for its removal, unless they knowingly caused or permitted its dumping. We have no plans to introduce a scheme to pay the costs incurred by landowners in removing fly-tipped waste.

However, the Fly Tipping Forum is addressing the problem of fly-tipping on farms; and has commissioned research to assess the problem's scale and associated costs. (The Environment Agency chairs the Forum and its members include the NFU and the Country Landowners Association.) It is anticipated that this research project will be completed later in the spring and the Forum will then consider its findings. The Department of Trade and Industry also chairs a joint Government/industry working group which is considering options for recycling tyres in the light of the Landfill Directive, which will ban their disposal in landfill sites.

No data are currently held centrally on the cost to either local authorities or farmers of removing illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres.

Departmental Policies (Blackpool, South)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Blackpool, South constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [142229]

Ms Quin: As most of my Department's policies flow from measures agreed within the framework of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, statistical data are normally available on a UK or England basis, but not disaggregated further. However, farmers in the UK have benefited from this Government's policies to the tune of £1.2 billion since 2 May 1997 in addition to the figure of approximately £3 billion per year in direct CAP payments. Farmers in the Blackpool, South constituency will also have available to them all of the schemes available under the England Rural Development Programme, which is backed by funding of £1.6 billion over the period 2000–06. Three of the schemes within this programme—Rural Enterprise, Processing and Marketing, and Vocational Training—have a budget of around £190 million and are being operated on a regional basis; each region has its own allocation.

Policy and Strategy Units

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food when his policy and corporate strategy unit was established; which of its reports are placed in the public domain; how many departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate in its work; how many regular *(a)* non-departmental and *(b)* departmental staff participate in its work; and how many of these work for the unit on a full-time basis. [150366]

Ms Quin: The MAFF Policy and Corporate Strategy Unit was established in November last year. No departmental or non-departmental special advisers participate directly in the unit's work, but one of the departmental special advisers sits, alongside senior officials and a non-executive director of the MAFF management board, on the unit's steering board. This board is chaired by the permanent secretary and is intended to determine priorities for the unit's work.

It is intended that the Policy and Corporate Strategy Unity will provide internal advice to Ministers and the permanent secretary. Typically, resulting reports would be placed in the public domain by the Department. No such reports have yet been produced by the unit.

The unit currently has 10 full time members of staff, including three staff on loan from other Government Departments and Agencies. During the coming months its staff complement is expected to rise to approximately 15 full time staff.

Producers' Organisations

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what review has been carried out by his Department's officials in order that producers' organisations recognised prior to 1995 satisfy EC Regulation 1762/96; and if he will list the proportion of total production by weight, attributable to each producers' organisation for its economic area. [151536]

Mr. Morley: UK Fisheries Departments regularly review the status of producers' organisations in accordance with the provisions of EC Regulation 2939/94, as amended by EC Regulation 1762/96, to ensure that they still meet the recognition criteria. Under EC Regulation 2939/94 a producers' organisation must be responsible for at least 15 per cent. of the production in its area, or at least 30 per cent. of production in a major port in its area. Data from 1999, the latest date for which information is available, for the producers' organisations are set out as follows. It should be noted that the European Commission is currently reviewing the recognition criteria in respect of minimum levels of economic activity.

Producers' organisation	Major port for landings	Proportion of landings at major port (percentage)
Anglo-North Irish FPO Ltd.	Kilkeel	69
Cornish FPO Ltd.	Newlyn	72
South Western FPO Ltd.	Brixham	71
The FPO Ltd.	Hull	84
Anglo-Scottish FPO Ltd.	North Shields	76
Yorkshire and Anglia FPO Ltd.	Bridlington	38
Northern Ireland FPO Ltd.	Portavogie	71
Grimsby FPO Ltd.	Scarborough	57
Fleetwood FPO Ltd.	Fleetwood	54
Lowestoft FPO Ltd.	Lowestoft	59
North Sea FO Ltd.	Harlingen	100
Wales and West Coast FPO Ltd.	Corunna	62
Northern FPO Ltd.	Montrose	88

Producers' organisation	Proportion of landings in economic area (percentage)
Aberdeen FPO Ltd.	33
Fife FPO Ltd.	59
North East Scotland FO Ltd.	20
Scottish FO Ltd.	44
Shetland FPO Ltd.	36
West of Scotland FPO Ltd.	[1]9

[1] The West of Scotland FPO Ltd. is only recognised for Nephrops

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Hague Convention on Child Abduction

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will place in the Library the Government's response to the questionnaire concerning the practical operation of the Hague Convention on Child Abduction and views on possible recommendations, drawn up by Mr. William Duncan, Deputy Secretary-General, and dated October 2000. [150890]

Jane Kennedy: The response to the questionnaire on behalf of the Central Authority for England and Wales has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

School Sports Co-ordinator

Mr. Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when he will name the remaining areas that will benefit from a new school sports co-ordinator from September 2001. [149399]

Kate Hoey: Twelve new areas in the second round of school sport co-ordinators were announced on 16 February. Fifty-five further appointments will be made in these new areas bringing the total number of school sport co-ordinators to 195.

Sports Facilities (Primary Schools)

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment his Department has made of the quality of sports facilities in primary schools. [149386]

Kate Hoey: There is need to improve sports facilities in many of our primary schools. Part of our plan to do this is the Space for Sport and the Arts initiative which will provide £130 million for capital projects in 65 LEAs benefiting about 300 schools. In addition, £580 million of New Opportunities Fund money will be invested in strengthening the foundation of sport across England by building and refurbishing PE and sports facilities in over 1,500 schools.

Lottery Funds

Mr. Healey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures he is taking to ensure national lottery funds are distributed in a way that targets areas with the greatest social needs. [149393]

Mr. Chris Smith: Following the 1988 reforms to the national lottery, distributors are required to take into account the need to ensure that all areas have access to funding and the scope for reducing economic and social deprivation. Since then, distributors have increasingly targeted funding on areas of need, on people and activities rather than just capital projects, and on small grants to community groups. All of this means that, more than ever, the communities with the greatest needs are experiencing the positive effects of national lottery funding.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much income for the Dome was generated through *(a)* merchandising aids and *(b)* royalties. [150937]

Janet Anderson: The figure provided by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is subject to the Company's necessary external audit scrutiny. That work will begin shortly and will inform the content of the Company's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000. The Report and Statements will be published in due course. NMEC has advised that income from merchandising was £2 million net, and from licensing was £0.2 million.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total expenditure was on staffing the Dome from the run up period to the opening until the closure, including the costs of terminating contracts. [150925]

Janet Anderson: The figure provided by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is subject to the Company's necessary external audit scrutiny. That work will begin shortly and will inform the content of the Company's Annual Reports and Financial Statements for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000. The Report and Statements will be published in due course. NMEC has advised that staffing expenditure for the period February 1997 to 31 December 1999 was £34.5 million. Staffing expenditure for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000 was £47.2 million including retention and bonus payments as provided for in staff contracts but excluding bonus payments to Directors.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what revenue was received by NMEC from the catering arrangements at the Dome. [150924]

Janet Anderson: The figure provided by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is subject to the company's necessary external audit scrutiny. That work will begin shortly and will inform the content of the company's annual report and financial statements for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000. The report and statements will be published in due course. NMEC has advised that revenue received from the catering arrangements at the Dome was £2.3 million net.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the ticket revenue received from the Dome was. [150923]

Janet Anderson: The figure provided by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is subject to the company's necessary external audit scrutiny. That work will begin shortly and will inform the content of the Company's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000. The report and statements will be published in due course. NMEC has advised that ticket revenue received from the Dome was £58.4 million.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the expenditure on utilities was for the Dome until its closure. [150926]

Janet Anderson: The figure provided by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) is subject to the Company's necessary external audit scrutiny. That work will begin shortly and will inform the content of the Company's Annual Report and Financial Statements for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000. The Report and Statements will be published in due course. NMEC has advised that expenditure on gas, electricity and water to 31 December 2000 was £4.3 million.

Dome Sponsors

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on what date the £1 million sponsorship payment from the Hinduja foundation for the faith zone was received by the New Millennium Experience Company. [149220]

Janet Anderson *[holding answer 6 February 2001]:* I understand from the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC), that the Hinduja Foundation first approached NMEC in February 1997 about the possibility of incorporating the "Concordia Project" into the Dome. This was to be an interactive visitor education centre focusing on the world's different cultures. The agreement between NMEC and the Hinduja Foundation governing its £1 million financial support for the Faith zone was signed on 16 February 1999. The first payment of £100,000 was paid on 25 February 1999; the second payment of £450,000 was paid on 18 May 1999 and the final amount of £450,000 was paid on 23 August 1999.

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Further and Higher Education Students

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what the combined total of students in further and higher education in each of the past five years was expressed as *(a)* total student enrolments in publicly funded institutions and *(b)* total full-time equivalents. [150118]

Mr. Wicks *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* The information requested is contained in the tables.

Higher education student numbers have steadily increased over recent years. Further education student numbers, on the other hand, have fallen slightly. The main reason for this is the large fall in franchised provision. Previous participation figures were artificially inflated by franchising, some of which offered courses of dubious value. I remain determined to raise student numbers in FE at the same time as I raise the quality of the provision on offer.

Table 1—headcount of student numbers in higher education

Thousands

Year	*Number*
1995–96[1]	1,355
1996–97[1]	1,382
1997–98[1]	1,414
1998–99[1]	1,442
1999–2000[2]	1,461

[1] Actual
[2] Provisional
Source:
HESA, December record

Table 2—full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers in higher education

Thousands

Year	*Number*
1995–96[1]	1,058
1996–97[1]	1,077
1997–98[1]	1,106
1998–99[1]	1,123
1999–2000[2]	1,134

[1] Actual
[2] Provisional
Source:
HESA, December record

Table 3—headcount of student numbers in further education

Thousands

Year	*Number*
1995–96[1]	4,029
1996–97[1]	4,463
1997–98[1]	4,463
1998–99[1]	4,335
1999–2000[2]	4,274

[1] Actual
[2] Provisional
Source:
FEFC

Table 4—full-time equivalent (FTE) student numbers in further education

Thousands

Year	*Number*
1995–96[1]	1,198
1996–97[1]	1,215
1997–98[1]	1,160
1998–99[2]	1,149
1999–2000[2]	—

[1] Actual
[2] Provisional

Notes:

1. All figures are on a whole year basis, and are for England only.

2. In 1998–99, three colleges transferred from the FE sector to the HE sector. Student numbers in these colleges are included in Tables 3 and 4 until 1997–98, and in Tables 1 and 2 from 1998–99.

3. In 1999–2000, one FE sector college merged with an HE institution. Student numbers in this college are included in Tables 3 and 4 until 1998–99; from 1999–2000 this college is considered part of the HE sector.

4. While funding for HNC and HND students in FE sector colleges transferred from FEFC to HEFCE in 1999–2000, their numbers appear in Table 3 throughout (as FEFC-funded students until 1998–99, then as non FEFC-funded students), and in Table 4 until 1998–99. Their numbers do not appear in Tables 1 or 2 in any year.

Table 1

The data include only those students on higher education courses at publicly funded HE institutions. Includes home, EU and overseas students filling places funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England or by other sources. Includes students on Open University courses.

Table 2

The data include only those students on higher education courses at publicly funded HE institutions. Includes home, EU and overseas students filling places funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England or by other sources. Includes students on Open University courses. The full-time equivalent factor used for part-time students is 0.35.

Table 3

The data include FEFC-funded and non FEFC-funded students in FE sector colleges and FEFC-funded students in External Institutions, Specialist Designated Institutions and Higher Education Institutions.

Table 4

In line with the normal publishing convention, Further Education FTE data include FEFC-funded and non FEFC-funded FE students in FE sector colleges, FEFC-funded FE students in External Institutions, Specialist Designated Institutions and Higher Education Institutions, and non FEFC-funded FE students in Adult Education Centres. Also included are FEFC-funded HE students in FE sector colleges. FTE figures are not yet available for 1999–2000.

Source:

ISR; FEFC Aggregate Record

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the IT projects his Department plans to undertake in the next year; and if he will state in each case the *(a)* expected date of commencement and completion and *(b)* cost. [151476]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The major information technology projects to be started in the next year are listed in the table.

£

Project	*Description*	*Start date*	*Completion date*	*Estimated project cost*
Correspondence handling	Enhancements to the system introduced in April 2000 for moving and tracking correspondence electronically	April 2001	October 2001	350,000
Infrastructure upgrades	Replacement of PCs and servers	April 2001	March 2002	3,000,000

Following on from the achievements the Employment Service (ES) has made in the last 12 months the ES is committed to improving its main advisory tool, the Labour Market System, which should see major improvements by December 2001 at a cost of £9.2 million.

The Modernising ES programme is already delivering new and exciting ways in helping customers come closer to the labour market, e.g. Jobpoints and Internet Jobbank, and the next steps are for the ES to engage with DSS colleagues on how best to take forward the IT requirements of the new agency. This will occur over the coming months.

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151502]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The major information technology-enabled projects currently being undertaken by the Department are listed in the following table.

Project	*Description*	*End date*	*Estimated cost (£)*
Teaching and learning initiatives UK Online Centres	Funding for ICT learning centres in disadvantaged communities	Ongoing	100 million
National Grid for Learning (Schools)	Further development of the NGfl programme to equip and connect schools, colleges and other places of learning	Ongoing. All schools to be connected to the internet by 2002	1 billion over 3 years 2001–04
ICT in Further Education Capital Infrastructure (National Learning Network)	The planned investment in ICT will help support colleges as the demand for ICT skills; electronic delivery of learning and access to knowledge and information continues to grow. Colleges will need to take advantage of best practice in the use of ICT, and they will need to exploit ICT to deliver new ways of learning through flexible, attractive and convenient mechanisms	Ongoing	74 million
ICT in Higher Education	Provision to support learning and effective management in HE institutions	Ongoing	300 million

Project	*Description*	*End date*	*Estimated cost (£)*
Connexions card project	To deliver a multi-functional smart card to young people in further learning, which carries discounts and rewards to encourage their participation and attainment. The project includes an underpinning database driven careers and course website	Autumn 2001	6.5 million
Worktrain	To develop an internet portal to job vacancies, careers, work-related learning and training opportunities	Comprehensive service available in 2001	3.2 million
Individual Learning Accounts	This includes: The implementation of policy for individual learning accounts; The creation of a national framework for the administration of individual learning accounts; The marketing and other promotional activity to support and increase take up; Continued development of ILA policy within the framework of funding for adult learners and wider policy developments The development of a partnership between DfEE and Capita; Ensuring consistency between the arrangements in England and the devolved administrations	May 2005 (end of contract)	50 million
Learning and Skills Council Information and Business System Project	To define, build and deliver the information systems and processes necessary to support the Learning and Skills Council	August 2002	38 million
Computers Within Reach	Scheme to give subsidised recycled PCs to low income families and earners	March 2001 (end of contract)	15 million
Wired up communities	To connect homes in a number of deprived communities to the internet and email and to test the impact which this might have to education and employability	February 2002 (end of contract)	10 million
Grid Club	The creation of a fun learning site for children aged 7 to 11. It will help them learn through communicating and participating in joint activities and through improving their IT skills	March 2004 (end of contract)	6 million
Learn Direct	Telephone help line and website run by the University for Industry providing information and advice to adults	Ongoing	10 million
Virtual College of School Leadership	A portal that provides the virtual arm of the National College for School Leadership. The NCSL has been launched to provide leadership and development to the School leadership group. It will deliver both face-to-face programmes, including the existing headship training programmes, as well as online developmental and networking opportunities	May 2003 (end of contract)	2 million
Other departmental systems			
European Social Fund	Adapting systems to deliver ESF in accordance with revised payment methodology and business process	March 2001	1.2 million
Sure Start IT System	Sure Start is a cross-departmental initiative aimed at improving local service available to families and young children in disadvantaged areas	Mid 2001	1 million
Overseas Labour Service	To introduce a series of enhancements including the introduction of emailed applications for work permits	March 2002	650,000
New Student Support System	A project to allow students to access an initial application form for financial support electronically	Database and application form available in 2001	550,000

Project	*Description*	*End date*	*Estimated cost (£)*
Special Education Needs Tribunals System Re-write	Re-write of the system to meet new tribunal regulations which will result in a fundamental change to the way that appeals are managed	March 2001	500,000
Voluntary Aided Schools Information System (VASIS) Phase 2	Enhancement to the VASIS system which will provide the capability to receive and approve grant claims electronically and provide on-line access to schools and LEAs	September 2001	350,000
GTC Database (Releases 3–5)	Further releases which will provide for the collection of key data on teachers and fee collection	March 2001	300,000
Standards Fund System	Development of the existing system to enable LEAs to make electronic claims against the Standards Fund	March 2001	250,000
Publications Database (Phase 2)	Enhancements, which will improve our ability to monitor progress against targets	September 2001	150,000
Neighbourhood Support Fund Database	System required to monitor and evaluate the performance of the NSF projects and Managing Agents in delivering the Programme	February 2001	150,000
DfEE Correspondence Handling System	The development and implementation of a computerised system for managing the Department's wide ranging correspondence in order to improve on its performance targets as per the Whitehall Standards	—	2.5 million
DfEE Infrastructure upgrades	Replacement of PCs, fileservers and software	March 2001	4 million

Employment Services

The Employment Service's modernisation programme has made remarkable achievements in less than 12 months. The ES now has a modern IT infrastructure in its 1,000 Jobcentres. A national jobs database has been created with around 400,000 vacancies. That database is available to anyone with internet access through the Employment Service website.

Job points have been installed in 12 Jobcentres. Job points are state-of-the-art touch-screen kiosks through which Jobcentre customers can search the national database. Early indications from these pilots are that job points are popular and successful and it is intended that they will be rolled out nationally to all Jobcentres from March this year.

The Employment Service is also establishing a network of 11 customer services centres to take vacancies from employers through a single telephone number, by fax or by e-mail. They will provide employers with 24-hour electronic access to Jobcentre recruitment services. This new service is expected to come on line in the next few months.

The Employment Service is also managing the transfer of Work Based Learning for Adults in April 2001 from the TECs and this will result in the implementation of a new contracting and funding system in April 2001 which will encourage closer working with ES's programme providers.

These achievements have been part of a fully integrated programme of change valued at some £816 million, which has already seen a vast improvement in the way ES conducts its business.

New Deal (Northern Ireland)

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many people have benefited from the New Deal, by parliamentary constituency, in Northern Ireland broken down by gender who are *(a)* young unemployed, *(b)* long term unemployed, *(c)* disabled and *(d)* lone parents. [151000]

Ms Jowell: This subject is a devolved matter. I refer my hon. Friend to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Fast-track Teachers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if fast-track teachers will be distributed proportionately between specialist and non-specialist schools; and if he will make a statement. [151133]

Ms Estelle Morris *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Specialist and non-specialist schools will be able to create fast-track teaching posts. Fast-track teachers will not be distributed among schools; they will apply for these posts and be recruited in the usual way.

Environment Agency Learning Initiatives

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what involvement he will have in the implementation of learning initiatives proposed by the Environment Agency in "The Business of Learning—Investing in a Sustainable Future". [150272]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 15 February 2001]:* I recently met Sir John Harman and colleagues to hear about their consultation on "The Business of Learning". The Environment Agency is proposing a number of initiatives building on its Pathfinder project and extending

its involvement in sustainable development education. The Government's sustainable development education panel has already made a significant contribution towards raising the profile of sustainable development education in schools, further and higher education, and among the general public. I am considering with colleagues at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions the extent to which the proposals outlined in the consultation paper might complement the panel's work.

Civil Servants (Performance-related Pay)

Mr. John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on what basis performance-related pay is awarded to those civil servants within his Department concerned with the outsourcing of LEA services. [150703]

Mr. Wills: DfEE staff up to and including Grade 6 have their performance assessed under the Department's Performance Management System and at the end of each year are awarded an overall performance marking. This performance marking determines the size of their pay increase. Better performance is rewarded with a higher pay increase than weaker performance. The details of these increases are negotiated annually with the unions.

Members of the Senior Civil Service (SCS) (former Grade 5 and above) in DfEE have their performance assessed under the arrangements for the SCS Performance Review set centrally by the Cabinet Office. At the end of each reporting year, members of the SCS are awarded a performance mark, which is the key factor in determining their pay increase. Again, better performance at each level of management within the SCS is rewarded with a higher pay increase than weaker performance. The framework for the SCS pay award is set centrally each year by the Cabinet Office following the Government's response to the Senior Salaries Review Body's Report for that year.

School Funding (Sefton)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the credit approvals allocated to Sefton borough in each year from 1997 to 2004; and if he will specify the projects which received approvals and their associated cost. [151291]

Jacqui Smith: The table lists credit approvals issued to Sefton local education authority for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02, and shows those schools for which the credit approvals were allocated, together with details of the projects supported, where this information is known. Credit approvals for local authorities for the years beyond 2001–02 have not yet been issued. Sefton local education authority will have had discretion as to the application of credit approvals to specific projects and will be able to provide more information about the individual projects which have been supported through credit approvals.

Credit approvals allocated to Sefton local eduction authority (LEA)

Year/school	*Project*	*Credit approval awarded £000*
1997–98		
LEA-wide allocation	Annual Capital Guideline settlement:	
	Commitments arising from previous years	[1]70
Details not readily available	Special Education Needs (SEN)	[2]20
1998–99		
LEA-wide allocation	Annual Capital Guideline settlement:	
	Commitments arising from previous years	[1]9
	Formula	[1]208
	Minor Works	[1]60
Greenbank High	Enhance facilities for the teaching of languages	100
Green Park County Primary	Schools Access Initiative (SAI) project	2
Orrell County Primary	SAI project	4
Davenhill County Primary	SAI project	6
Grange County Primary	SAI project	5
Linaker County Primary	SAI project	3
Freshfield County Primary	SAI project	3
Crosby Road North County Primary	SAI project	5
Northway County Primary	SAI project	4
Manor High	SAI project	34
1999–2000		
LEA-wide allocation	Annual Capital Guideline settlement:	
	Commitments arising from previous years	[1]104
	Formula	[1]327
	Basic Need	[1]161
	SEN projects	[1]87
	Minor Works	[1]91
Netherton Moss County Primary	Surplus places removal	76
Redgate County Primary	Surplus places removal	33
Litherland Moss County Primary	Surplus places removal	92
Rowan Park Special	Alterations	217
Presfield Special	Alterations	40
Ronald House Special	Alterations	40
Greenacre Nursery	SAI project	1
Birkdale Community Primary	SAI project	10
Davenhill Community Primary	SAI project	18
Farnborough Road Community Infant and Junior	SAI project	21

Credit approvals allocated to Sefton local eduction authority (LEA)

Year/school	*Project*	*Credit approval awarded £000*
Freshfield Community Primary	SAI project	2
Larkfield Community Primary	SAI project	42
Linaker Community Primary	SAI project	1
Thomas Gray Community Infant	SAI project	4
Range High	SAI project	8
Waterloo Community Primary	SAI project	5
St. John's CE Primary, Crossens	SAI project	10
St. Luke's CE Primary, Formby	SAI project	4
Holy Spirit Catholic Primary	SAI project	2
St. George's Catholic Primary	SAI project	3
St. Peter's CE Primary	SAI project	1
Holy Family Catholic High	SAI project	10
2000–01		
LEA-wide allocation	Annual Capital Guideline Settlement:	
	Commitments arising from previous years	[1]868
	Formula	[1]380
	Basic Need	[1]202
	Minor Works	[1]139
Chesterfield High	Enhance facilities for the teaching of sport	100
Ronald House Special	Alterations	42
Bedford Primary	SAI project	11
Birkdale Primary	SAI project	10
Larkfield Primary	SAI project	7
Linaker Primary	SAI project	6
Range High	SAI project	17
St. John's CE Primary, Crossens	SAI project	3
St. Luke's CE Primary, Formby	SAI project	4
Twelve schools	SAI project	[2]147
English Martyrs Catholic Primary	SAI project	2
St. Nicholas CE Primary	SAI project	1
St. Peter's CE Primary	SAI project	2
2001–02		
LEA-wide allocation	Annual Capital Guideline settlement:	
	Commitments arising from previous years	[1]2,725
	Basic Need	[1]225
	LEA co-ordinated voluntary local programme (LCVAP)	[1]101
Holy Family RC High	LEA liabilities on project to provide 47 additional sixth form places	23
Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary	LEA liabilities in respect of project to create nursery	2

[1] This credit approval was LEA-wide; Sefton LEA can provide details of how this funding was used.
[2] Details of which school(s) benefited from this credit approval are not readily available; Sefton LEA can provide details of which school(s) benefited from this funding.

Explanation of terms used in table

Commitments—funding to meet commitments that have arisen from allocations made in previous years;

Special Educational Needs (SEN)—funding to meet costs of statutorily approved projects at SEN schools;

Basic Need—allocation towards the cost of providing sufficient numbers of school places;

Formula—allocation made on a per pupil basis;

VA Minor Works—funding to meet LEA liabilities for projects costing less than £250,000 at Voluntary Aided (VA) schools;

Surplus places removal—funding to remove surplus places;

LEA Co-ordinated Voluntary Local Programme (LCVAP)—this has replaced the Minor Works programme, and is broadly similar.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment if he will list the projects that *(a)* the New Deal for Schools programme and *(b)* Seed Challenge funding have supported in the borough of Sefton in each year since 1997; which it will support in each year up to 2004; and how much money (i) has been and (ii) will be allocated to each project. [151290]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows those schools in the borough of Sefton which are benefiting from investment through the New Deal for Schools programme, allocated over the four years from 1997–98 to 2000–01. These allocations total £6.768 million. In the same period, Sefton local education authority has been allocated some £19.536 million of funding in total for capital investment in schools.

A total of £196,000 of Seed Challenge funding was made available to Sefton local education authority in 2000–01. The authority will be able to provide a breakdown of individual projects and costings. 2000–01 is the first year in which Seed Challenge funding has been allocated to local education authorities.

In January this year, we announced that the New Deal for Schools would be extended over the next three years to 2003–04. Allocations which will benefit schools in Sefton local education authority, announced in January 2001 under the New Deal for Schools, total £11.23 million over three years; of this, £1.89 million is for 2001–02, £3.69 million for 2002–03 and £5.65 million for 2003–04.

This funding does not include the new £550 million New Deal for Schools Modernisation programme for which detailed allocations will be announced later this year.

An increase in Seed Challenge funding was also announced in January 2001, with allocations to Sefton local education authority totalling £970,000 over the three years to 2003–04. This comprises £220,000 in 2001–02, £375,000 in 2002–03 and £375,000 in 2003–04. It will be for Sefton local education authority, working with local schools and within guidelines provided by the Department, to allocate this new funding to individual school projects.

New Deal for Schools
Allocation for schools in Sefton local education authority

Year/school	*Project*	*Grant awarded (£)*
1997–98		
Included within an LEA-wide package:		
Hillside High	Conversion and refit of laboratory	[1]836,000
Sacred Heart RC High	Refit of three science laboratories	
Range High	Refit of three science laboratories	
Christ The King RC High	Refit of two science laboratories	
St. Winefride's RC Primary	Major structural repair due to ground subsidence	
Litherland High	Replace felt roof	
Maghull High	Replace felt roof	
Ramborough Road Infant	Replace two classroom units	
Lydiate County Primary	Demolition of reinforced concrete covered walkway	
Grange County Primary	Wet rot repairs and external painting	
1998–99		
Litherland High	Heating repairs	55,850
Holy Trinity CE Primary	Rewiring	55,850
Holy Trinity CE Primary	Heating repairs	44,680
Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary	Boiler replacement	44,680
Our Lady of Lourdes RC Primary	Replacement kitchen	112,310
St. Andrew's CE Primary	Rewiring	55,850
Ainsdale High	Fire safety improvements	11,549
Linacre Primary	Heating repairs	61,435
1999–2000		
Churchtown School	Replace temporary accommodation	1,862,285
2000–01		
Farnborough Road Infant and Junior, Bootle High, Christ the Church High	Boiler replacement	[2]368,283
Hillside High	Replace temporary classrooms	528,513
Forefield Infant	Replace temporary classrooms	513,231
Greenbank High	Replace temporary classrooms	424,253
St. Luke's Formby CE	Replace temporary classrooms	605,594
Melling Primary	Replace temporary classrooms	396,048
Forefield Junior	Replace temporary accommodation	393,539
Waterloo Primary	Replacement dining room	398,079

[1] Local education authorities (LEAs) were not required to specify individual project costs for phase 1 of the NDS programme, so the amount shown is the total allocation in that year to the LEA. Sefton local education authority holds project level information.
[2] The total allocation made to package projects covering more than one school. Sefton local education authority will be able to advise the value of projects at schools which have benefited from these allocations.

Emergency Contraception

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment (1) what steps have been taken to ensure that parents are notified that supply of emergency contraception will be permitted under a school's sex and relationships education policy; [151128]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that parents are properly consulted before a school adopts a policy of supplying emergency contraception; [151127]

(3) what estimate he has made of the number of schools which have made emergency contraception available to pupils. [151126]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Our sex and relationship education guidance, published last July, clearly states that governing bodies and head teachers should consult parents in developing their sex and relationship education policy to ensure that they develop policies which reflect the parents' wishes and the culture of the community they serve. All schools must have a policy which is made available for inspection and to parents.

In the few cases where school nurses are dispensing contraception, this should be made clear in a school's sex and relationship policy, which has to be agreed with parents. These arrangements should not proceed until parents have been consulted.

Ofsted is statutorily required to evaluate and comment on a school's sex and relationship policy. From January 2000, as part of its new inspection framework, Ofsted is required to evaluate and report on how well schools work in partnership with parents.

We have made no estimates of the number of schools dispensing emergency contraception. However, Ofsted is aware of a few instances where emergency contraception has been dispensed by school nurses.

Improving teenagers' access to contraceptive advice, including emergency contraception, is a key strand of the Government's teenage pregnancy strategy.

DEFENCE

Departmental Advertising

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000 and *(e)* 2000–01, (i) his Department's total spending on advertising campaigns, (ii) the cost of each individual advertising campaign and (iii) the criteria that were established to gauge the effectiveness of each campaign; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of each campaign based on these criteria. [142710]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member of Bath (Mr. Foster) on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, columns 196–97. The information sought is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, what information is available was provided on that occasion.

Advertising is used by the Ministry of Defence when it is judged to be the most cost-effective way of delivering the publicity necessary to support a policy or proposal.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list for *(a)* 1992–93, *(b)* 1993–94, *(c)* 1994–95, *(d)* 1995–96, *(e)* 1996–97, *(f)* 1997–98, *(g)* 1998–99, *(h)* 1999–2000 and *(i)* 2000–01, (I) his Department's total spending on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces or other means and (II) the cost of each individual project. [146583]

Dr. Moonie: As the modernising government White Paper set out, it is important to this Government that we listen to what people have to say about new proposals and policies. Quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues by focus groups, opinion polling, task forces and other means are now an integral and important part of departmental work. Public opinion research spending, however, is subject to the usual strict rules that spending must represent good value for money for the taxpayer and must not be used for party political purposes.

Information on quantitative and qualitative surveys of policy issues is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. These standard management tools are now employed across the Department and its many agencies.

Information on task forces, reviews and ad hoc advisory groups is updated and published every six months by the Cabinet Office.

Nancekuke

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what information regarding the decommissioning of Nancekuke is contained within the remaining documents held by the Government under the 30-year rule; and if he will place it in the Public Record Office; [148908]

(2) what documents exist regarding Nancekuke that are more than 30-years-old but are not placed in the Public Record Office; and if he will place all remaining documents regarding Nancekuke in the Public Record Office; [148905]

(3) what type of information is contained within the remaining documents regarding Nancekuke held by the Government under the 30-year rule. [149286]

Dr. Moonie: It is not possible to identify the complete holding of records relating to defence activities at Nancekuke in the main MOD repository at Hayes without incurring disproportionate cost. All departmental records are reviewed under well-established procedures and those selected for public preservation are released in accordance with the provisions of the Public Records Act 1958 and 1967.

Following discussions between the Public Record Office (PRO) and the DERA site at Porton Down in the late 1990s, a collection of records that were over 30-years-old was identified and passed to the MOD's records authority for review in accordance with the procedures described above. The records from this collection that are selected for permanent preservation will be released to the PRO once the review process is complete. Some of these records make reference to the work at Nancekuke.

As part of the programme of environmental surveys of RAF Portreath, which have been conducted by the RAF and an independent expert consultant, a number of records have been identified relating to the decommissioning of Nancekuke. It is envisaged that these records will be made available when the conclusions of the current environmental survey have been considered and made public. No decisions have yet to be taken on the need for possible remedial work at the site and I expect this work to reach a conclusion later this year.

Anti-malarial Drugs

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether there were sufficient supplies of Mefloquine or equivalent anti-malarial drugs for members of the Parachute Regiment and other service personnel deployed to Sierra Leone in 2000; and if he will make a statement. [149885]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 12 February 2001]:* My Department had sufficient supplies of Mefloquine and other anti-malarial drugs to support deployments to Sierra Leone in 2000. There were no known problems in obtaining supplies, either at the start of Operation Palliser or on subsequent deployments. Some 200 Army personnel nevertheless deployed initially without anti-malarial tablets. An Army board of inquiry subsequently concluded that this was due to an oversight in their preparation for an unexpectedly rapid deployment. Within 24 hours of these personnel arriving in theatre, the French drug, Savarine, was procured locally and distributed. Steps were immediately taken to provide Mefloquine, the preferred anti-malarial treatment, from the UK and all personnel taking Savarine transferred to Mefloquine within four days. One other individual is known to have deployed without anti-malarials as a result of being temporarily absent from his unit on duty just prior to deploying and therefore missing the issue of Mefloquine.

He was issued with Mefloquine as soon as the problem came to light between two to five days after his arrival in theatre.

No anti-malarial drug is 100 per cent. effective and the degree of protection can be subject to a wide range of factors', for example, the geographical location, the season and the activities undertaken by the individuals concerned.

Ro-ro Ferries

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what efforts are being made in negotiations with the preferred bidder for ro-ros to ensure that strategic sealift service vessels are crewed by UK officers and ratings; [150908]

(2) what progress has been made in the negotiations with the preferred bidder for the ro-ro ferries. [150903]

(3) if, in the event that negotiations with the preferred bidder for the ro-ros fails, the other short listed bidders remain available to continue the competition. [150902]

Dr. Moonie: This is a matter for the chief executive of the Defence Procurement Agency. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Sir Robert Walmsley to Mr. Stephen Hepburn, dated 28 February 2000:

I am replying to your three questions to the Secretary of State for Defence regarding the RoRo Strategic Sealift project. This matter falls within my area of responsibility as Chief of Defence Procurement and Chief Executive of the Defence Procurement Agency.

Negotiations continue with the preferred bidder with a view to placing a contract in the near future. In the event that it does not prove possible to place a contract with the preferred bidder, we would consider other options, one of which would be to reopen discussions with the other contractors who submitted proposals last year.

With regard to your question about the crewing of the vessels, when on MOD business the vessels will be manned by British UK officers and ratings. When not on MOD business, the ships will be trading commercially and their manning then will be a commercial matter for the company. However, to meet their potential MOD requirements, AWSR will be required at all times to ensure availability of sufficient British seafarers to man all six vessels.

Office for Standards of Casework

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he established the Office for Standards of Casework; what its mission, purpose and objectives are; and if he will publish its key targets and achievement matrix. [151231]

Dr. Moonie: The Office for Standards of Casework (Army) (OSC(A)) will be formally established by 2 April 2001. Work is currently in progress to develop its outline mission, purpose and goals.

Its mission is to oversee the Army's casework processes in order to achieve the armed forces overarching personnel strategy (AFOPS) goals for discipline.

OSC(A)'s purpose and primary function is to keep the Army's disciplinary and administrative casework processes under constant review and to propose measures that will ensure that these processes are working as efficiently as possible.

OSCA's objectives and associated tasks are:

to eliminate inefficiency and unnecessary delay by monitoring Army disciplinary and administrative casework

establish and monitor audit trails for casework progress

identify sources of unnecessary delay

analyse casework to identify trends and issues

propose remedial measures

analyse priorities for the resolution of issues.

It will also seek to ensure a culture of fairness and justice by promoting consistency in resolving casework throughout the Army, enable the swift and appropriate resolution of casework at the lowest level, continually review the documentary guidelines provided for commanders to ensure they are up-to-date and effective, liaise with all agencies involved in Army casework in order to ensure that their activities are co-ordinated and complementary and confirm that appropriate priority is given to casework at all stages and that standards are maintained.

Medical Records

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what measures are taken by his Department to ensure that the medical records of members of the armed forces are not lost; [150262]

(2) what measures he takes to ensure that individual members of the armed services are not disadvantaged in the event of their medical records being lost. [150263]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 14 February 2001]:* Every care is taken in my Department to ensure that service personnel medical records are securely stored and not misplaced. A receipt note is used to cover the physical transfer of medical records, which is enclosed with the documents for immediate return by the receiving unit to the sending unit. In the event of a medical record going astray, it could be partially reconstructed from secondary sources.

Juliet McBride

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the telephone and simcard of Juliet McBride are in the possession of the Ministry of Defence Police at Aldermaston; if the text and other messages have been transcribed or recorded; if the Chief Constable of the Ministry of Defence Police has appointed *(a)* a Ministry of Defence Police officer or *(b)* an officer from another force to investigate; and if he will make a statement. [151288]

Dr. Moonie: On 18 January 2001, Ms McBride entered the AWE Aldermaston site without authorisation. She was approached and ejected by the Ministry of Defence Police (MDP) officers. Subsequently, Ms McBride reported the loss of her mobile telephone while on the site. This was found in the MDP vehicle used when removing Ms McBride from AWE and was returned to its owner on 19 January 2001. The Deputy Chief Constable of the MDP has appointed a MDP Chief Superintendent to investigate the circumstances surrounding the recovery of Ms McBride's telephone. It would be inappropriate to make any further comment pending the results of this investigation.

HEALTH

Halal Meat

Mrs. Fiona Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he has collated on the amounts of surplus halal slaughtered meat being sold in non-halal retail outlets. [147449]

Ms Stuart: I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that information on the volumes of halal meat sold in non-halal outlets is not collected centrally. All meat, whether produced to halal requirements or not, must be produced under the relevant meat hygiene or food hygiene regulations, the requirements of which ensure that the meat is fit for human consumption.

Warrington Hospital

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the amount and *(b)* the purpose of each specific grant allocation made to Warrington Hospital since 1997. [149485]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The information requested is in the tables.

Warrington Hospital NHS Trust

£000

	[1]1996–97	[1]1997–98	[1]1998–99	[1]1999–2000	[2]2000–01
Revenue income					
Total income from activities (Health Authorities etc.)	48,535	52,036	57,416	62,804	70,771
Percentage increase on income from activities	—	7.21	10.34	9.38	12.69
Other operating income	5,204	4,265	4,945	5.609	5,539
Total overall income	53,739	56,301	62,361	68,413	76,310
Percentage increase on total income	—	4.77	10.76	9.70	11.54
Capital allocations					
Unconditional capital	1,309	1,309	1,047	1,117	1,151
Conditional capital schemes					
Replacement angiographic equipment	560	—	—	—	—
Breast screening	—	65	65	—	—
Anaesthetic equipment	—	254	—	—	—
Neurophysiology	—	—	96	79	—
Daresbury unit	—	—	—	413	1,407
A&E 2nd round of modernisation	—	—	—	750	—
ICU bed	—	—	—	69	—
Critical care beds	—	—	—	—	500
Radiology	—	—	—	1,000	—
Action on cataracts	—	—	—	—	500
Action on other	—	—	—	—	90
Rapid access chest pain clinics	—	—	—	—	25
Capital project manager	—	—	—	—	35
Outpatient equipment	—	—	—	—	132
Sub-total conditional capital	560	319	161	2,311	2,689
Total all capital	1,869	1,628	1,208	3,428	3,840

[1] Actual
[2] Forecast
Notes:
1. Information extracted from Final accounts, except for 2000–01 financial year, which is the latest forecast available.
2. Information per Regional capital programme.
3. The analysis represents the year in which funding was made available, the pattern of expenditure may be different.
4. A further £160,000 conditional capital will be made available to the trust for the action on cataracts investment.
5. Capital allocations subsequently transferred to revenue have been excluded and are reflected in the turnover of the trust in the first table.

Parkinson's Disease

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Medical Research Council funded trial to compare sub-thalamic nucleus deep brain stimulation for Parkinson's disease with best medical practice will treat all patients that have an unmet need for deep brain stimulation *(a)* as part of the trial and *(b)* outside the trial; and if he will make a statement. [151454]

Yvette Cooper: A proposal for a large randomised long-term assessment of the relative effectiveness of surgery for Parkinson's disease patients is being considered by the Medical Research Council (MRC). The funding decision on this trial is due to be made by the MRC in March, following which the council would be happy to provide further details.

I regret that in an Adjournment debate on Parkinson's disease on 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 641, funding of £940,000 for a study into the effectiveness of new and old drugs for Parkinson's disease was incorrectly attributed to the MRC. This specific project is in fact funded by the National Health Service Technology Assessment Programme.

Waiting Lists

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people *(a)* have died while on the waiting list for an operation and *(b)* have been removed from the waiting list as a result of death in each of the last three years. [151606]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2001]*: The Department does not collect statistics on the number of people who have died while on the waiting list for an operation or the number of people who have been removed from the waiting list as a result of death. Data are collected on how many patients are removed from the waiting list without being treated, but these are not broken down in to the reasons why.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Tankers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many tankers registered in the United Kingdom have single hulls; and what percentage of the total this represents. [148401]

Mr. Hill: There are 26 single hulled tankers over 3,000 gross tons registered in the United Kingdom. This figure represents 86% of the total.

London Underground

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Government decided to release commercially confidential information concerning the PPP bids for London Underground to Transport for London; and for what reason the Government did not do this previously. [150421]

Mr. Hill: Transport for London has had privileged access to information about the London Underground PPP from the beginning, consistent with the duties to consult and co-operate under the Greater London Authority Act 1999. My answer of 14 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 201–02W, set out some of the commercially confidential information which had by that time been made available to Mr. Robert Kiley, the Commissioner of Transport for London. Since the agreement of 2 February between the Deputy Prime Minister and Mr. Kiley, there have been intensive discussions based on full access to information.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions under the Government's proposed PPP for the London Underground, if it is the Government's policy *(a)* to avoid splitting the operation of trains and the control of infrastructure as originally envisaged and *(b)* to ensure that London Underground management will have control over programmes for investment, renewal and maintenance of infrastructure, particularly with regard to their timing and priority. [150398]

Mr. Hill: The Government remain committed to securing the best option for long-term and stable investment in the Tube that combines value for money with maintaining and improving safety. We are in discussion with the Commissioner of Transport for London, Bob Kiley, on his proposals. Building on the work already done, we aim together to work out how best to accommodate his thinking within the current framework for the public private partnership competitions.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how much London Transport has spent to date on consultancy for the London Underground Public-Private Partnership. [151576]

Mr. Hill: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) on 30 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 757W. The Government will continue to provide six-monthly updates to Parliament on the cost of the consultancy work for the PPP and restructuring of London Underground.

Waste Management

Mr. Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the consultation document on changes to the exemptions from waste management licensing. [150452]

Mr. Meacher: The recovery and disposal of waste are subject to control under the Framework Directive on waste; and the main method of control is a waste management licence under Part II of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. However, Article 11 of the Directive provides discretion for the provision of licensing exemptions, on the basis of "general rules" and subject to certain conditions. The main purpose of exemptions is to encourage waste recovery in ways which protect the environment and human health.

We are currently reviewing several of the exemptions provided in regulation 17 of Schedule 3 to the Waste Management Licensing Regulations 1994. The review includes two exemptions subject to allegations of abuse (Schedule 3 paragraphs 9 and 19). We propose to tighten the terms of these exemptions to preclude their use for "sham recovery", to set minimum inspection frequencies by the Environment Agency, and to introduce charges for their registration and inspection.

We are also reviewing the exemptions for the landspreading of waste for

"agricultural benefit or ecological improvement"

(paragraph 7); the storage and landspreading of sewage sludge for ecological improvement (paragraph 8); recovery operations at sewage treatment works (paragraph 10); and community composting (paragraph 12). We are considering the provision of new exemptions for the recovery and storage of waste oil, the burning of dunnage at ports and the remediation of contaminated land.

We intend to publish a consultation paper on these proposals this spring. We also intend to consult later this year on the application of waste management controls to agricultural waste—including licensing exemptions. A separate consultation exercise on licensing exemptions for "special waste" is planned for the summer.

Home Improvement Agencies

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will review the performance of Foundations responsible for co-ordinating the work of home improvement agencies. [150848]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: My Department keeps the performance of Foundations, the national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies, under continuous review in accordance with the procedures established under the contract.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his

Department will be publishing figures on the performance of local home improvement agencies which are in receipt of funding from the Department. [150849]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Under the arrangements for funding home improvement agencies, local authorities are responsible for monitoring the performance of their local agency. The national co-ordinating body collects information on agencies' activities and outputs and, in respect of the current financial year, will be making it available for benchmarking purposes as soon as it has been collated.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will publish the guidelines for the monitoring of the performance of home improvement agencies. [150850]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The national co-ordinating body for home improvement agencies, Foundations, completed the despatch of guidelines to local authorities and agencies on 20 February. I am arranging for copies to be sent to my hon. Friend and placed in the Libraries of the House.

School Transport

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends to issue guidance to local education authorities prohibiting the use of vehicles *(a)* specifically designed to carry standing passengers and *(b)* without seatbelts, for the transportation of school children. [150806]

Mr. Hill: I have no plans to issue guidance to local education authorities prohibiting the use of vehicles specifically designed to carry standing passengers or those without seat belts for the transportation of school children. As I stated in my answer of 26 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 315W, it is ultimately for the schools and local education authorities to ensure the vehicles they will be using are appropriate for the type of journeys planned, and in so doing to take the safety benefits of seat belts into account.

Tyre Dumping

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) if he intends to introduce measures to reduce the number of illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres; [150807]

(2) if he will make a statement on the cost to local authorities of removing illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres for the last five years for which figures are available. [150808]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides the Environment Agency and local authorities with powers to require the removal of waste dumped in contravention of waste controls; or to remove it and recover their costs from those responsible. However, farmers of land which is the subject of fly-tipping cannot be required to remove the waste or to pay for its removal, unless they knowingly caused or permitted its dumping. We have no plans to introduce a scheme to pay the costs incurred by landowners in removing fly-tipped waste.

However, the Fly Tipping Forum is addressing the problem of fly-tipping on farms; and has commissioned research to assess the problem's scale and associated costs. (The Environment Agency chairs the Forum and its members include the NFU and the Country Landowners Association). It is anticipated that this research project will be completed later in the Spring and the Forum will then consider its findings. The Department of Trade and Industry also chairs a joint Government/Industry working group which is considering options for recycling tyres in the light of the Landfill Directive, which will ban their disposal in landfill sites.

No data are currently held centrally on the cost to either local authorities or farmers of removing illegally dumped motor vehicle tyres.

Cabin Crew (Security)

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps the Government are taking to ensure flight security for cabin crew. [150644]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The Civil Aviation Act 1982 and the Air Navigation (No. 2) Order 1995 provide strong powers for dealing with passengers who threaten the safety or personal security of cabin crew or passengers. New powers were introduced in 1999 to ensure that anyone using threatening, abusive or insulting behaviour towards cabin crew or intentionally interfering with the crew during their duties can be punished. The effectiveness of existing measures to deal with disruptive incidents is monitored by the Disruptive Passengers Working Group, which is made up of representatives from Government, the Civil Aviation Authority, the airline industry, the police and other interested parties.

School Crossing Wardens

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the *(a)* contribution to road safety, *(b)* recruitment, remuneration and retention and *(c)* extension of responsibilities to include assistance to people with disabilities of school crossing wardens. [150710]

Mr. Hill: The Government fully recognise that school crossing patrols provide a valuable service to local communities, making it safe and easier for children, parents and other pedestrians to cross busy roads. However, questions as to where they should be provided and to the terms and conditions of employment of the patrol officers, are a matter for individual local authorities. My Department has made no centralised assessment of such matters.

Recent amendments to previous legislation, through the Transport Act 2000, have given school crossing patrols wider powers. When in operation, they now have authority to help anyone who seeks their assistance in crossing the road, and not just children on their way to or from school.

Road Construction (East Sussex)

Mr. Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will make a statement on the compatibility of the stated purpose of the South Coast multi-modal study and the consideration of the construction of bypasses for Hastings. [150875]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Access to Hastings study reported in November 2000 and considered how transport can contribute to regenerating the local economies in Bexhill and Hastings.

The South Coast multi-modal study is currently out to tender, and aims to investigate congestion, safety and environmental problems on the south coast between Southampton and Ramsgate. The study is strategic in nature and will take into account the Access to Hastings Final Report and decisions by Ministers.

Business Rates

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to review the system of business rates. [151279]

Ms Beverley Hughes: In September we published our Green Paper "Modernising Local Government Finance". It detailed a number of proposals relating to business rates including a supplementary local rate and rate relief for small businesses. The consultation period ended on 8 December. We are now considering the many responses we have received. We will publish our conclusions in a White Paper later this year.

Ministerial Meeting

Mrs. Virginia Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the meeting between the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, the right hon. Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong) and leading members of the Town and Country Finance Issues Group concerning the Green Paper on local government finance will take place. [151132]

Ms Armstrong: We have no record of a formal request for a meeting from the leading members of Town and Country Finance Issues Group. If I receive such a request I would be happy to consider it.

Recycling

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what procedures he has established for auditing the quantities of recyclable material eligible for packaging recovery notes and packaging export recovery notes; and if he will make a statement. [150975]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Only packaging waste handled by accredited reprocessors and exporters is eligible for packaging recovery or packaging export recovery notes. In England and Wales the accreditation is overseen by the Environment Agency, to whom those who are accredited are required to send information regularly on the quantities handled. Accredited reprocessors are subject to an annual inspection at the time of making their application for accreditation. Accredited reprocessors must submit quarterly returns to the Environment Agency and the Agency also makes periodic inspections, some of which are unannounced, to premises to check this information.

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the introduction of packaging export recovery notes on the use of recyclate by British manufacturing industry; and if he will make a statement. [150974]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* No assessment of this kind has been done to date. However, in the first three quarters of 2000, 93 per cent. of packaging recycled has been recycled in the UK; with the remainder being exported for recycling. Since the packaging regulations came into force, the UK has increased its packaging recovery rate from some 30 per cent. in 1997 to just under 40 per cent. at the end of 1999.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) how much his Department spent in the last year on raising public consciousness concerning the value of recycling; [151320]

(2) what steps he is taking to improve public awareness of the cost of waste disposal and the importance of recycling. [151316]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Prime activity to raise public awareness of waste reuse and recycling is taken forward under my Department's "are you doing your bit?" publicity campaign, which aims to persuade people to take action to protect the environment. This campaign, which is receiving funding of £9 million in this financial year covers transport, climate change, waste and water conservation. Approximately 15 per cent. of campaign expenditure is devoted to waste issues. Examples of "are you doing your bit?" waste campaign activity are at www.useitagain.org.uk and www.doingyourbit.org.uk, which I commend to the House.

In addition, my Department is providing core funding of £3.7 million to the environmental charity ENCAMS (incorporating Tidy Britain Group and Going for Green), who primarily focus their waste promotional activity around a waste theme month in October. Environmental Action Fund grants totalling approximately £415,000 are also being paid to 13 charities in this financial year to support various waste/recycling projects.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve the level of recycling in the United Kingdom. [151353]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Waste Strategy 2000 set out targets for doubling the recycling or composting of household waste in three years and nearly tripling it in five years. These targets will be underpinned by statutory performance standards for each local authority under the Best Value regime. It also set a target of reducing the amount of industrial and commercial waste sent to landfill by 2005, to 85 per cent. of that landfilled in 1998.

We announced in the Spending Review 2000 major extra funding for local authorities and for the new Waste and Resources Action Programme which will operate across all waste streams to foster markets for recycled materials.

Most recently, my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport consulted on proposals for the next round of lottery funding (the New Opportunities Fund), including a programme to expand community sector waste reuse, recycling and composting.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what incentives his Department plans to introduce to assist in the production of community recycling programmes. [151317]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced in his speech of 24 October a further £50 million from the New Opportunities Fund to support community recycling initiatives for up to 700,000 households.

We will shortly issue guidance to English local authorities on Municipal Waste Management Strategies, which will make it clear that we expect such strategies to include the authorities' plans for partnerships with local community groups.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the contracts that exist between Serco and his Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151337]

Mr. Hill: The following are current contracts between Serco and DETR, its executive agencies and major associated public bodies:

Refuse Collection Service, Canterbury Driving Test Centre;

Integrated Telesales Facility for DVLA;

Additional Message Sign Sub-System and Maintenance of Motorway Communication Equipment;

Midlands Network and Customer Services (West Midlands) Maintenance Contract;

National Motorway Communications System (NMCS) Software Maintenance;

Maintenance of Automatic Traffic Counting Equipment for London.

The following are contracts which have been completed during the last three years:

Drainage System for A43;

Maintenance and Operation of Enforcement Equipment for M25;

Maintenance of Channel Navigation Information System;

Design, Manufacture and Testing of Computing Sub-Systems;

Replacement of Radar Tracking Unit at Fairlight Down;

Managing Agents for HSE Scottish Estates;

NMCS Maintenance Contract for Dartford River Crossing.

The information requested in respect of other associated bodies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Woodfold Hall and Park

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many representations he has received concerning the planning application relating to Woodfold Hall and Park, Mellor near Blackburn. [151551]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State has received representations from eight interested parties since he called-in the three applications relating to Woodfold Hall and Park on 15 December 2000.

Departmental Policies (Norwich, North)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Norwich, North constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151140]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Norwich, North constituency has benefited from a range of Government initiatives since 2 May 1997 including:

Capital allocations for housing

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	5.39
1998–99	7.93
1999–2000	7.76
2000–01	9.17
2001–02	12.95

By 2001–02 the resources made available to Norwich city council's housing investment programme will have more than doubled since the Government came to power. In 2001–02 £9.68 million of the allocation is in the form of the Major Repairs Allowance (MRA), paid as revenue, reflecting a shift to providing resources specifically for the cost of works to maintain council housing. It is for the local authority to determine where within its boundaries these resources are invested; it is therefore not possible to give precise amounts used within the Norwich, North constituency.

Single Regeneration Budget

SRB Round 1—Mile Cross, Norwich

A four-year scheme on a run-down peripheral pre-war council estate aimed to improve the quality of life for tenants through investment in the physical environment and community development, including a renovated community centre and an innovative combined heat and power scheme.

SRB total £2.245 million, £1.579 million since 1997–98.

SRB Round 4—Norwich—A Learning City

This seven year scheme aims to raise the education attainment levels and employability of the people in the five most deprived wards in Norwich, where unemployment is 7.4 per cent. against the Eastern Region average of 4.9 per cent. This includes the Mile Cross and Catton Grove wards in Norwich, North. The emphasis will be on young people with low educational achievement and disadvantaged groups.

SRB total £1.188 million, £616,000 of which will be spent by March 2002.

SRB Round 6—Catton and Fiddlewood

£250,000 over thee years has been awarded to the Catton and Fiddlewood Partnership to build community capacity and involvement. This will help them to prepare and submit bids for more regeneration in future years.

SRB total £250,000 for period 2000–01 to 2002–03.

East of England Development Agency (EEDA)

A land and property scheme to redevelop an old wartime concrete area in Mile Cross.

EEDA funding £153,000 since 1997–98.

Local Government Finance Settlement

The following figures show the Government grants to Norwich city council and Norfolk county council as part of the Local Government Finance Settlement.

The information for general grant (Revenue Support Grant, National Non-Domestic Rates and damping grants) is as follows:

£ million

Year	*Norwich city council*	*Norfolk county council*
1998–99	12.467	341.529
1999–2000	12.550	362.774
2000–01	12.833	380.676
2001–02	13.112	395.21

These figures have not been adjusted to make year on year comparisons possible. There are no readily available figures for 1997–98.

It is not possible to determine the exact amounts allocated by the two councils to the Norwich, North constituency.

Local transport plans

Year	*£ million*
1997–98	[1]7.713
1998–99	[1]5.521
1999–2000	[1]7.752
2000–01	[2]9.203
2001–02	29.247

[1] These figures are for Norfolk county council's Transport Policies and Programmes allocation

[2] This figure is from Norfolk county council's Provisional Local Transport Plan settlement

It is not possible to determine exactly how much of these amounts has been spent on Norwich, North constituency. However, the constituency has benefited from Norfolk county council's integrated transport policies.

HMOs (Licensing System)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to introduce a licensing system for houses in multiple occupation; and if he will make a statement. [151554]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: As we indicated in our Housing Policy Statement, we remain committed to introducing a compulsory licensing system for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Legislation will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

London Borough of Camden

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what funding allocations his Department has made to the London borough of Camden to support those in temporary housing in each year since May 1997. [150977]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* There has been no specific allocation of funding from this Department to support those in temporary housing in the London borough of Camden. It is for local authorities to decide how they should allocate the resources they receive from the Department.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources have been allocated by his Department to the London borough of Camden through regeneration initiatives since May 1997. [150979]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Since 1997 to date, the London borough of Camden has been allocated £58.599 million for regeneration schemes. These resources have been spread over the following five schemes, two of which have been co-ventures with the neighbouring boroughs of Brent and Islington:

Scheme	*£ million*
Kings Cross	37.5
West Euston	6.5
All Change at Camden Central	7.0
New Commitment to Kilburn (Brent and Camden)	6.599
Young People, Drugs and Crime in Gospel Oak (Islington and Camden)	1.0

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what resources have been invested by his Department in *(a)* local authority housing and *(b)* social housing in the London borough of Camden since May 1997. [150978]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Since May 1997, the London borough of Camden has been allocated a total of £124.937 million to resource local authority social housing. This is broken down into the following areas:

	£ million
Housing Investment Programme:	
1998–99	9.271
1999–2000	10.169
2000–01	32.394
2001–02	18.826
Capital Receipts Initiatives:	
1997–98	2.658
1998–99	8.612
1999–2000	9.262
Capital Challenge, (Gospel Oak scheme):	
1998–99	2.104
1999–2000	3.227

	£ million
Estate Action, (Kings Cross scheme):	
1998–99	5.200
1999–2000	1.030
Major Repairs Allowance:	
2001–02	22.184

A259/A3 Bypasses

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what his policy is on the decisions of South East of England Regional Assembly relating to the *(a)* proposed A259 Hastings bypass and *(b)* proposed A3 Hindhead bypass; and if he will make a statement. [151331]

Mr. Hill *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The South East of England's Regional Assembly (SEERA) considered the Final Report for the access to Hastings Study, and for the A3 Hindhead Study, at its plenary meeting of 14 February. I will consider the Assembly's formal recommendations on these studies carefully.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what guidelines are set by him concerning the minimum distance of telecommunications masts from houses. [151498]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Telecommunications operators have a duty under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Management of the Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 to ensure that so far as is reasonably practicable, their work activities—which would include the installation and operation of their equipment—do not expose people to risks to their health and safety.

Following publication of the Stewart report on mobile phones and health in May 2000, the Government accepted that, as a precautionary measure, the emissions from mobile phone base stations should meet the more restrictive International Commission on Non-Ionizing Radiation Protection (ICNIRP) guidelines for public exposure (as expressed in the EU Council Recommendation of 12 July 1999 on the limitation of exposure of the general public to electromagnetic fields (0 Hz to 300GHz)). Most base stations already meet the ICNIRP guidelines and all new base stations will do so.

The Stewart report recommended the establishment of clearly defined physical exclusion zones around base station antennas, which delineate areas within which exposure guidelines may be exceeded, to prevent the public from exposure to radiofrequency radiation above the ICNIRP guidelines. These exclusion zones relate to an area directly in front of and at the height of the antenna. The report did not recommend the introduction of a minimum distance between masts and existing development and we have no plans to introduce such a requirement.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he intends to publish revised PPG Note 8 on telecommunications development and the Government's conclusions on proposed changes to part 24 of the General Permitted Development Order. [151293]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to mobile phone masts and associated guidance ended on 31 October 2000. The Department is currently analysing the responses. We intend to announce our conclusions as soon as practically possible.

Safer Stations Initiative

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what the funding, under the Safer Stations Initiative, the Government have made available for passenger safety improvements to *(a)* Queenstown Road Station, *(b)* Battersea Park Station, *(c)* Wandsworth Town Station, *(d)* Balham Station and *(e)* Clapham South Station. [151154]

Mr. Hill: The Safer Stations Initiative is led by the London borough of Wandsworth. It is aimed at improving the safety, accessibility and environmental quality of railway stations in the borough, in partnership with service providers, passenger representatives and the police. The initiative has received no direct funding from central Government.

Departmental Policies (Battersea)

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will set out the effects on Battersea constituency of his Department's transport policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151155]

Mr. Hill: Specific information about the effects on Battersea constituency is not available. However, since April 1997 my Department has allocated £6.48 million of resources for transport initiatives and schemes to the London borough of Wandsworth under the Local Transport Settlement.

Responsibility for allocations for the financial year beginning April 2001 onwards now belongs to Transport for London.

The London borough of Wandsworth has also benefited from Local Transport Settlement allocations to a number of London-wide initiatives, and to two sub-regional partnerships, SWELTRAC and Wandle Valley. Since April 1997 the following amounts have been allocated:

	£ million
London Cycle Network	20.5
London Bus Priority Network	47.0
SWELTRAC	3.6
Wandle Valley	1.0
Green Areas Initiative	0.6
Bridge Strengthening	64.9

In addition, as part of the Red Route programme a number of road schemes have been carried out in the constituency, including junction improvements, crossings and signing.The franchises for national rail services in the area are currently being replaced with a view to providing a much improved service when the competitions are complete.

East Coast Main Line

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the criteria which are to be used in deciding the award of the East Coast main line franchise and their order of priority and relative weighting. [151553]

Mr. Hill: In considering proposals for franchise replacement the Instructions and Guidance given to the Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority by the Deputy Prime Minister ask him to give due weight to performance, customer services, innovation, investment and efficiency, the extent to which passengers will be given a greater voice in the level and standard of services and affordability and value for money for the taxpayer. The Authority provides the actual evaluation criteria to prequalified parties for each replacement franchise.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when his Department expects to receive the Strategic Rail Authority's recommendations concerning the awarding of the East Coast main line rail franchise; and what are the reasons for the delay announced on 14 February. [151552]

Mr. Hill: On 14 February the Strategic Rail Authority announced a pause in the franchise replacement process for the Inter City East Coast replacement franchise as a result of increased cost estimates for upgrading the East Coast main line provided by Railtrack.

Prior to that date, the Secretary of State was considering a request from the SRA for a direction, under section 26 of the Railways Act 1993, which would allow it to choose a preferred bidder for this replacement franchise. The SRA has now asked the Secretary of State to delay further consideration of whether to grant such a direction until it has discussed the issue of cost estimates with Railtrack and taken a view on any implications for the replacement process.

Water Meters

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 21W, on water meters, if he will publish Ofwat's letter to water companies on water meters and the responses received. [150661]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I understand from the Director General of Water Services that the letters referred to were not only about metering but dealt with a wide range of issues in companies' charges schemes. Some of this information concerning companies' planning, costs and revenues was discussed in confidence and is commercially sensitive. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to publish the correspondence.

However I have asked the Director General to write to the hon. Member to explain the action taken by Ofwat and he will do so very shortly. A copy of this letter will be placed on public deposit in the Ofwat library.

Liquid Petroleum Gas

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (1) what steps the Government are taking to encourage car manufacturers to make and sell cars that run on liquid petroleum gas; [151263]

(2) what steps the Government are taking to help promote the environmental benefits of liquid petroleum gas to the public; [151265]

(3) what steps the Government are taking to encourage more petrol stations to sell liquid petroleum gas; [151264]

(4) what grants are available to owners of older car models to convert their cars to run on liquid petroleum gas. [151262]

Mr. Hill: The Government have introduced a range of measures to promote the wider use of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). The Powershift programme, funded by my Department and administered by the Energy Saving Trust, provides grants towards the additional cost of vehicles fuelled by LPG. There is a low rate of duty on LPG and other road gas fuels—around 7.5p per litre, compared to 48.82p per litre for premium unleaded petrol and 48.82p per litre for ultra low sulphur diesel. From 1 March 2001, new LPG cars will benefit from a lower rate, under the new Vehicle Excise Duty system.

The number of LPG refuelling points is growing rapidly. There were around 100 in 1997. There are now around 660 sites in the UK and this number is expected to rise to over 1,000 by the end of this year, thanks to investment from the major fuel suppliers. Many of these new facilities will be on petrol station forecourts. The Government's revised transport planning guidance note (PPG13) will further encourage local authorities to view planning applications for refuelling facilities for cleaner fuels more favourably. This is expected to be published later this year.

My Department's Ministers and officials have met a range of vehicle manufacturers to discuss the development of the gas vehicle market. The Energy Saving Trust is also in close touch with vehicle manufacturers, encouraging them to introduce production line gas vehicles. I am encouraged to know that several vehicle manufacturers are considering doing so.

Grants under the Powershift programme focus on new cars (but also those of up to one year old), encouraging manufacturers to develop high quality production line gas vehicles, so as to reduce the cost and lead to the wider use of gas fuelled vehicles. Also, the older a vehicle is, the harder is it to guarantee that a gas conversion will lead to emission reductions.

Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to amend the Public Service Vehicles (Condition of Fitness, Equipment, Use and Certification) Regulation 1981 (No. 257), regulations 28(1)(d)(ii) and 28(1)(f) following the judgment made at Colchester county court on 5 February against Crusader Holidays of Clacton-on-Sea (claim C0005266). [151157]

Mr. Hill: I have no plans to amend the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment. Use and Certification) Regulations 1981 as a result of the judgment made at Colchester county court of 5 February. The standards for seat spacing are the minimum

requirements that reflect the varied types of operation of buses and coaches. There is nothing to prevent an operator from having a greater space for the seats than that which is set out in the regulations if they so wish.

Jubilee Line Extension

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to seek compensation from the contractors responsible for construction work on the Jubilee Line extension. [151301]

Mr. Hill: This is a matter for London Underground Limited (LUL), who let the contracts for Jubilee Line Extension construction. I understand that the majority of Jubilee Line Extension contracts included liquidated damages clauses. There is a rigorous final accounting process during which these clauses are reviewed against the performance of individual contractors to determine whether or not damages apply. LUL manages this process, supported where necessary by high quality legal and technical advisers. If a contractor is deemed to be liable for any part of the total time and cost overrun this is taken into account in final settlement of the relevant contract. For reasons of commercial confidentiality it would not be appropriate to comment on any individual case.

Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority

Ms Dari Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what Government funding has been received by the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority since 1997; and what it is to be used for. [151125]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Department has not provided funding to the Tees and Hartlepool Port Authority since 1997.

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will ensure that local authorities have sufficient resources to cover the above-inflation element of the teachers' pay award without having *(a)* to levy additional council tax and *(b)* reduce other services. [151170]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We took account of all pressures on local education authorities, including teachers' pay, when setting the level of provision in the spending review. In addition, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Employment announced on 29 January extra funding of £52 million to help certain local education authorities manage funding changes in 2001–02. Local authorities are responsible for their own decisions on budget priorities and council taxes for 2001–02.

Secure Environment

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what strategy he has for ensuring that all council and housing association tenants have a secure environment; and what funds are being allocated to it. [151533]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* An important part of the Government's regeneration and neighbourhood renewal strategy is to tackle anti-social behaviour and promote community safety at grass roots level. Neighbourhood Wardens form a key part of the Government's partnership approach to tackling crime and disorder, working with the community, police, local authorities, housing associations and other agencies to reduce crime and the fear of crime and to promote safer and more secure communities.

My Department and the Home Office have jointly allocated £18.5 million until 2003–04 for the Neighbourhood Warden programme. Some of the wardens will perform a "supercaretaker" role on estates; others will have a patrolling function. Both roles will provide a sense of security and personal contact with residents.

More widely, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires local authorities and the police to establish district based crime and disorder reduction partnerships, to develop and implement local strategies for reducing crime and disorder. Each strategy is informed by evidence drawn from an audit of crime and disorder in the locality in consultation with the local community. The recently appointed crime reduction directors in each of the English regions and Wales will be managing the Partnership Development Fund announced as part of the Spending Review 2000 which provides for £3 million in this financial year with a further £20 million in each of the next three financial years. The purpose of the fund is to support the partnership process and to develop improved and more effective ways of working.

Wind-farm Developments

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many wind-farm developments have been granted permission, but are yet to be built by developers in *(a)* Wales, *(b)* England and *(c)* the UK as a whole. [151364]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I understand from information collected by ETSU that, as at December 2000, the following number of wind-farm developments had been granted planning permission but had not commenced construction:

(a) 4 in Wales

(b) 11 in England

(c) 19 in the whole of the UK (the other four being in Scotland).

Agenda 21 Strategies

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what targets have been set for the implementation of Agenda 21 strategies by local authorities; and how the progress of such strategies is being monitored. [151574]

Mr. Meacher: The Prime Minister set a challenge for local authorities to produce a Local Agenda 21 strategy by the end of 2000; over 90 per cent. of English local authorities have met this. Whether a local authority has produced a strategy in line with the Government's guidance will be tested formally via the Best Value performance indicators.

Local authorities should now implement their Local Agenda 21 strategies in order to meet the objectives and targets they have set. With the introduction of Community Strategies, local authorities that have produced Local Agenda 21 strategies in line with the Government's guidance should have gone a long way towards developing effective partnership working, a long term vision for the area and the necessary implementation mechanisms, that they will require in preparing their Community Strategies.

Housing Rents

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what plans he has to require local authorities to limit increases in housing rents during the period they are seeking convergence with registered social landlord rent levels. [151575]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Local authorities are responsible for deciding the level of their rents. We expect all social landlords to ensure that no tenant will be subject to a change in their rent as a result of the combined influence of restructuring and convergence of more than £2 a week in any year above the normal increase for inflation. We intend to use the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy system to encourage restructuring and convergence and discourage excessive rent increases.

Shared Ownership Schemes

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many do-it-yourself shared ownership schemes have been approved since May 1997. [151183]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: The total number of do-it-yourself shared ownership (DIYSO) schemes approved since May 1997 is 4,117.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the *(a)* representations his Department has received and *(b)* meetings he and his Department have had with any of the Hinduja brothers since May 1997. [151184]

Ms Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given on 15 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 222W. My right hon. Friend has had no other meetings with the Hinduja family.

It is not the normal practice of the Government to release details of meetings or discussions between officials and private individuals or companies.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what public funds have been spent in each year since 1997 on consultancy fees in relation to the development, production and evaluation of strategies and action plans for regional development agencies. [151185]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The fees paid to consultants' by the nine Regional Development Agencies are detailed in the table. There were no costs incurred for the period 1997 to 1998 as the Regional Development Agencies were established on 1 April 1999.

Year	*£*
1998–99	59,414
1999–2000	1,226,400
2000–01	312,250

Oceans Statute

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what discussions he has had with organisations about the World Wide Fund for Nature's proposals for an oceans statute. [150983]

Mr. Meacher: I understand that the WWF, in discussions in the Working Group of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation, have put forward proposals on the need for further legislation to protect the marine environment. This Working Group was established by the Government to review the options for improving the protection available for the marine environment. An interim report is due to be presented to Ministers soon. This will set out a range of options on possible ways forward and highlight where strategic decisions may be necessary.

Quality Mark Scheme

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress is being made with the Quality Mark scheme; and if he will make a statement. [151886]

Mr. Raynsford: In January a number of measures were put in place to encourage builders to join the Quality Mark (QM) pilot scheme in Birmingham and Somerset. Among these were a time limited discount on the joining fee, joint working with several leading trade associations and commercial organisations, to develop ways of helping their members and sub-contractors achieve the QM standard and easier ways of obtaining the mandatory warranty cover. I am pleased to say these efforts are now beginning to pay off and the number of companies in the two pilot areas now wishing to join the QM has increased from around 40 to over 275. I expect more companies to apply to join the QM in the weeks and months ahead.

Most of these companies should complete the assessment process and attain the QM in the next two-three months. As a result of this, I am able to announce today that subject to satisfactory progress with the assessment process, we shall move to the second stage of the pilot programme by opening the QM to consumers on 22 May. The launch will involve the unveiling of the QM logo and involve a major public information campaign in the pilot areas, co-ordinated with our partners, to alert the public to the QM and the benefits of using QM builders. They will be able to find the names of QM builders and tradesmen through a national call centre of via the Internet.

Householders in the two pilot areas of Birmingham and Somerset will then be able, through this Government-backed scheme, be able to find a reputable builder to do a good job for a fair price. By using a QM builder they will have the comfort of knowing that the company has been subject to a rigorous and independent inspection, including an on-site inspection of their work, will work to a QM code of good practice and give a free six-year

warranty on their work. The opening of the QM scheme to the public in this way is a major step forward in the fight against disreputable builders and fulfils a major commitment by this Government to introduce measures to empower consumers and promote reputable companies.

After six months there will be a review of how well the scheme has worked to see what lessons can be learned. This will involve all aspects of the scheme, including how easy it is for the public to locate a QM builder. Following further consultation with QM builders, our partners, the industry and consumers a decision will then be made about whether any modifications need to be made to the scheme and how to extend it to the rest of the country.

Consumers in this country have for too long been at the mercy of disreputable builders and tradesmen. But there are many reputable builders willing and able to do a good job for a fair price. The QM pilot scheme is a first step towards a national scheme to link consumers and reputable builders. I hope that more builders will recognise the benefits of the QM and apply to join now.

Farm Diversification

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what responses he has received to his consultation paper on rate relief for farm diversification; and if he will make a statement. [151887]

Ms Beverley Hughes: We received 68 responses to our consultation paper on rate relief for farm diversification, copies of which are available through the Library of the House.

In the light of our consultation, we are proposing to implement a scheme to allow 50 per cent. rate relief for an initial period for five years to all new small businesses established on property that was previously subject to the agricultural exemption from rates.

We also intend to implement the proposals in "Modernising Local Government Finance: A Green Paper", published last September, for extending the rate relief scheme for village shops to provide mandatory relief to certain food shops, pubs and petrol filling stations.

Legislation to implement these proposals will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows. They are a significant contribution to realising the vision set out in the White Paper, "Our countryside: the future".

Pollution

Mr. Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when the Framework Document of his Department and the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution will be published. [152059]

Mr. Meacher: The Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution is a non-departmental public body which gives advice on dangers to the environment and priorities for environmental policies.

A key recommendation of the recent five-year Financial Management and Policy Review (FMPR) of the Royal Commission, which Ministers endorsed, was the preparation of a Framework Document to bring greater clarity to the Commission's relationship with the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and to reinforce the Commission's drive towards improved effectiveness.

I am pleased to announce today the publication of a 'Framework Document' which sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of DETR, as sponsor Department, and the Commission, including provisions for more effective forward planning and performance review. It is available on my Department's website www.detr.gov.uk and copies are being placed in the Library of the House.

CABINET OFFICE

British-Irish Council

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what matters she has recently discussed in the British-Irish Council; and if she will make a statement. [149964]

Mr. Ian McCartney: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 20 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 221W.

The Council had been due to meet in Dublin on 23 January. Many of those who would be expected to attend the Council meeting were involved in continuing political discussions on implementation of the Good Friday agreement. The meeting was therefore postponed to allow more time for these discussions, as was the successor date of 5 February. It is hoped that a summit level meeting can be held as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Committee on Standards in Public Life

Mr. Cox: To ask the Prime Minister when he will announce new appointments to the Committee on Standards in Public Life; and if he will make a statement. [151859]

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Sir Nigel Wicks GCB CVO CBE as the new Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life in succession to Lord Neill of Bladen QC with effect from 1 March 2001.

In addition, I have appointed two new members to the Committee: Rabbi Julia Neuberger and Rita Donaghy OBE. They are appointed in succession to Sir William Utting and Sir Clifford Boulton. All three appointments are for three years in the first instance with the possibility of renewal. All three appointments were made fully in line with the Guidance of the Commissioner on Public Appointments.

I am very grateful to Lord Neill, Sir William and Sir Clifford for their work on the Committee and for the significant contribution they have made to standards in public life.

Engagements

Mr. Paice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 28 February. [150004]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Students

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Prime Minister for what reason he has not corrected, in line with Chapter I (iii) of the Ministerial Code, the inaccurate answer, concerning the number of extra students in further and higher education since the Government came into office, recorded on 8 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 1178. [151171]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given today by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Lifelong Learning to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell). In addition, I have written to the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) and have placed a copy in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Youth Activities

3. **Mr. Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what strategies he is pursuing to encourage young people into activities which are considered alternatives to crime. [149950]

Mr. George Howarth: There has, for many years in Northern Ireland, been a wide range of initiatives at local level directed towards encouraging young people into more constructive activity. Most of these initiatives, however, now fall within the responsibility of the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland.

The Community Affairs Branch of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, in partnership with other bodies, carry out work with young people, who either have committed crime or are deemed at risk of offending, aimed at diverting them away from criminal activity.

Security Normalisation

4. **Jean Corston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to create a normal security environment in Northern Ireland. [149951]

Dr. Reid: Normalisation of the security environment depends on the prevailing threat.

7. **Mr. Ivan Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the potential impact of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 on the normalisation of security in Northern Ireland. [149954]

Mr. Ingram: The Police (Northern Ireland) Act will assist normal policing by enabling the police service to operate more effectively and in partnership with the community.

That is what the people of Northern Ireland, including the police, want.

8. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress is being made towards the normalisation of security measures in Northern Ireland, with particular reference to border areas. [149955]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given earlier by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, East (Ms Corston).

12. **Mr. Colman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [149959]

22. **Mr. Day:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in Northern Ireland. [149970]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend and the hon. Member to the reply my right hon Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland gave earlier to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), *Official Report*, columns 892–93.

Peace Process

5. **Mr. Dobbin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on recent international support for developments in the peace process in Northern Ireland. [149952]

Dr. Reid: There continues to be widespread international support for our attempts to bring about a lasting peace in Northern Ireland.

9. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the impact of a stable economy on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [149956]

Dr. Reid: The strength and stability of the Northern Ireland economy in recent years has been an important factor in creating the right conditions for advancing the peace process. Political progress has in turn had a positive effect on the economy, bringing tangible benefits to everyone and so helping to encourage support for further progress.

16. **Mr. Andy King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the peace process in Northern Ireland. [149963]

Dr. Reid: We are continuing to make progress on the implementation of the Belfast Agreement. We still have some way to go, but there is a desire from all quarters to move forward. The Assembly is functioning smoothly and the Programme for Government has been well received, as has the budget announced by the Finance Minister, Mark Durkan.

Paramilitary Violence

10. **Mr. Fraser:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the level of paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. [149957]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson), *Official Report*, columns 892–93.

17. **Mr. Wilkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* bombings, *(b)* shootings and *(c)* physical assaults relating to paramilitary activities have taken place in Northern Ireland this year. [149965]

Mr. Ingram: The tables provide the information requested:

Security situation statistics: Casualties as a result of paramilitary style attacks, 1 January 2001 to 25 February 2001

	By Loyalist	*By Republican*
Assaults	20	12
Shootings	13	9

Security situation statistics: Bombing and shooting

	Number
Bombing incidents	60
Shooting incidents	39

Notes:

1. The following types of shooting incidents are included:
   shots fired by terrorists;
   shots fired by the security forces;
   paramilitary style attacks involving shootings;
   shots heard (and later confirmed); and
   other violent incidents where shots are fired (e.g. armed robbery).
2. An individual bombing incident may involve one or more explosive devices. Incidents recorded include explosions and defusing. Incidents involving hoax devices, petrol bombings or incendiaries are excluded.

Royal Ulster Constabulary

11. **Mr. Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the impact on morale of the level of recruitment to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. [149958]

Mr. Ingram: There has been no recruitment to the Royal Ulster Constabulary since 1 April 2000. It is therefore not possible to make any assessment on the impact this has had on morale within the force. On a wider front, however, the RUC is subject to major change resulting from the Patten Report and, like any other organisation, there is understandable concern among officers until changes are properly implemented and bedded in. Strenuous efforts are being made by force command to ensure all employees are fully informed at each stage of the process.

27. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about his timetable for implementing the reform of the RUC. [149975]

Mr. Ingram: A revised Implementation Plan setting out the position of the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland, which includes details of the considerable progress already made, will be published shortly.

Decommissioning

13. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent developments have been made towards decommissioning; and if he will make a statement. [149960]

19. **Miss Kirkbride:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on decommissioning. [149967]

Mr. Ingram: Decommissioning remains an essential part of securing the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The Government continue to work together with the Irish Government and the political parties in Northern Ireland to achieve what we all want—the removal of the gun from Northern Ireland politics for good.

20. **Mr. Wardle:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives in Northern Ireland. [149968]

23. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on the decommissioning of illegally held arms and explosives in Northern Ireland. [149971]

Mr. Ingram: Mr. Ramaphosa and Mr. Ahtisaari have reported that they have completed their second inspection of several IRA arms dumps. It represents further progress and an honouring of commitments given at the beginning of May. I am confident the inspectors will report any further progress that has been made when they deem it appropriate to do so.

Further progress still needs to be made by both Republican and Loyalist paramilitaries to meet their commitments to bring a lasting peace to Northern Ireland.

Efforts are still continuing to seek a way forward to enable decommissioning to occur as soon as possible.

Victims of Violence

15. **Mr. Browne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in offering proper recognition to the families of members of the police service who have been victims of violence in Northern Ireland. [149962]

Mr. Ingram: On 9 November the Government, in welcoming the proposals made by John Steele for a new Police Fund Trust, said that they would establish the trust by April and make lump sum payments to the widows of those killed by terrorists before 25 November 1982 by then too.

Robert Hamill

18. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on establishing a public inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Robert Hamill. [149966]

Mr. Ingram: The Office of the Police Ombudsman is currently supervising on-going investigations into the circumstances surrounding the death of Mr. Hamill.

While the Government do not rule out an inquiry in the future any decision taken now to initiate such a process would lead to a serious risk that any subsequent or contemporaneous prosecution could be compromised.

Sectarian Violence

21. **Ms Moran:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he is taking to tackle sectarian violence in Northern Ireland. [149969]

Mr. Ingram: The security forces are continuing to thwart sectarian attacks. Additional police patrols are being deployed in many areas including Larne, Belfast and Coleraine. The military are acting in support of the police where appropriate. Recent successes include the discovery this month, of what are believed to be a number of loyalist pipe bomb making facilities in Larne, Belfast and Newtownabbey. A number of people have been charged as a result of these operations and other individuals are being sought.

I am confident that the police are doing all that they can to prevent these attacks and to bring those responsible to justice.

26. **Mr. Beggs:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Chief Constable of the RUC regarding additional policing within estates which have been subjected to gun, petrol or pipe-bomb attack in recent months. [149974]

Mr. Ingram: The Secretary of State discusses a broad range of issues with the Chief Constable of the Royal Ulster Constabulary on a regular basis. He is confident that the Chief Constable is taking all possible measures to tackle incidents of violent crime in the Province.

There has been an increase in the police patrolling profile in those areas subject to attacks of the nature described in the question. Both overt and covert police operations have increased. In addition, Mobile Support Units and military resources have also been deployed where this has been deemed necessary. The situation is kept under constant review.

Good Friday Agreement

24. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on progress in implementing the Good Friday agreement. [149972]

Dr. Reid: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth (Mr. King), *Official Report*, column 692W.

Policing Reforms

28. **Dr. Godman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received concerning the implementation of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. [149976]

Mr. Ingram: The Government are engaged in frequent dialogue with a range of individuals and bodies on the implementation of the Police Act as well as those changes recommended by the Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland (Patten) which do not require legislation. On the Act specifically, some provisions came into force on Royal Assent, others, such as the Police Ombudsman sections, were commenced in December. We are now preparing a further Commencement Order.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made on delivering reforms in policing in Northern Ireland. [149961]

Mr. Ingram: The Government and the police have made significant progress in a number of areas. These include the enactment of the Police (NI) Act 2000; the appointment of an Oversight Commissioner; publication of an Implementation Plan, detailing the Government's response on all 175 recommendations made by the Independent Commission on Policing (Patten); establishment of the Police Ombudsman's Office; appointment of a recruitment agency; launch of recruitment advertising; and closure of two of the three holding centres.

Drug Crime

29. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment he has made of the criminal activity involving illegal drugs in Northern Ireland. [149977]

Mr. Ingram: The drugs scene in Northern Ireland is composed of a network of importers, distributors, street level dealers and users. Paramilitary organisations are involved to differing degrees both in the procurement and supply of controlled drugs. The extent to which these groups are involved is cloudy and may be on an individual member basis rather than sanctioned by the respective leadership of these groups.

The Royal Ulster Constabulary continues, with other organisations, to combat drug related crime within the resources available to it.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Benefits Information

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security (1) if he will *(a)* list the circulars, advice and guidelines that have been issued to local Benefits Agency offices in respect of each benefit since May 1997 and *(b)* place copies in the Library; [148493]

(2) if he will list the adjudication and operations circulars and guidelines that have been issued to local Benefits Agency offices since May 1997 and place copies of these in the Library. [151452]

Angela Eagle: The Benefits Agency issues guidance to its local offices on decision-making (formerly adjudication) on benefits for which it is responsible. The Agency also issues a wide range of material providing technical support to staff and guidance on operational issues affecting the day-to-day administration of benefits.

Since May 1997, the Agency has issued 232 items of adjudication and decision-making guidance. Copies of this guidance are held in the Library.

It is impractical to list or place copies in the Library of all items of technical support and operational guidance that have been issued because of the range and diversity of the material. However, if the hon. Member can indicate particular areas of interest, documents can be listed or obtained in line with Open Government principles.

Benefits Statistics

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will update the table, using the latest statistical information his Department has, stating sources in each case, published on 9 November 1998, *Official Report*, column 96W. [150877]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The table gives uprated estimates for the Social Security benefits included in the previous table. Working Families Tax Credit is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The estimated number of households in receipt of Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (income related), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit in 2000–01

Thousand

	Income Support/ Jobseeker's Allowance (income related)	*Housing Benefit*	*Council Tax Benefit*
Single (no children)	2,610	2,200	2,640
Couple (no children)	450	690	1,080
Lone parent (one child)	510	450	450
Lone parent (two children)	320	310	310
Lone parent (three or more children)	230	210	210
Couple (one child)	120	130	140
Couple (two children)	150	150	160
Couple (three or more children)	170	150	160
Total benefit units with at least one person receiving benefit	4,560	4,300	5,160
Total number of adults in benefit units where at least one person receiving benefit	5,440	5,420	6,700
Total number of children in benefit units where at least one person receiving benefit	2,960	2,800	2,860

Notes:

1. All figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and totals may not sum due to rounding.
Households may be in receipt of more than one of the benefits shown. Consequently, the sum of the totals will not represent an overall estimate for adults and children on income-related benefits.
2. The Income Support column of the original table also included Jobseeker's Allowance recipients, and has been updated accordingly.
3. Figures are derived from the Department policy simulation model, and are based on the 1997–98 Family Resources Survey uprated to 2000–01 prices, benefit levels and caseloads. Actual data are not available for Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit beyond May 1999.
4. Total numbers in receipt of the above benefits are consistent with the Department's 2000 post budget forecasts.
5. The total number of adults represents those aged 16 and over, except for those 16 to 18 year olds in full time education. The total number of children represents those aged under 16, and 16 to 18 year olds in full time education.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of single pensioners with gross weekly incomes of between (i) £78 and £134, and (ii) £122 and £134; and if he will estimate the (1) number and (2) percentage of pensioner couples with gross weekly incomes of between (A) £124 and £200 and (B) £188 and £200. [151137]

Mr. Rooker: The information is in the table.

Gross income between:	*Number*	*Percentage*
Single pensioners with gross income falling in selected bands—1998–99		
£78 and £134	1,960,000	44
£122 and £134	490,000	11
Pensioners couples with gross income falling in selected bands—1998–99		
£124 and £200	1,080,000	27
£188 and £200	170,000	4

Notes:

1. Estimates are rounded to the nearest 10,000 or 1 per cent. but are not necessarily accurate to that degree since they are subject to sampling error.
2. Gross weekly income includes benefit income and is at July 1998 prices.
3. Single pensioners are defined as anyone aged over 60.
4. Pensioner couples are defined as married or cohabiting couples where either partner is aged over 60.

Source:

Family Resources Survey (FRS) 1998–99

Child Poverty (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the child poverty levels in the Jarrow constituency were in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [151006]

Mr. Bayley: Poverty and social exclusion are complex multi-dimensional issues, affecting many aspects of children's lives—their families' income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is no single measure that can capture the complex problems that need to be overcome.

However, a number of these aspects have seen significant improvement in Jarrow since 1997. For example, the proportion of 11-year-olds achieving level four or above at Key Stage 2 has risen in both english and mathematics from around 60 per cent. to over 70 per cent. in 2000. Over the same period the number of children in families in receipt of out of work benefits has fallen from 4,900 to 4,500.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mrs. Fyfe: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what plans he has to extend the heating allowance paid to pensioners on Income Support to those pensioners who have small private or occupational pensions. [151186]

Mr. Rooker: Winter Fuel Payments, this winter £200 for eligible households, are not means-tested and are paid to the majority of people from age 60. People eligible

for a payment and who might be in receipt of a small private or occupational pension would already be included in the scheme.

Cold Weather Payments are paid to people who are in receipt of Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance and get either a disability or pensioner premium or have a child under five. A payment of £8.50 is made automatically when the average temperature at the specified weather station linked to their postcode has been recorded as, or is forecast to be, 0°C or below over seven consecutive days. There are no plans to extend this scheme.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the Benefits Agency's role is in promoting benefits take-up. [151365]

Angela Eagle: We are keen to ensure that people are in an informed position to make choices on whether to claim benefit and we are the first Government to encourage the active pursuit of take-up initiatives as a means of tackling pensioner poverty. The Benefits Agency was instrumental in running the national take-up campaign for the minimum income guarantee. Additionally, it is involved in a wide range of national and local initiatives to ensure accurate and accessible information is available, including leaflets, information officers, liaison with local groups, and talks.

Adjudication and Operations Circulars

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security for what reason he has released a Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Adjudication and Operations Circular numbered F00. [151450]

Angela Eagle: We have no record of issuing a circular numbered F00.

Personal Pensions

Mr. Goggins: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the general and compensation levies payable under the Pension Schemes Act 1993 by occupational and personal pension schemes. [151891]

Mr. Rooker: I am pleased to announce that the General Levy rates for 2001–02 will be frozen at the 2000–01 level as set out in the table. We have been able to do this as a result of good housekeeping by Opra and buoyant levy receipts. Opra's costs will increase due to new responsibilities for Stakeholder and Personal pensions but will be met from existing levy rates.

Furthermore I am pleased to announce that it will not be necessary to raise a Compensation Levy in 2001–02.

The General Levy covers the costs of the bodies that safeguard the rights of pension scheme members or provide them with help, advice and information. These bodies are the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra), the Pensions Ombudsman, the Pensions Advisory Service and the Pension Schemes Registry.

The Compensation Levy covers the cost of expenditure by the Pensions Compensation Board.

Compensation can be paid up to a limit set out in legislation to occupational schemes of insolvent employers who have suffered a reduction in their assets through dishonesty such as theft or fraud.

Scheme rates

Scheme size	*Basis*	*2000–01 (£)*	*2001–02*[1] *(£)*	*Minimum payment per scheme (£)*
Occupational pensions				
2 to 11	Scheme	12.00	12.00	—
12 to 99	Member	1.25	1.25	—
100 to 999	Member	0.90	0.90	125
1,000 to 4,999	Member	0.70	0.70	900
5,000 to 9,999	Member	0.53	0.53	3,500
10,000+	Member	0.37	0.37	5,300
Personal pensions				
2 to 11	Scheme	5.20	5.20	—
12 to 99	Member	0.50	0.50	—
100 to 999	Member	0.35	0.35	50
1,000 to 4,999	Member	0.30	0.30	350
5,000 to 9,999	Member	0.20	0.20	1,500
10,000+	Member	0.15	0.15	2,000

[1] No change

Note:

Minimum payments ensure that schemes in the lower bands do not pay more overall than those in the higher bands

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Montserrat

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what future levels of development assistance her Department intends to provide to Montserrat. [151895]

Clare Short: We have informed the Government of Montserrat (GoM) that approximate future levels of assistance will be as follows:

	£ million
2001–02	24.4
2002–03	17.0
2003–04	13.6
2004–05	9.5
2005–06	7.5

These amounts include both budgetary aid and development assistance. The 2001–02 figure is firm, subject to parliamentary approval. Figures for subsequent years are for planning purposes and are subject to the normal processes of resource allocation and review in the light of changing circumstances.

By the end of March 2001, DFID will have provided over £135 million to Montserrat since the onset of volcanic activity in 1995. A substantial amount of work has been completed during this period, with much of the essential economic and social infrastructure now in place in the previously under-developed north of the island.

DFID's assistance to Montserrat in the next five years will focus on building the capacity of GoM to deliver effective and efficient public services, with a reduced requirement for significant external budgetary assistance.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mercenaries

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 351W, on mercenaries, what the target date is for the completion and publication of a Green Paper on options for regulation of mercenaries. [150385]

Mr. Battle: As I said in my written answer on 2 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 351W, work is continuing on the preparation of the Green Paper outlining options for the regulation of mercenaries and private military companies. This is a complex issue and it is important to work carefully through the details.

UK Citizens (Overseas Prisons)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of *(a)* men and *(b)* women from the United Kingdom who are detained in prisons overseas. [151014]

Mr. Wilson: At the end of January 2001 we were aware of 2,827 British men and 423 British women detained in prisons overseas.

Brazil

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to his Brazilian counterpart concerning the issue of bonded labour. [151182]

Mr. Battle: Bonded labour is a serious problem in some parts of Brazil, particularly remote rural areas where there are many poor and unemployed people who are easily exploited by unscrupulous employers.

The British Embassy in Brasilia monitors closely the human rights situation in Brazil and is in regular contact with the Brazilian authorities on all aspects of human rights, including bonded labour. Officials last raised our concerns about bonded labour in Brazil at the human rights talks held between the FCO and the Brazilian Government in December 2000.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the contracts that exist between Serco and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151344]

Mr. Wilson: Neither the FCO, nor its executive agency or associated public bodies have existing contracts with Serco. Within the last three years, the BBC World Service has contracted with Serco for internet consultancy services at a total cost of £25,971.03 plus VAT.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the outcome of the First Stage of the Quinquennial Review of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Research Councils will be announced; and what the principal recommendations are for the future governance and organisation of CCLRC. [151890]

Mr. Byers: I am today able to announce the outcome of the First Stage of the Quinquennial Review of the Council for the Central Laboratory of the Resarch Councils.

Reviews of Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) are a key part of our programme to modernise Government. The Government are committed to achieving better public services that are of higher quality and are more responsive to the needs of the people who use them. Regular NDPB reviews are an important element in ensuring that we have in place the right structures to deliver the Government's agenda effectively and to provide a strong focus on improving future performance.

The Terms of Reference for the Review required the First Stage to examine the role, composition and funding mechanisms for CCLRC, by reference to its Charter and mission, its past performance, recent CCLRC instigated studies on future vision and funding, current best practice for NDPBs and its contribution to the work of other Research Councils. The Review was further required to consider all relevant options for the future of the Council, including abolition, continued NDPB status, rationalisation, privatisation or strategic contracting out.

The Review has been conducted in accordance with the lastest Cabinet Office guidance (published on 31 January 2000) and has included consultation with members of Council, the Executive and CCLRC's customers and key stakeholders. The Review Boad, chaired by Sir Peter Williams, met on six occasions, including visits to the Rutherford Appleton and Daresbury laboratories.

The principal recommendation is that the relationship of the Research Councils and CCLRC as customer and supplier has proved to be sub-optimal and should be changed to a Strategic Ownership model, in which CCLRC is brought under the joint ownership of the grant awarding Research Councils. To facilite this change, CCLRC should be reconstituted, as soon as practicable, as a Limited Company, to provide a similar governance structure to existing Research Council Institutes.

This model ensures a clear commitment by the Research Councils to meet the planned funding needs of CCLRC based on scrutiny of strategic and operating plans, and should provide efficiency savings. Within this framework, CCLRC should seek to fulfil a more strategic role in the provision of access to leading edge, large-scale facilities for UK researchers. Investment in new facilities should be based on long-term requirements agreed by all the different research communities.

Stage Two of the Review will now examine the issues associated with the implementation of the Strategic Ownership model, addressing in particular the implications

for the status of CCLRC and its accountability to Ministers and Parliament. Stage Two will also examine how the strategic role can be implemented, such that it is not compromised by CCLRC's role as a facilities operator.

I warmly welcome these recommendations and offer my thanks to Sir Peter Williams and the rest of the Review Board.

British Aerospace - GEC Marconi

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the meetings the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), as Secretary of State for Trade Industry, and his officials had with representatives of British Aerospace and GEC Marconi to discuss *(a)* their joint sponsorship of the Mind Zone at the Millennium Dome and *(b)* their merger. [149477]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The commitment to support the Millennium Dome by British Aerospace and GEC Marconi was announced by the previous Administration in 1996. The offer by the companies jointly to sponsor the Dome's Mind Zone was announced on 26 November 1998.

I am advised that neither my right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) nor his officials had meetings with the companies to discuss their sponsorship of the Dome.

As the Prime Minister had made clear since his statement with the French and German Heads of Government in December 1997, there was an urgent need to restructure the aerospace and defence industries in Europe to compete in world markets. The right hon. Member for Hartlepool, in his capacity as Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, and his officials discussed this issue at a number of meetings with representatives of British Aerospace and GEC during 1998.

The Government's position was at all times that it was for industry itself, not the Government, to make specific proposals for restructuring. Any resulting merger would be considered on its own merits by the relevant competition authorities.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if *(a)* the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), *(b)* officials at his Department and *(c)* representatives of British Aerospace and GEC Marconi, informed him of the joint sponsorship by British Aerospace and GEC Marconi of the Mind Zone at the Millennium Dome before he approved the merger of the two companies. [149478]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2001]: (a)* No; *(b)* No; *(c)* No.

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons he turned down the advice of the Director General of the Office of Fair Trading when reaching a decision on the merger of British Aerospace and GEC Marconi. [149481]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* The Boards of British Aerospace and GEC announced on 19 January 1999 that they had reached agreement on the principal terms of a proposed reconstruction under which Marconi Electronic Systems would be separated from GEC and merged with British Aerospace.

The civil aspects of the proposed merger were cleared by the European Commission on 25 June 1999. I considered the military aspects of the proposed merger under the merger control provisions of the Fair Trading Act 1973. The reasons for my decision to seek and subsequently to accept from BAE Systems undertakings in lieu of reference to the Competition Commission are set out in my announcements of 9 September 1999 and 28 March 2000.

Science Funding (North-west)

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to his answer of 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 652W, if he is in a position to report on the recommendations of the North-West Science and Daresbury Development group. [151284]

Ms Hewitt: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met with the North-West Science and Daresbury Development Group on 31 January to discuss their report. As a result of the meeting the Group submitted supplementary information concerning their recommendations on 16 February for his consideration. He hopes to be able to respond around the end of February.

Credit Company Blacklists

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans he has to investigate credit companies' power to blacklist individuals. [150852]

Dr. Howells: I do not have any current plans to investigate such companies. The Director General of Fair Trading has a duty under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to review and advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry about developments in the UK credit market. If he makes any recommendations, I will study them carefully.

Departmental Policies (Norwich, North)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Norwich, North constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151144]

Mr. Caborn: The Department does not maintain statistical information at constituency level.

My hon. Friend's constituents, like many others throughout Norfolk, will have benefited from my Department's Employment Rights policies which include the National Minimum Wage, Working Time Directive, Part Time Working Regulations and improved Maternity Leave.

In addition, the wards of Catton Grove, Coslany, Crome, Mile Cross and Mousehold are eligible for the Enterprise Grant Scheme.

In the East of England region, my Department's policies have contributed to growth in employment by 62,000 and a fall in unemployment by 45,539; reductions in youth employment (under 24) by 46 per cent. and long-term unemployment (over 26 weeks) by 65 per cent.

In the constituency of Norwich, North there has been a drop in unemployment by 2.7 per cent. (964 people), a reduction in youth unemployment (under 24) by 46 per cent, in line with the region as a whole and a reduction in long term unemployment (over 26 weeks) by 44 per cent.

Postal Services Act

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he has laid the draft order defining turnover for the purposes of the 10 per cent. limit on financial penalties as required by section 30 of the Postal Services Act 2000; and if he will make a statement. [151888]

Mr. Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has today laid a draft order defining turnover for the purposes of section 30 of the Postal Services Act 2000. A consultation document on this draft order was published on the DTI website www.dti.gov.uk on 19 December. The consultation came to an end on 31 January. The Department is grateful to those who responded. The policy behind the draft order has not altered but a number of minor changes have been made. The reference to "enforcement action" has been removed as it was deemed to be unnecessary. Some minor changes to annualisation in the first year have been made to minimise unfairness. Finally, the multi-year calculation has been simplified so that whole years are used rather than fractions of years. Subject to the approval of both Houses, the draft order will enable the Postal Services Commission to impose appropriate financial penalties in support of its enforcement of the new postal licensing regime.

Strategic Arms Exports Bill

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the content and timetabling of the forthcoming draft bill on strategic arms exports; and what discussions he has had with non-governmental organisations. [150970]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Full details of the Government's proposals for new export control legislation will be set out when the draft Export Control Bill is published. It is not possible at this stage to give a precise date but we hope to be in a position to publish the Bill within the next few months.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of non-governmental organisations last November to discuss issues relating to the proposed Export Control Bill, including the Government's proposals for new controls on arms trafficking and brokering. Ministers and officials have also held other meetings with NGOs to discuss these issues.

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if monitoring of the end-use of UK arms will be covered in the forthcoming draft legislation on strategic arms exports. [150971]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The Government have already taken steps to minimise the risk of UK arms exports being diverted from the stated end-use or end-user. These include new measures to strengthen the process of risk assessment at the export licensing stage. We also regularly seek additional details of proposed end-use and end-users, including through our overseas posts.

UKAEA

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will make a statement on the progress of the Quinquennial Review of the UKAEA. [151889]

Mr. Hain: In line with Cabinet Office guidance, the review is being carried out in two stages. I am now in a position to make an announcement about the outcome of Stage 1 and the basis on which work will be taken forward.

The review team recognises the progress which UKAEA has made since 1996 and commends its performance and commitment to improvement across the full range of its activities. However, it identifies a number of options for organisational change and raises fundamental issues relating to UKAEA's primary role in managing nuclear liabilities on behalf of the taxpayer and restoring the environment at the sites for which it is responsible over the next 60 years—for example about funding arrangements, the regulatory framework and the way in which it operates, waste management and the long-term availability of relevant knowledge and skills.

The Government consider it essential that nuclear liabilities should be dealt with safely, cost effectively and in a way which inspires public confidence. Significant challenges are involved and there is an absolute requirement that the public should have confidence in the arrangements in place for dealing with them. The ideas and issues raised by the review team will therefore be explored further with a view to establishing whether there is a case for changing present management arrangements. The review team will also consider what action might be taken to attract more companies into the nuclear decommissioning market and to promote competition for decommissioning contracts let by UKAEA.

As regards other UKAEA activities, Stage 2 of the review will focus on testing options for:

accelerating the commercial re-development of UKAEA's Harwell and Winfrith sites through partnership arrangements with the private sector and for further improving UKAEA's performance in property management;

the future management of the fusion programme at Culham;

the future organisation of the UKAEA Constabulary;

further improving administration of the UKAEA pension schemes, which will continue to be run from Thurso for the foreseeable future, and for securing additional work for the Thurso pensions office.

This represents a considerable work programme which will take some time to complete. Given the importance of these issues, it is essential that the correct conclusions are arrived at. UKAEA staff, Trade Unions and other interested parties will have the opportunity to contribute views as the work proceeds.

I will make a further announcement once the Stage 2 work has been completed and decisions have been taken on the review team's recommendations.

Enterprise and Investment

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the

Minister of Enterprise, Trade and Investment in the Northern Ireland Assembly about the number of *(a)* business start ups and *(b)* amount of inward investment in each parliamentary constituency in Northern Ireland since the signing of the Belfast Agreement; and if he will make a statement. [151047]

Mr. Caborn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no official discussions with the Minister for Enterprise in the Northern Ireland Assembly. Minister and officials are, however, in regular contact with colleagues in each of the devolved Administrations.

The main source of business start up information is VAT registration data. Not all businesses are VAT registered, however, in particular, if they do not have a turnover above £52,000 per annum. Taking this into account, for 1998 and 1999 the number of such start-ups with a turnover of more than £52,000 per annum in Northern Ireland is 3,685 and 3,565 respectively. Such information is not readily available by parliamentary constituency.

Ministerial Visits (Peterborough)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the Ministers in his Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151034]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Minster for Trade, visited the Peterborough constituency on 24 February 2000 when he met the local hon. Member. On 25 January 2001 he visited the North-East Cambridge constituency but did not meet the local hon. Member.

Company Relocations

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to encourage major companies to locate their sites in the North West Region. [150630]

Mr. Caborn: The Government established the Northwest Development Agency in April 1999. It has a clear objective to attract investment and encourage major companies to locate in the region.

Rolls-Royce

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what conditions were attached to the grant of £250 million to Rolls-Royce. [151149]

Mr. Alan Johnson: The Government's investment of £250 million in Rolls-Royce is not a grant, but is a repayable investment which is expected to secure a substantial real rate of return for the taxpayer as well as securing wider economic benefits for the UK.

The conditions of the investment are commercially confidential under exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Testing (Immigration Detainees)

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he plans to make to the random mandatory drug-testing programme for immigration detainees. [151893]

Mr. Boateng: Immigration detainees rarely test positive for drugs. As a result from 1 April 2001 detainees held at Her Majesty's Prison Haslar and within discrete units at Her Majesty's Prisons Lindholme and Rochester will no longer be subject to the random mandatory drug-testing programme. Other security measures to prevent the smuggling and misuse of drugs will remain unchanged. These new arrangements will not apply to detainees dispersed more widely across the prison estate and who therefore have regular contact with prisoners. The policy will be reviewed at three and six-month intervals to ensure that the low level of drug abuse in these establishments continues.

Toxicology and Safety Evaluation Studies

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made on the preparation of guidance on the conduct of regulatory toxicology and safety evaluation studies; and if he will make a statement. [151892]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have today published guidance on the conduct of regulatory toxicology and safety evaluation studies and a copy has been placed in the Library.

The guidance has been prepared by the Home Office working with the British Toxicology Society, the British Society of Toxicological Pathologists and the Department of Health and takes account of consultation with the scientific community and animal welfare and animal protection groups.

Copies of the guidance will be issued shortly to all establishments licensed under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and it will also be available on the Home Office website.

The guidance will not impact significantly on the numbers of animals used, but will ensure that all possible refinement strategies are considered in the design of these studies.

Terrorist Organisations

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional terrorist organisations he intends to proscribe, following the coming into force of the Terrorism Act 2000. [151894]

Mr. Straw: I have today laid a draft Order, under section 123(4)(a) of the Terrorism Act, recommending to Parliament that the following organisations be added to the list of proscribed organisations in Schedule 2 to the Act:

Al-Qa'ida

Egyptian Islamic Jihad

Al-Gama'at al-Islamiya

Armed Islamic Group (Groupe Islamique Armé) (GIA)

Salafist Group for Call and Combat (Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat) (GSPC)

Babbar Khalsa

International Sikh Youth Federation

Harakat Mujahideen

Jaish e Mohammed

Lashkar e Tayyaba

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE)

Hizballah External Security Organisation

Hamas-Izz al-Din al-Qassem Brigades

Palestinian Islamic Jihad—Shaqaqi

Abu Nidal Organisation

Islamic Army of Aden

Mujaheddin e Khalq

Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) (PKK)

Revolutionary Peoples' Liberation Party—Front (Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partisi—Cephesi) (DHKP-C)

Basque Homeland and Liberty (Euskadi ta Askatasuna) (ETA)

17 November Revolutionary Organisation (N17).

Under section 3(3)(a) of the Act, I may by order add an organisation to schedule 2, where I believe that it is concerned in terrorism, as defined in section 1 of the Act. I am entirely satisfied that the organisations named above are "concerned in terrorism" as set out in section 3(5) of the Act, and have, after careful consideration, decided to exercise my discretion to proscribe them. The draft Order is subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. There will therefore be a debate in both Houses on my recommendations. If approved by Parliament, the proscriptions will take effect on the day after I sign the Order. To assist consideration by both Houses, I have placed in the Libraries, the Vote Office, and the Printed Paper Office copies of a Note setting out a brief summary in respect of each organisation named in the draft Order.

The Act provides for an appeal process. After the Order comes into force, it will be open for any of the organisations so proscribed, or any person affected by their proscription, to make application to me for deproscription. If that application is refused, the Act provides for an appeal to a new independent tribunal, the Proscribed Organisations Appeal Commission, established by the Terrorism Act.

Reconviction Rates

Ms Kelly: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent research his Department has undertaken into the relationship between the prison where a sentence is served and the incidence of the individual concerned being convicted of a crime once he or she has served the original sentence. [151537]

Mr. Boateng: The latest research into reconviction rates following discharge from prison was published in chapter 9 of Prison Statistics England and Wales 1999, Cm 4805, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Since a prisoner can move between a number of prisons during his or her sentence, from the data centrally held it is not possible to establish a relationship between the prison establishments where an inmate served any part of their sentence and convictions once the original sentence has been served.

Volunteers

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the numbers of paid staff needed to train and support volunteers as part of the Government's plan to increase volunteering. [151181]

Mr. Boateng: The Government place a great deal of importance on the training and support provided to volunteers, whether this is provided by paid staff or by unpaid volunteer managers.

A major package to encourage more people to get involved in their communities was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 January. The £300 million package almost doubles the Government's commitment to the voluntary sector and will help, among other things, to develop the infrastructure of the voluntary sector, to assist community groups in deprived areas, and to fund a new National Experience Corps making use of the talents of the over-50s.

Some of this money will be used in support of paid staff who will be funded by Government through grant aid to volunteering and community organisations in support of volunteering objectives. However, there is no ready source of information on the number of paid staff who are currently, or who will in the future be, supported in this way.

CM (M693939)

Mr. Tony Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when a decision will be made in the case of CM (M693939); and for what reason there have been delays in processing the case since 26 October 2000. [150694]

Mrs. Roche: As HIV/AIDS cases involve careful consideration due to their compassionate nature, I am unable to give a definitive date for completion of this application.

Due to the fact that guidelines in dealing with HIV/AIDS cases have until recently been under review, there has been a delay in the handling of such applications. I am sorry that my hon. Friend was not made aware of such a likely delay in the handling of this application in the reply he received.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to change conditions of eligibility for asylum seekers to apply for maternity provision; [150967]

(2) in which languages advice for asylum seekers making an application for maternity benefits is published; [150963]

(3) what plans he has to change the provision afforded to asylum seekers who apply for maternity grants; [150966]

(4) what assistance is afforded to asylum seekers wishing to make an application for maternity benefits. [150962]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* In line with the maternity grant paid from the social fund to those on low incomes, the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) on 13 November 2000 introduced a maternity payment for eligible asylum seekers. The mother or father completes an application form within the time scale to qualify. The voluntary sector one-stop shops will assist asylum seekers to complete the maternity payment application form if required.

There are no plans to change the conditions of eligibility. We consider that the NASS application time scale is reasonable. This allows asylum seekers to apply for the maternity payment between one month before the estimated date of delivery and two weeks after the birth. Additionally, a payment may be made if a child was born outside the United Kingdom to a person who, on application, qualifies for NASS support and the child is three months of age or less.

Written advice on applications for the maternity payment is available from the NASS in English. The voluntary sector one-stop shops are funded by the Home Office to provide relevant advice in other languages to asylum seekers if required.

There are no plans at present to change the NASS maternity provision. However, the Government are currently reviewing the operation of the NASS voucher scheme. If serious problems are found they will be properly addressed.

Immigration Controls (Eurostar)

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in relation to his plan to introduce juxtaposed entry controls at Eurostar terminals, when the first immigration officers will be stationed in France; if the scheme requires new manpower for the Immigration Service Ports Directorate; from which areas officers will be redeployed to staff the scheme; and if he will make a statement. [151211]

Mrs. Roche *[holding answer 28 February 2001]:* We intend to introduce juxtaposed entry controls on Eurostar trains arriving from Paris, Lille and Calais-Frethun as soon as legislation will allow. The timing of the deployment of United Kingdom immigration officers will depend upon ratification by the French Parliament of the Additional Protocol to the Sangatte Protocol governing the control of international traffic through the Channel Tunnel. We understand this will now take place in early summer 2001.

The United Kingdom Immigration Service proposes to staff juxtaposed controls from within its agreed staffing allocations for 2001–2002. It will have 1,000 more operational staff, (Assistant Immigration Officers, Immigration Officers and Chief Immigration Officers) in post in May this year than it did in April 2000. Waterloo will provide the immigration officers to operate the juxtaposed controls at Paris and Lille. Controls at Calais-Frethun will be conducted by staff deployed at the Channel Tunnel site at Coquelles. We do not intend to use staff from other areas of the Home Office.

TREASURY

Working Families Tax Credit

Ms Kelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much families have benefited from the Working Families Tax Credit, by parliamentary constituency, in Northern Ireland, broken down by gender of claimant. [151002]

Dawn Primarolo: The following table provides estimates of the number of recipients of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) in each constituency at the end of August 2000, based on the postcodes as captured from the application forms.

Recipients of WFTC in each Northern Ireland constituency August 2000

	Gender of applicant		
	Female	*Male*	*All*
Belfast, East	1.4	0.2	1.5
Belfast, North	2.2	0.2	2.4
Belfast, South	1.1	0.1	1.2
Belfast, West	2.6	0.2	2.9
East Antrim	1.6	0.2	1.8
East Londonderry	2.0	0.3	2.3
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1.9	0.3	2.3
Foyle	2.4	0.4	2.8
Lagan Valley	1.5	0.2	1.7
Mid-Ulster	1.9	0.3	2.2
Newry and Armagh	2.2	0.3	2.5
North Antrim	2.0	0.3	2.4
North Down	1.2	0.2	1.4
South Antrim	1.9	0.3	2.1
South Down	2.0	0.3	2.3
Strangford	1.6	0.3	1.9
Upper Bann	2.2	0.3	2.5
West Tyrone	2.0	0.3	2.4
Unknown	0.8	0.1	0.9
All	34.4	5.0	39.4

Note:
Based on an analysis of all awards, using the 2000 Version 1 Postcode Directory supplied by the Office for National Statistics, which allocates postcodes to constituencies according to their definitions at January 2000. Cases with incomplete postcodes are allocated if the constituencies are nevertheless indicated with certainty.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will give a breakdown of all Working Families Tax Credit awards to those in *(a)* couple families showing the gender of the recipient of the payment and *(b)* couple families with children aged under one, showing the gender of the recipient of the payment. [151004]

Dawn Primarolo: In couple families the applicants receive the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) payments in their wage packets, or into accounts nominated by them, or as order books which can be cashed by either partner. It is estimated that, in the 548,000 couples receiving WFTC at the end of August 2000, 412,000 of the applicants were female and 136,000 male.

116,000 of these couples had at least one child aged under one year at the application dates of the awards. 85,000 of the applicants in these couples were female and 31,000 male.

Ms Kelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion families receiving Working Families Tax Credit are also entitled to *(a)* Housing Benefit and *(b)* Housing Benefit and Council Tax benefit. [150999]

Dawn Primarolo: Applicants for the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) are not required to supply information on Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB). Claimants for HB and CTB are however required to supply information on WFTC, and I understand from the Department of Social Security that estimates of the numbers involved are expected to be available in the coming months.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the take-up level of the Working Families Tax Credit in *(a)* Glasgow, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the United Kingdom. [151616]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the number of families in each of these areas in receipt of the Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) at August 2000 appear in the WFTC Quarterly Enquiry, a copy of which is in the Library.

Family Taxation

Ms Kelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of families with children aged three or under pay the highest rate of income tax. [150998]

Dawn Primarolo: Of families with children aged three or under it is estimated that 15 per cent. pay higher-rate tax.

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the changes to the tax system that have benefited working families since 1997. [151618]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have put in place a series of measures aimed at families with children, including: record increases in Child Benefit, with a 26 per cent. real increase in the rate for the first child since 1997; the new Children's Tax Credit, worth up to £442 a year for around 5 million families from April 2001; the introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit in October 1999, to make work pay for low and middle income working families with children.

These measures, together with the new 10p income tax band, the cut in the basic rate of income tax to 22p and reforms to National Insurance Contributions, mean that by April this year the tax burden on the typical family will be at its lowest level since 1972.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

People's Peers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council what the value was of the interview expenses of applicants for a people's peerage; and how many applicants declined to be reimbursed. [151201]

Mrs. Beckett: All nominees invited for interview will be offered full reimbursement for expenses they incur, although overall costs are not available yet.

I understand, however, that no nominee has stated that he or she will decline reimbursement.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy for the application forms of applicants for a people's peerage in future rounds to be deposited in the Library. [151218]

Mrs. Beckett: No. People should be able to make an application to the Appointments Commission in confidence.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if those selected as people's peers are expected to be broadly representative of the social class and educational background of the population of the United Kingdom. [151203]

Mrs. Beckett: The Government hope that the new method of selecting non-political peers will increase the extent to which the House of Lords is representative of the country as a whole.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy to require the House of Lords Appointments Commission to consider and invite for interview applicants for a people's peerage who are or were engaged in a manual occupation. [151204]

Mrs. Beckett: No. The Appointments Commission should make its nominations on the overall criteria set out in its application process.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy to require the House of Lords Appointments Commission to request details from applicants for a people's peerage of how many domestic properties they own. [151217]

Mrs. Beckett: No.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy to require the House of Lords Appointments Commission to include in its recommendations for people's peerages, in the next round of applications, individuals who live in council or social housing. [151219]

Mrs. Beckett: No.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the first part of the postcodes of *(a)* applicants for a people's peerage and *(b)* those invited to interview. [151202]

Mrs. Beckett: The Appointments Commission made it clear to applicants that their applications would be treated in confidence.

However, the Commission's website shows the following regional breakdown of applications:

Region	*Percentage of applicants*	*Percentage of population*
South West	9	8
South East	18	14
East Anglia	6	9
London	27	12
East Midlands	6	7
West Midlands	6	9
Wales	4	5
North West	9	12
Yorkshire	4	8
North East	3	4
Scotland	5	9
Northern Ireland	2	3
Other	1	—

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the President of the Council if she will make it her policy to require the House of Lords Appointments Commission to give to rejected applicants for the people's peerage the reasons for their rejection if so requested. [151200]

Mrs. Beckett: No. As stated in the information pack, the Commission does not undertake to provide reasons as to why a nomination has been unsuccessful but it has made clear that nominations will be assessed fairly and consistently against its stated criteria.

Ministerial Visits (Peterborough)

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the President of the Council if she will list the Ministers in her Department who visited any of the constituencies which are in the Peterborough Unitary Authority area between 1 January 2000 and 14 February 2001, indicating in each case *(a)* the date of the visit, *(b)* the constituencies included in the visit and *(c)* if the local hon. Member met the Minister. [151032]

Mrs. Beckett *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The information requested is as follows.

I have made no such visits to the Unitary Authority.

My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office: *(a)* undertook two engagements on Monday 5 February 2001 to constituencies within the Peterborough Unitary Authority. The MPs for both these constituencies were forewarned; *(b)* undertook one political engagement to the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton) and one official engagement to the constituency of the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss); *(c)* met my hon. Friend the Member for Peterborough (Mrs. Brinton).

SCOTLAND

Eurozone

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent advice she has given to the Prime Minister regarding the readiness of the Scottish economy for the entry into the eurozone. [145644]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular discussions with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on a wide range of issues. The determining factor underpinning any Government decision is whether the economic case for the UK joining the single currency is clear and unambiguous. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has clearly set out the Five Economic Tests, which must be met before any decision to join can be taken. The Government will make another assessment of the Five Economic Tests early in the next Parliament. The Five Tests will assess the economic case for entry of the whole of the UK, including Scotland.

Vehicle Fuel Duties

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the impact of the vehicle fuel duties on the rural economy in Scotland. [145640]

Mrs. Liddell: Vehicle fuel duty is only one of many factors that have an impact on Scotland's rural economy and needs to be seen in the context of overall UK fiscal policy. The measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-Budget report to reduce fuel duties for cleaner fuels and vehicle excise duty will benefit all Scottish motorists and bring significant financial benefits to Scotland's economy. In particular, the abolition of Vehicle Excise Duty for Tractors and agricultural vehicles will benefit up to 20,000 agricultural producers in Scotland.

Independent research commissioned by my Department has shown that the level of taxation paid by private motorists in Scotland is lower than in other European countries such as Netherlands, Finland, Ireland and Portugal. The average Scottish driver pays £1,000 a year less than in Denmark.

Minimum Income Guarantee

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many pensioners in Glasgow, Pollok are now receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee. [147870]

Mr. Foulkes: In August 2000, there were around 3,400 recipients of the Minimum Income Guarantee in Glasgow, Pollok.

Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were serving a life prison sentence for murder in Scotland on 1 February. [150448]

Mrs. Liddell: This is a devolved mater and is therefore the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 1 March 2001

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Adult Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Meale: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what plans the Government have to improve adult literacy and numeracy skills in England. [152260]

Mr. Blunkett: The standard of literacy and numeracy skills in England has been too poor for too long. Claus Moser's report found that up to 7 million adults in England have weak literacy and numeracy skills. This is disastrous for the individuals concerned, weakens business competitiveness and places a huge burden on society.

The Government will shortly launch their strategy to tackle this problem. Our priority is to improve the skills of those groups where literacy and numeracy needs are greatest and where we can make most impact. We will spend £1.5 billion over the next three years and focus the work of all relevant organisations on ensuring that 750,000 adults improve their literacy and numeracy by 2004, and that we reach the literacy and numeracy levels of our international competitors.

Our strategy will deliver radical quality improvements. New national standards, a common core curriculum and National Tests will make sure that best teaching and learning practice is adopted across the country. And we are training teachers, establishing a research centre and introducing more rigorous national inspections so that standards remain high.

The Government themselves will be setting an example with my Department working with other Government Departments and agencies such as the MOD and the Prison Service to bring about radical improvements in standards of adult skills.

Our literacy and numeracy strategy will mark a decisive step in addressing this country's poor literacy and numeracy skill levels and will give adults the opportunity to acquire the skills they need to participate in modern society.

New Deal

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment how many young people have found employment through the New Deal in *(a)* the north-west region and *(b)* Lancashire. [150650]

Ms Jowell: Figures to the end of November 2000 show that the following numbers of young people have found employment through New Deal in the north-west region and Lancashire:

	North-west region	*Lancashire*
Total jobs	39,666	5,171
of which are sustained	30,132	3,894
Other	9,534	1,277

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Employment what his most recent estimate is of the take up of the New Deal for *(a)* young people, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* people with disabilities and *(d)* older people in Copeland; and if he will make a statement on its operation. [150684]

Ms Jowell *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* Latest figures, to the end of November 2000, for Copeland parliamentary constituency show the following take-up of the New Deal:

	Numbers starting New Deal
New Deal for Young People	1,375
New Deal for Lone Parents	234
New Deal for 25+	1,103

Statistics on New Deal for People with Disabilities are not available at constituency level. To date the New Deal for Disabled People has operated only in a limited number of locations, not including Copeland. 24 innovative schemes have been testing new ways of helping disabled people into work and 12 Personal Adviser pilots have helped disabled people to overcome their particular barriers to work.

The New Deal for Disabled People will be extended on a national basis, with services for disabled clients beginning from July 2001.

The approach which underpins the New Deal programmes is one which links equality of opportunity and investment in skills to economic prosperity and labour market expansion.

ENVIRONMENT, TRANSPORT AND THE REGIONS

Departmental IT Projects

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he will list the IT projects currently undertaken in his Department; and if he will state the *(a)* expected completion date and *(b)* cost of each project. [151501]

Ms Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The tables list IT projects currently undertaken within DETR(C) and its agencies where costs are estimated to be equal to or exceed £50,000.

Small projects where the total cost falls below £50,000 have not been listed as the collection of information and collation of these projects could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

DETR IT projects where costs are equal to or greater than £50,000

Projects	*Total forecast costs to completion (£)*	*Projected completion date*
DETR(C)		
Data Communications Systems	2,230,000	March 2001
Replacement PCs	204,000	March 2001
High Speed LANS	762,000	March 2001
Second GSI Gateway	33,000	March 2001
Bristol HQ Infrastructure	293,000	March 2001
Netware 5	365,000	March 2001
Replacement ETHOS Servers	225,000	March 2001
TAN21—a programme of business change involving the redesign of the business processes and the modernisation of IT/IS systems	7,977,000	September 2001
Computerised Local Authority Statistics System	245,000	March 2001
DETR Payroll Procurement Project	480,000	September 2001
The Optimum Pensions System	943,000	March 2002
Maps on Tap	174,000	June 2001
Electronic Procurement Stages 2 and 3	4,331,000	March 2003
Marine Incident Database—Phase 2	241,000	April 2001
DETR Electronic Briefing System	1,340,000	February 2002
DOC Project Management System	133,000	October 2001
Videoconferencing System	64,000	April 2001
Climate Change Levy	113,000	March 2001
Research Management Database—Phase 1	40,000	June 2001
Electronic Document and Record Management—Scoping Study	40,000	May 2001
RIMNET Scoping Study	200,000	May 2001
Next Generation Accounting System (procurement under way)	—	—

[1] Information commercially sensitive.

Note:

The information above relates to projects that have been approved and are still running. It should be noted that for some projects the costs only represent those related to scoping studies. The final cost of these projects is subject to the outcome of the scoping study and ITSD and BISD approval. It is therefore not possible to include total project costs for these projects.

DETR IT projects where costs are equal to or greater than £50,000

Projects	*Estimated total external project costs to completion (£)*	*Projected completion date*
Highways Agency		
Computer Aided Facilities Management (CAFM)	212,000	July 2001
Migration to MS Outlook and Office 2000	1,639,000	May 2002
Electronic Document Management (EDMS)	350,000	March 2004
Environmental Database	375,000	February 2002
Extranet Project (Agent Access)	621,000	February 2001
Geotechnical Data Management System (GDMS)	355,000	December 2002
HA Corporate Intranet/Extranet Development	1,199,000	February 2002
Highways Agency Management Information System (HAMIS)	3,100,00	March 2001
Highways Agency Pavement Management System (HAPMS)	11,238,000	December 2003
HA Supplier Database and Tender Support	175,000	August 2001
Knowledge Management Pilot	104,000	July 2001
Part 1 Claims Database	80,000	April 2001
Remote Access—Service Improvements	301,000	July 2001
Strategy for Financial Management (SFM)[1]	25,000,000 to 30,000,000	2004
Structures Management Information System (SMIS)	1,736,400	March 2002
Total (SFM minimum)	46,485,400	—
Total (SFM maximum)	51,485,400	—

[1] The Agency also classifies the implementation of resource accounting and budgeting as an IT project. It is currently estimated to cost £25–30 million over a 10 year period ending in 2004.

Note:

The information above relates to projects that have been approved and are still running. It should be noted that for some projects the costs only represent those related to scoping studies. The final cost of these projects is subject to the outcome of the scoping study and ITSD and BISD approval. It is therefore not possible to include total project costs for these projects.

DETR IT projects where costs are equal to or greater than £50,000

Projects	*Total forecast costs to completion (£)*	*Projected completion date*
Rent Service Agency		
VICTER	3,000,000	Pilot test May 2001
Planning Inspectorate Agency		
Inspector Scheduling	844,400	September 2001
Human Resource Information	409,811	March 2001
Planning Portal Programme	3,000,000	April 2002
Annual Refreshment of IT Hardware	336,500	April 2001

DETR IT projects where costs are equal to or greater than £50,000

Projects	*Total forecast costs to completion (£)*	*Projected completion date*
Marine and Coastguard Agency		
Incident Management System	2,000,000	End 2002
Search and Rescue Information System	80,000	Mid 2001
Driving Standards Agency		
Road Safety Information System	650,000	January 2002
Internet Booking of Practical Tests	500,000	Early 2002
Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency		
Automated Number Plate Reader	1,174,000	June 2001
Casework Project	8,734,000	November 2001
Replacement/Modernisation OCR data capture equipment	2,882,000	June 2002
Financial System (procurement under way)	[1]—	April 2002
IT Infrastructure Modernisation	2,697,000	March 2002
New Vehicle Registration Mark Format	1,802,000	September 2001
Replacement IT Services Contract (procurement under way)	[1]—	September 2002
Personnel Systems Enhancements	372,000	November 2001
Smart Tachograph Cards	8,155,000	February 2003
Web Vault	550,000	June 2001
Changes to Vehicle Taxation System (Graduated VED—phase 2)	25,303,000	September 2001

[1] Information commercially sensitive.

Note:
The information above relates to projects that have been approved and are still running. It should be noted that for some projects the costs only represent those related to scoping studies. The final cost of these projects is subject to the outcome of the scoping study and ITSD and BISD approval. It is therefore not possible to include total project costs for these projects.

DETR IT projects where costs are equal to or greater than £50,000

Projects	*Estimated operating cost per annum (£)*	*Contract due to commence*
Vehicle Inspectorate Agency		
MOT Computerisation	22,000,000	May 2002
Replacement IT Services Contract (procurement under way)	[1]—	—

[1] Information commercially sensitive

Note:
The information above relates to projects that have been approved and are still running. It should be noted that for some projects the costs only represent those related to scoping studies. The final cost of these projects is subject to the outcome of the scoping study and ITSD and BISD approval. It is therefore not possible to include total project costs for these projects.

Local Transport Plans

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if local authorities can bid for additional funding to that in their full local transport plan in their first annual progress reports for *(a)* major road schemes, *(b)* major public transport schemes and *(c)* integrated transport packages. [151556]

Mr. Hill: Authorities may bid for additional major road, public transport or integrated transport schemes as part of the process of submitting their first annual progress reports (APRs) on their local transport plans. In certain circumstances, authorities will also be able to bid for additional funding for smaller-scale integrated transport schemes. Details will be provided in the guidance on APRs that we will issue to authorities shortly.

Planning Appeals

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what representations he has received on reform of the planning appeals process contained in DETR circular 05/200 relating to rights of third parties to see and comment on the submissions of others made to the Planning Inspectorate. [151607]

Ms Beverley Hughes: Five representations have been received.

Following public consultation streamlined statutory procedures for handling planning appeals—on which guidance is given in DETR Circular 5/2000—were introduced last year. These require third parties to submit their comments or statements of case to the Secretary of State on the same timescale as that for local planning authorities and appellants. Thus third parties have the opportunity at both planning application stage and at planning appeal stage to comment on the proposed development.

The operation of the new procedures is being monitored and we shall review them in the light of experience, taking account of representations received.

Waste Recycling

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what percentage of waste was recycled in *(a)* Great Britain and *(b)* each local authority in 2000. [151299]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* Recycling levels in Scotland are a matter for the Secretary of State for Scotland. The Department collects information on waste management and recycling from local authorities in England and Wales on an annual basis through the Municipal Waste Management Survey. National and regional level information for the financial year 1998–99 was published in the Municipal Waste Management 1998–99 Bulletin in September 2000. We expect to publish provisional results for 1999–2000 in early April 2001 and a more detailed analysis later in the year. We intend to publish figures showing the

percentage of household waste recycled by individual local authorities in England during the financial year 1998–99 shortly in the "Guidance on Municipal Waste Management Strategies".

Telecommunications Masts

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what progress has been made following the closure of consultation on the regulation of mobile telecommunications masts; and if he will make a statement. [151612]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The consultation exercise seeking views on possible changes to the planning laws relating to mobile phone masts and associated guidance ended on 31 October 2000. The Department is currently analysing the responses. We shall announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Home Energy Efficiency

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions how many grants have been awarded under the home energy efficiency scheme in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne since 2000–01; and what was *(a)* the total and *(b)* the average value of such grants. [151835]

Mr. Meacher: The number of grants and their total value and average value for the City of Newcastle upon Tyne for 2000–01 is as shown.

Period	*Number of grants*	*Average value of grant (£)*	*Total value of grant (£)*
April-May 2000[1]	597	175	104,523
June 2000-February 2001	1,455	[2]439	638,102
March 2001[3]	168	[2]297	44,189
Total for 2000–01	2,220	354	786,814

[1] The previous HEES scheme (which started in 1991) continued to run for the first two months of 2000–01. Only one 'main' measure was offered up to a grant limit of £315.

[2] The average value of grant has increased substantially in the current year following the launch of the new Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (HEES) for England on 1 June 2000. It replaced the more basic scheme that operated since 1991. HEES provides packages of insulation and heating measures, linked to the condition of the property and the type of householder. The grant maximum increased from £315 up to £2,000.

[3] Projection based on orders placed with installers.

Halewick Lane Waste Transfer Station

Mr. Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the inspector's report on the public inquiry into the Halewick Lane waste transfer station at Sompting, West Sussex. [151677]

Ms Beverley Hughes: The Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions will publish the inspector's report when he determines the planning application for a waste management centre at Halewick Lane, Sompting, West Sussex. This decision will be issued as soon as possible.

Bog Sites

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if he intends to agree the request for the raised bog sites at *(a)* Hatfield Moor, *(b)* Thorne Moor, *(c)* Bolton Fell Moor, *(d)* Solway Moor and *(e)* Wedholme Flow to be designated special areas of conservation under the habitats and species directive. [151382]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: In August 2000, English Nature began public consultations on proposals for new and amended Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Those proposals included new SACs at Bolton Fell Moss, Solway Moss and Hatfield Moor, boundary amendments to the existing candidate SACs at Thorne Moor and South Solway Mosses, plus the addition of a new qualifying interest on the site encompassing Wedholme Flow. English Nature is currently considering the scientific justification for each new or amended site. The Government will consider their recommendations as soon as they are made.

GM Sugarbeet

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions if the 24 GM sugarbeet trials scheduled for this year involve expenditure by the Government. [151543]

Mr. Meacher: There will be up to 26 fields of beet taking part in the Farm Scale Evaluations of herbicide tolerant GM crops this spring. As was the case last year, the Government will pay only for the ecological studies associated with the evaluations. It is expected that, for the beet sites, this will cost approximately £445,000 this year.

Local Government Finance

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions when he will publish the analysis of responses to the local government finance Green Paper. [152126]

Ms Armstrong: An analysis of the 16,321 responses we received will be posted on the DETR website at www.local.detr.gov.uk/greenpap/analysis/index.htm on Monday 5 March. Copies of the analysis will also be placed in the Library.

We were very pleased with the excellent response to consultation. We are carefully considering the responses and will publish our decisions in a White Paper later this year.

SSSIs

Angela Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Environment, Transport and the Regions what measures he is taking to ensure payments for management agreements on sites of special scientific interest are directed towards conservation and enhancement of the special features of these sites. [152127]

Mr. Robert Ainsworth: Tomorrow, together with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, we shall be issuing new guidance on management agreement payments in England to replace

that in DOE/MAFF Circular 4/83. English Nature will use the guidance to determine the amount of payment under a management agreement.

The guidance reflects the substantially strengthened powers to protect and manage SSSIs introduced by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. It will emphasise the future priority for agreements to be directed at positive management designed to bring the special features of sites into favourable condition. It will also ensure that agreements are in line with the European Rural Development Regulation.

Copies of the Guidelines will be freely available and will be placed in the House Libraries.

DEFENCE

Defence Secondary Care Agency Unit (Organ Parts)

Mr. Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 523W, on organ parts, if he will list the specimens held; and for what purposes they are kept. [150814]

Dr. Moonie: Pursuant to my answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 523W, further investigation has revealed that the Defence Secondary Care Agency holds approximately 60 pathological specimens relating to 26 patients, rather than "26 specimens". These specimens are all held at the Royal Hospital Haslar and for each, patient consent has been given for organ retention for both diagnostic and medical research purposes. In total there are 14 organs and approximately 46 tissue samples:

	Number
Brain	4
Heart	0
Lungs	4
Other organs[1]	5
Body Parts	0
Stillbirths or pre-viable foetuses	1
Tissues[2]	46
Total	60

[1] Not include above
[2] Approximate
Note:
The data are recorded in the format provided to the Chief Medical Officer for his report in 2000 entitled "Retention of Organs at Post-Mortem: Census of Hospitals in England".
Definition of terms:
Tissues: samples of organs or body parts
Organs: whole organs
Body parts: limbs, heads or the entire contents of either the thorax or abdomen.

Armed Forces (Death in Service)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women serving in (i) the Army, (ii) the Royal Navy and (iii) the Royal Air Force have died in active service in each month over the past 10 years; and how many of those listed were married at the time of death. [151011]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* The term "active service" is used wildly in connection with the Services, with various meanings in different contexts. However the Service Discipline Act contains specific definitions for the purposes of that legislation. In order to avoid a more restrictive interpretation than may be intended by the question, we set out figures based on a wide range of deaths on duty. The circumstances covered by the figures are explained more fully immediately after the table.

Between 1 January 1991 and 31 December 2000 there have been 394 service personnel who have died of injuries sustained on duty. Out of this total, 132 were married at the time of death. The table provides details of these deaths for each service:

Deaths of armed forces personnel in on duty due to injury: 1991 to 2000

	Navy deaths	*Navy married*	*Army total*	*Army married*	*RAF total*	*RAF married*	*Tri-service total*	*Tri-service married*
1991	5	3	64	23	14	1	83	27
1992	3	2	35	9	9	2	47	13
1993	13	6	22	5	11	3	46	14
1994	5	2	39	19	9	2	53	23
1995	7	1	20	8	12	5	39	14
1996	3	2	12	5	4	1	19	8
1997	5	2	8	2	3	0	16	4
1998	4	1	30	7	6	2	40	10
1999	2	1	23	8	6	0	31	9
2000	4	1	15	8	1	1	20	10

Note:
Deaths on duty are defined as those personnel who have died as a result of injuries categorised as: Battle wounds or injuries; injuries inflicted internationally during peacekeeping and similar operations (e.g. Kosovo and Northern Ireland); injuries sustained from terrorist activity, and accidental injuries sustained while on duty.

Royal Ordnance

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the terrorist threat to the Royal Ordnance sites at *(a)* Bridgwater, *(b)* Chorley, *(c)* Glascoed, *(d)* Nottingham and *(e)* Radway Green; and if he will make a statement. [151589]

Dr. Moonie: A comprehensive assessment of the threat to security at the Royal Ordnance sites was undertaken. It is not the practice to discuss threat assessments publicly for reasons of national security, but the threat assessment was taken fully into account in reaching the decision to withdraw Ministry of Defence police officers from Royal Ordnance sites.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost per annum to Royal Ordnance is of employing Ministry of Defence Police at *(a)* Bridgwater, *(b)* Chorley, *(c)* Glascoed, *(d)* Nottingham and *(e)* Radway Green; and if he will make a statement. [151590]

Dr. Moonie: I am withholding details of the sums paid by Royal Ordnance to the Ministry of Defence for the services of the MOD police under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information as they are a matter of commercial confidentiality.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Ministry of Defence Police are deployed at the Royal Ordnance sites in *(a)* Bridgwater, *(b)* Chorley, *(c)* Glascoed, *(d)* Nottingham and *(e)* Radway Green; what plans there are to withdraw cover and on what dates; and if he will make a statement. [151591]

Dr. Moonie: There are 15 Ministry of Defence police (MDP) posts complemented at each of the five RO sites. MDP officers will be withdrawn from RO Bridgwater, Chorley, Glascoed and Radway Green on 31 May 2001. MDP officers will be withdrawn from RO Nottingham when the MOD weapons have been removed from the Pattern Room, which is currently expected to take place in February 2002.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the proposed withdrawal of Ministry of Defence police at Royal Ordnance sites will result in *(a)* compulsory and *(b)* voluntary redundancies within the Ministry of Defence police; and if he will make a statement. [151592]

Dr. Moonie: It is very unlikely that the withdrawal of the Ministry of Defence police (MDP) from the five RO sites will lead to any compulsory redundancies, unless officers substantiate a case for a Limited Mobility Waiver, and there are no other employment opportunities with the MDP in the local area. We anticipate that all will be offered alternative postings.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what powers private security companies will have to *(a)* patrol beyond perimeters and *(b)* carry weaponry at Royal Ordnance sites once Ministry of Defence police protection is withdrawn; and if he will make a statement. [151593]

Dr. Moonie: Once Ministry of Defence police protection is withdrawn, the deployment of company guards will be the responsibility of the Royal Ordnance. The guards will not have constabulary powers.

Private security company guards will not be armed. Section 54 of the Firearms Act 1968 limits the authority to carry firearms on duty to Crown Servants (which includes Service personnel and the Ministry of Defence police). The Firearms Act Amendment 1997 lists pistols as prohibited items, the carriage of which requires a personal licence issued by the local Chief Constable; no such licences are issued to private security companies. Home Department police will provide an armed response force, as required, at the RO sites.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what obligations service units have to implement Child Support Agency instructions for attachment of earnings in relation to Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force personnel. [149480]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 8 February 2001]:* Under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations, the Ministry of Defence will, at the request of the Child Support Agency, make appropriate deductions from pay to meet the maintenance obligations of Service personnel. Deductions are made in full, except in less than 1 per cent. of cases where this would breach minimum rates of pay set in Ministry of Defence legislation.

Operation Palliser

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many members of the armed forces deployed on Operation Palliser are in a medically downgraded category; what percentage of forces deployed on Operation Palliser this represents; and if he will make a statement; [147562]

(2) how many members of the armed forces who serviced on Operation Palliser are categorised as medically downgraded; and if he will make a statement. [148377]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 2 February 2001]:* Some 4,500 armed forces personnel deployed to Sierra Leone on Operation Palliser. It is not possible to identify, from the information currently available, the number of Royal Navy personnel who deployed on any operation to Sierra Leone who are currently medically downgraded. However, of the approximate 2,100 Army and RAF personnel who deployed to Sierra Leone at the time of Operation Palliser, 54 are currently medically downgraded. This represents 2.5 per cent. of the Army/RAF personnel who deployed.

Far East Prisoners of War

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many widows of former Japanese prisoners of war have claimed their compensation entitlement. [150627]

Mr. Bayley: I have been asked to reply.

The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available as at 19 February shows that 8,272 claims under the ex-gratia payments scheme had been received from widows and widowers of deceased ex-far east prisoners of war.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Tanzania

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to reassess her aid programme to Tanzania following recent unrest in Zanzibar. [151588]

Clare Short: The Government of Tanzania, as part of their qualification for HIPC debt relief, are pursuing a broad-based national poverty reduction strategy and are in receipt of UK development assistance. We do not believe that the poor of Tanzania should suffer because of the abuse of human rights in Zambia. However, Her Majesty's Government have made clear to the Government of Tanzania UK concerns following the recent unrest in

Zanzibar. Sir John Vereker recently visited Dar es Salaam and discussed these concerns directly with President Mkapa.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her EU counterparts regarding EU funding for aid programmes in Tanzania since the Zanzibar elections in 2000. [151587]

Clare Short: There have been no high-level discussions related to EU development assistance to Tanzania since the national elections last November although I have discussed the situation with my Utstein group colleagues.

EU development assistance to Tanzania is under review following the conclusion of the Cotonou agreement last year.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the projects her Department supports in Tanzania. [151586]

Clare Short: Our development assistance to Tanzania last year was £65 million. This included £40 million to support pro-poor sectors of the national budget and reward the maintenance of continued macro economic stability. We are also funding projects in health, education, improved public sector management and public sector reform. In addition, we are undertaking initiatives to strengthen civil society and encourage pro-poor growth and private sector development.

Afghanistan

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. [151585]

Clare Short: Afghanistan is suffering its worst drought in 30 years, which has combined with continuing conflict to lead to a dramatic deterioration in the humanitarian situation. At least 12 million people are affected, 3–4 million of them seriously, and the number of displaced Afghans seeking relief from drought and conflict is now over 500,000. Winter weather conditions are reported to be severe, and a shortage of food, shelter and clothing has led to an increase in mortality rates.

We remain extremely concerned about the situation in Afghanistan. This financial year, DFID has provided over £7.5 million of humanitarian assistance to Afghans through UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs. As well as drought relief assistance, this includes a regular programme of longer-term humanitarian assistance to the Afghan population—both in Afghanistan and to Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries.

In addition, due to the severity of conditions in Afghanistan, DFID has recently agreed a further £3 million for the provision of drought relief and emergency relief goods to displaced people. This will be channelled through UN agencies and the Red Cross.

Sub-Saharan Africa (School Fees)

Mr. Hilary Benn: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the extent of fees being charged to pupils attending schools in countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. [151665]

Clare Short: We believe that primary education should be free and that no child should be denied access to a basic education because the costs, direct or indirect, cannot be met by the household. School fees are an example of a direct cost, but there may be indirect charges for books, uniforms and exams which can make education unaffordable to many.

The equitable financing of education is a key issue for achieving universal primary education by 2015. Accordingly, assessments are made by DFID at country level of the extent to which fees or indirect costs are charged to primary school pupils. Support for the planned transition to free primary education is a priority for us. We have seen some progress. In Zambia, the Government have recently announced the abolition of fees for primary school children, including those for examination entry. Tanzania has committed to abolishing primary school fees by 2001, but there are still significant challenges. In Malawi, for example, primary schooling is nominally free but there are still hidden costs which need to be addressed. In Kenya parents do not pay primary school fees, but instead must pay for books, school levy, uniforms and examination fees.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Departmental Policies (Tooting)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will set out with statistical information relating as directly as possible to the Tooting parliamentary constituency, the effect of his Department's policies and actions since 1 May 1997. [149867]

Mr. Caborn: The parliamentary constituency of Tooting, Wandsworth has benefited from a range of initiatives since 1 May 1997. Direct business advice and support to small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has been provided by the DTI through core programmes and the Business Links. While my Department does not collect detailed statistical information on a constituency basis, over 5,800 requests for advice, information and support from SMEs in Tooting, Wandsworth have been handled by the Business Links since May 1997. During the same period, grants totalling over £300,000 have been awarded to SMEs for innovation and technology development under the Smart scheme.

United Kingdom Accreditation Service

Mr. Alan Keen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent consideration he has given to the accreditation and the status of the United Kingdom Accreditation Service; and if he will make a statement. [151629]

Mr. Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 February 2001]:* During the course of 2000, my noble Friend the Minister for Science reviewed the Department's existing policy on accreditation. He decided to re-confirm the existing policy of recognition for the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) as the sole national body for the accreditation, against the recognised international standards, of testing and calibration laboratories and certification and inspection bodies. He confirmed the terms of the memorandum of understanding which my Department, on behalf of the Government as a whole, has

with UKAS and which sets out the activities for which UKAS is recognised along with a number of rights and obligations on both parties.

While my noble Friend concluded that no major structural changes to the UK accreditation system were desirable, he did agree that there would be benefit in a well-targeted, UKAS-driven publicity campaign to raise the profile of UKAS accredited conformity assessment to ensure that the benefits of using UKAS accredited conformity assessment services are properly understood.

Accreditation by UKAS ensures that conformity assessment bodies have been independently assessed to agreed international standards of competence and impartiality by a body which is itself subject to regular assessment and to oversight by Government. For these reasons, while there is no legal requirement for the providers of conformity assessment services to be accredited, the Government recommend the use of UKAS accredited conformity assessment wherever this is an option. The Government also advise purchasers to look for the National Accreditation Marks, which UKAS and UKAS accredited organisations are able to use under a licensing agreement with my Department, as a sign of Government recognition.

My Department and a number of other Government Departments are therefore supporting the UKAS Accreditation Awareness Campaign which was launched by my noble Friend on 27 November 2000. The campaign is expected to run for the next 18 months and is aimed at increasing the understanding of accreditation within Government itself and, through a series of briefings aimed at business support agencies, within the business community in general and SMEs in particular.

Steel Industry

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations he has received concerning the decision by Corus to cut jobs and close plants in the UK; what estimate his Department has made of the effect on local employment that the closures will have; and what measures he is taking to support the steel industry in the UK. [151673]

Mr. Alan Johnson: I have received representations from a variety of sources, including from many Members of Parliament, trade unions and members of the public about the implications of Corus's announcement on 1 February.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has urged Corus to reconsider its decision and pressed the company to engage in a constructive dialogue to identify a better way forward. I am pleased to say that Corus is now talking to the trade unions about their plans.

If Corus proceed with the job cuts announced on 1 February then the Government and the National Assembly for Wales will not walk away from the innocent victims. We are assessing the possible consequences on a contingency basis and will provide help to any individual affected and to the communities in which they live. This will include new job opportunities, retraining and economic regeneration.

The steel industry is a vital part of UK manufacturing and the Government will continue to work closely with all parts of the industry to help ensure its future competitiveness. We and the National Assembly for Wales stand ready to work alongside Corus, other steel companies and the trade unions to identify a way forward that builds on the strengths of the industry and secures its long-term future in the UK.

Nuclear Industry

Mr. Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many withdrawals of nuclear materials from safeguards applied under the tripartite UK-Euratom-IAEA Voluntary Safeguards Agreement there have been since 1 February 2000; and if he will indicate the number which were permanent. [151600]

Ms Hewitt: Information on advance notifications of withdrawals from safeguards made since the start of 2000 is contained in the following table. Data are shown in the same format as in the paper provided on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, column 1094W. The withdrawals involved only very small quantities of material to be used for analytical purposes and are all regarded as permanent. Annual updates of information on withdrawals in future years will be made available on the non-proliferation section of the DTI website www.dti.gov.uk/non-proliferation.

Summary of notifications of withdrawals from safeguards (January 2000 to February 2001)

Number of withdrawal notifications (by type of nuclear material involved[1])	*Reason for withdrawal*
Two notifications involving plutonium (Pu), mg quantities One notification involving depleted natural and low enriched uranium (DNLEU), mg quantities Three notifications involving thorium (Th), mg quantities	Material to be used for analytical purposes (eg samples, standards/tracers and/or in instrument calibration)[2] (from NPL Teddington)

[1] The tabulated information covers advance notifications of withdrawal approved by DTI and which resulted in the eventual withdrawal of nuclear material from safeguards.

[2] There are no facilities outside safeguards which manufacture material in such quantities and forms, and defence establishment requirements for these specialist materials have therefore been met by supply from civil organisations.

British Association for Shooting and Conservation

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to determine the accuracy of the annual returns made in each of the last six years by the British Association for Shooting and Conservation Ltd., Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 Registration No. 28488 R. [151267]

Ms Hewitt: This is a matter for the Chief Executive of Companies House. I have asked him to reply direct to the hon. Gentleman.

Letter from J. S. Holden to Mr. Roy Beggs, dated 1 March 2001:

I have been asked to reply to your recently tabled Parliamentary Question to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry in respect of Companies House Executive Agency.

The British Association for Shooting and Conservation Ltd is an industrial and provident society, and therefore is not required by law to file annual return and accounts with Companies House but instead with The Registry of Friendly Societies. The only entry with Companies House is on the index of names as required by the legislation.

The Registry of Friendly Societies, 25 The North Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HS, is the government department which has responsibility under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts for the registration of industrial and provident societies.

Credit Company Blacklists

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions he has had with the Lord Chancellor about re-examining the role of the courts in relation to the black-listing of individuals by credit companies. [150853]

Ms Hewitt: I have not had any discussion with my right hon. and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor.

Serco Contracts

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the contracts that exist between Serco and the Department, its executive agencies and associated public bodies; and if he will list those which have existed in the last three years. [151346]

Ms Hewitt: The Department has a contract with NPL Management Ltd., a wholly owned subsidiary of Serco, to operate the National Physical Laboratory. Serco is also a partner in Laser (Teddington II) Ltd., the consortium who will be providing serviced accommodation for the National Physical Laboratory, under a PFI arrangement.

Information on contracts with suppliers is not held centrally, and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

I have asked the Chief Executives of our Executive Agencies and associated public bodies to reply separately to this question.

Ceramic Products Imports

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will undertake an inquiry into the practice of companies importing manufactured ceramic products from outside the EU, decorating such products and adding to them a made in England back stamp; and if he will make a statement. [151544]

Ms Hewitt: It is already a criminal offence under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 for a person in the course of a trade or business to apply false or misleading statements to goods, including statements about the origin of those goods. For the purposes of the Act goods are deemed to have been manufactured or produced in the country in which they last underwent a treatment or process resulting in a substantial change. The Act is enforced by the local authorities' trading standards service and any instances of false or misleading back-stamping should be brought to their attention.

Combined Heat and Power Stations

Mr. Illsley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when he will announce his decisions on the proposals by Dalkia Services plc to build combined heat and power stations at the Zeneca Agrochemicals works at Huddersfield and the AstraZeneca works at Macclesfield. [152259]

Mr. Hain: I have today given clearance under section 14(1) of the Energy Act 1976 to Dalkia Utilities Services plc to build a 20 megawatt gas-fired combined heat and power station at the Zeneca Agrochemicals works at Huddersfield and a 13 megawatt gas-fired combined heat and power station at the AstraZeneca works at Macclesfield.

Combined heat and power plants are designed to produce both electricity and usable heat. They have environmental benefits due to their high levels of energy efficiency.

The decision demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to promote CHP, wherever practicable, and our commitment to reduced emissions of carbon to fulfil the promises we gave at Kyoto.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letter are being placed in the Library of the House.

Trans-Balkan Oil Pipeline

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if his Department has provided export credits for the Trans-Balkan oil pipeline. [151583]

Mr. Caborn: ECGD has not been approached for support and no export credits have been provided for this project.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Southern Africa (Peacekeeping)

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on United Kingdom support for regional peacekeeping training in Southern Africa. [152324]

Mr. Robin Cook: In view of the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe, the British Military Advisory and Training Team (BMATT) for Southern Africa will relocate from Harare to the UK at the end of March 2001. The team has played an important role in enhancing the capacity of the countries of the Southern Africa Development Community to contribute to international peace support operations. We will continue to look for alternative locations from which the team can carry on this work with the countries of the region.

Trans-Balkan Oil Pipeline

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts concerning the Trans-Balkan oil pipeline; and if he will make a statement. [151584]

Mr. Vaz: The Foreign Secretary has had no discussions on this matter with EU or other colleagues.

Arms Exports (Western Sahara)

Ms Kingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions took place between his Department and the United Nations in New York concerning the granting of UK arms export licences for the refurbishment of guns situated in Western Sahara; on what date; and who took part in the discussions; [148691]

(2) if the mandate of MINURSO includes a duty to oversee the refurbishment of Moroccan guns in Western Sahara; and what discussions his Department has had on this subject with *(a)* the United Nations and *(b)* other interested parties; [148690]

(3) what reports he has received concerning direct approaches from UK arms manufacturers to the United Nations concerning *(a)* Her Majesty's Government's refusal to permit the sale of spare parts for the refurbishment of Moroccan guns on Western Sahara and *(b)* the subsequent appeal against this refusal; [148687]

(4) what correspondence has passed between his Department and the United Nations staff in *(a)* New York, *(b)* Morocco and *(c)* Tindouf concerning UK arms export licences for the provision of spare parts to refurbish Moroccan guns for use in Western Sahara; [148693]

(5) what discussions have taken place between his Department and the United Nations, including MINURSO, in *(a)* Morocco, *(b)* Western Sahara and *(c)* Tindouf concerning the granting of UK arms export licences for the refurbishment of guns situated in Western Sahara; on what dates; and who was involved in the discussions; [148692]

(6) what *(a)* discussions have taken place and *(b)* correspondence been exchanged between his Department and the United Nations concerning the capability of MINURSO to oversee the refurbishment of Moroccan guns situated in Western Sahara; [148688]

(7) what objections have been made by the United Nations to the Government concerning the Government's refusal of arms export licences for spare parts to refurbish Moroccan guns situated in Western Sahara; on what date; what the nature of the representations was; and what his Department's response was. [148689]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 February 2001]:* Foreign and Commonwealth Office and United Nations officials routinely discuss a wide range of issues relating to Western Sahara in New York and the region.

As set out in the Secretary of State's evidence to the Quadripartite Committee on 30 January, in 1998 a British company applied for an export licence in order, inter alia, to refurbish Moroccan guns in Western Sahara.

In late 1998, as a result of contacts between Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials and MINURSO in the region, Ministers came to the preliminary view that, if Moroccan guns were refurbished, this would not violate the terms of the UN-sponsored cease-fire between Morocco and the Polisario Front which has been in place since 1991. The UN told FCO officials in April 1999 that refurbishment could be considered as neutral. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials also understand that, under the terms of the Military Agreement signed between MINURSO and Morocco and MINURSO and Polisario, MINURSO would play a role in monitoring the process of refurbishing the guns.

In discussions between Foreign and Commonwealth Office and United Nations officials in New York this subject was referred to on 1 February 1999, 16 February 1999, 23 February 1999, 3 March 1999, 21 and 28 May 1999 and 21 June 1999.

On 21 June 1999, the United Nations Department for Peace Keeping Operations in New York confirmed that refurbishment of the guns would not be in breach of the existing military arrangements between MINURSO and the two parties; and that, in accordance with these arrangements, MINURSO would be in a position to monitor the procedure of the refurbishment of the Moroccan guns on the ground. This is set out in Military Agreement between the two parties and MINURSO of 1997.

It is not for the United Nations to object or not to any refusal by HMG of an arms export licence. The United Nations role is to monitor the cease-fire between the two parties.

We are not aware of any direct approaches from the UK arms manufacturers to the United Nations concerning refurbishment of Moroccan guns in Western Sahara. However, in their letter of appeal of 1 October 1998, the applicant asserted that refurbishment did not contravene the cease-fire and that MINURSO could monitor any refurbishment.

"Bridges into the Future"

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what events were organised as part of the "Bridges into the Future" strategy in 2000; and what events are planned for 2001. [148885]

Mr. Wilson: The FCO organised over 20 promotional events around the country in 2000 targeted on visible minority ethnic communities as part of its Minority Ethnic Strategy, "Bridges into the Future". We also hosted events in the Foreign Office main building, took part in careers fairs and organised a work shadowing scheme targeted on young members of minority ethnic communities. A similar programme of events is being organised this year.

Sathya Sai Movement

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to publicise the UNESCO Clarification of 15 September 2000 relating to allegations of sexual abuse involving youths and children at the ashram of the Sathya Sai movement in Puttaparthi, India. [151562]

Mr. Wilson: The text of the UNESCO Clarification can be found on the UNESCO website at: http://unesco.org/education/highlights/media—advisory.htm, and can be made available to Members through the Library of the House.

Israel

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what dates representations were made by the European Union to the Government of

Israel in the context of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, on human rights related issues since the start of the Al Aqsa intifada; and what responses have been received. [151136]

Mr. Wilson: The European Union delivered demarches to the Government of Israel on Israeli obstacles to humanitarian assistance (5 February) and on the Israeli policy of targeted physical eliminations (21 January). The EU made a further statement on 13 February which deplored the practice of eliminations or extra judicial killings of Palestinians by the Israeli security forces. The General Affairs Council has repeatedly called for closures to be lifted, most recently on 26 February. Within the framework of the EU-Israel dialogue on the Palestinian economy, the EU has also urged Israel to lift the closures and resume the payment of revenues withheld from the Palestinian Authority.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Home Detention Curfew Scheme

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for the period between the commencement of the Home Detention Curfew scheme and 31 January 2001 inclusive *(a)* the total number of prisoners released on the scheme, *(b)* the number of prisoners convicted of each specific offence who were released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, including specific offences committed by prisoners normally classified under the categories (i) other homicide and attempted homicide, (ii) other violence against the person, (iii) drug offence, (iv) assaults and (v) other offences, including a breakdown of the prisoners normally classified in the sub-category of other offences called other offences, *(c)* the average sentence (i) received and (ii) served, and the average period spent on the scheme, in respect of each specific offence, *(d)* the number of prisoners released on the scheme, with a breakdown of the offences committed, who (i) breached the conditions of the curfew, (ii) disappeared and were recaptured, (iii) disappeared and remain unlawfully at large and (iv) had their licences revoked, and for what reasons, *(e)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme while on the scheme, including all offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence and *(f)* a breakdown of the specific offences committed by prisoners released on the scheme who committed a further offence while on the scheme that was similar in character to that for which they were originally convicted, including all offences committed by prisoners who committed more than one offence; and if he will make a statement. [148089]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 1 February 2001]:* I have written to the right hon. Member, and placed a copy of the letter in the Library.

South Yorkshire Police Authority

Caroline Flint: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the value was of *(a)* the Government's financial settlement for the South Yorkshire Police Authority and *(b)* additional Government support for crime reduction in the Doncaster borough in each year since 1995–96. [149065]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Central Government supported funding for South Yorkshire Police Authority in each year since 1995–96 is shown in the table.

	£ million (cash terms)
1995–96	147.2
1996–97	154.7
1997–98	158.8
1998–99	165.4
1999–2000	171.3
2000–01	177.2
2001–02	184.8

In addition in 2000–01 South Yorkshire will receive a total of £984,978 from the Crime Fighting Fund. For 2001–02, the Authority will receive a total of £2,538,000. (All Crime Fighting Fund allocations are provisional and dependent on forces meeting recruitment targets).

Projects to the value of £2,050,997 are currently being funded under the Government's Crime Reduction Programme. Three types of project are being funded, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) and Reducing Burglary schemes (over the period 1999–2000 to 2001–02) and a Neighbourhood Wardens Scheme (for the period 2001–02 to 2002–03). £1.395 million is being invested in CCTV, £0.607 million in Reducing Burglary and £0.049 million in the Neighbourhood Warden Scheme.

Several smaller sums have been provided for the Doncaster Community Safety Partnership and the New Deal for Communities Partnership. Doncaster Regeneration Partnership has also invested in crime reduction projects via its Single Regeneration Budget Schemes.

Records are not maintained of funding which has contributed specifically to crime reduction in Doncaster prior to the launch of the Crime Reduction Programme in 1999.

Police Grant

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 72W, to the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) if he will express the percentage change in funding allocation to each police authority per head of resident population in each police authority. [149180]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The percentage change in funding allocation for 2001–02 compared with 2000–01 to each police authority per head of resident population is given in the table.

	Funding per head		
	2000–01 (£)	*2001–02 (£)*	*Percentage change*
Avon and Somerset Police	116.69	120.84	3.56
Bedfordshire Police	114.98	120.95	5.19
Cambridgeshire Police	107.26	112.15	4.57
Cheshire Police	113.69	120.71	6.18
City of London	10,825.34	9,555.52	−11.73

	Funding per head		
	2000–01 (£)	2001–02 (£)	Percentage change
Cleveland Police	152.24	159.73	4.92
Cumbria Police	126.20	131.76	4.41
Derbyshire Police	108.65	114.06	4.98
Devon and Cornwall Police	114.77	119.71	4.30
Dorset Police	104.74	108.30	3.39
Durham Police	138.05	144.21	4.47
Dyfed-Powys Police	110.98	117.13	5.54
Essex Police	108.87	114.55	5.22
Gloucestershire Police	113.95	119.23	4.63
Greater Manchester Police	149.80	156.96	4.78
Gwent Police	129.03	134.92	4.56
Hampshire Police	114.46	120.10	4.93
Hertfordshire Police	113.39	117.83	3.92
Humberside Police	132.37	137.37	3.77
Kent Police	121.43	128.71	6.00
Lancashire Police	129.87	135.39	4.25
Leicestershire Police	113.71	118.44	4.16
Lincolnshire Police	104.95	109.13	3.98
Merseyside Police	171.92	179.96	4.68
Metropolitan Police	241.04	250.42	3.89
Norfolk Police	109.46	114.88	4.96
North Wales Police	117.88	125.13	6.15
North Yorkshire Police	107.35	112.36	4.66
Northamptonshire Police	109.94	114.14	3.82
Northumbria Police	153.21	160.44	4.72
Nottinghamshire Police	126.02	131.79	4.58
South Wales Police	135.24	141.79	4.84
South Yorkshire Police	135.88	141.89	4.43
Staffordshire Police	110.06	114.65	4.18
Suffolk Police	105.65	111.17	5.23
Surrey Police	106.36	102.96	−3.20
Sussex Police	115.01	120.00	4.34
Thames Valley Police	110.40	115.82	4.91
Warwickshire Police	107.16	112.22	4.73
West Mercia Police	103.14	108.98	5.66
West Midlands Police	149.42	155.99	4.40
West Yorkshire Police	140.59	146.83	4.44
Wiltshire Police	110.15	113.71	3.23

Resident population is one of a number of indicators used in the calculation of the police funding formula. Details of the indicators and their value in determining the allocation for individual forces are set out in The Police Grant Report (England and Wales) 2001–02, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Street Robberies

Mr. Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the number of street robberies which *(a)* involved and *(b)* did not involve the theft of a mobile phone for every quarter since 1999 in Battersea; and if he will make a statement. [151150]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The information in the table has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, and represents the details for Wandsworth borough of which area Battersea forms a part.

Street crime in Wandsworth

Number of offences

Period	Street crime[1] in Wandsworth involving the theft of telephone equipment (including mobile phones)	Other street crime in Wandsworth	Total street crime[1] in Wandsworth
January to March 1999	57	182	239
April to June 1999	70	224	294
July to September 1999	79	255	334
October to December 1999	90	288	378
January to March 2000	151	231	382
April to June 2000	149	236	385
July to September 2000	162	214	376
October to December 2000	165	200	365

[1] The Metropolitan police define street crime as robberies and thefts from the person.

Armenian Massacre

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide for a memorial day in recognition of the Armenian massacre in the early 20th century. [151438]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Government have always condemned the appalling massacre of Armenians in 1915–16. Armenians already commemorate that tragic episode in their history on 24 April each year. This is not a national memorial day throughout Britain and we have no plans to make it one but this should not be seen as failing to acknowledge and sympathise with the victims and descendants of that atrocity.

Prison Visiting Regulations

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will re-classify grandchildren as family members for the purposes of the regulations governing visits to prisoners. [151442]

Mr. Boateng: Prison Service guidance on visits does not define the term "family member", although it lists family members who should be regarded as "close relatives", whose visits to a prisoner should be refused only in exceptional circumstances. The position of grandchildren and grandparents, who do not currently fall within this definition, is being considered as part of the Prison Service's current review of visits policy.

Police Authorities

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the amounts of annual payments for 2000–01 made to police authorities will be published. [150686]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I understand that the hon. Member's question relates to the payments made to police authorities for the additional policing costs incurred by forces as a result of the fuel distribution emergency last year.

Where details of actual expenditure incurred by forces were submitted by 31 January, grant covering 90 per cent. of the approved cost will be paid by the end of this financial year. The balance will be paid on receipt of a statement certified by the police authority's external auditor. Grant payments in 2000–01 are likely to be of the order of £5.3 million. I will place details of the payments made to individual police authorities in the Library once they have been finalised following audit.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, dated 27 December 2000, with regard to Mrs. Vida Obiri (Vida Obiri Yeboah-Burgess). [151278]

Mr. Straw: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 16 February.

Passport Fraud

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 606W, on passport fraud, in how many cases of fraudulent issuing of British passports his Department's staff were involved. [151357]

Mrs. Roche: The statistics provided in my answer of 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 606W, on passport fraud related to customer frauds only and did not include cases in which members of staff were complicit.

From 1991 to 2000, eight members of Passport Agency staff were convicted for fraudulently issuing passports. A further five members of staff were subject to internal disciplinary procedures as a result of their involvement in passport fraud. The Passport Agency's records indicate that these cases involved the fraudulent issue of 117 passports in total.

Community Relations Councils

Mr. Nigel Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals he has for the future funding of the community relations councils in Scotland. [151555]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Race Equality Councils (REC's) are co-funded by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), local authorities and other bodies. I understand that the CRE is consulting with REC's in Scotland as elsewhere about how to improve delivery of race equality.

Departmental Policies (Norwich, North)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Norwich, North constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [151142]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office annual reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 1999–2000, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published. 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to September 2000' and 'Police Service Strength England and Wales, 30 September 2000' can be found in the Library. The recorded crime statistics include information on recorded crime by Basic Command Unit and Crime and Disorder partnerships.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Norwich, North constituency or the immediate locality:

Targeted Policing

One scheme for £600,000 joining the Norfolk, Lincolnshire and Cambridgeshire police forces will cover the Fenlands area. The scheme will address rural crime and burglary.

Close Circuit Television (CCTV)

One scheme, an extension to the existing Norwich city centre system, has been submitted under round two of the CCTV initiative. The bid for £200,000 covering Norwich, North and Norwich, South is currently under consideration.

Reducing Burglary Initiative

One scheme for £38,000 covering Coslany ward, Norwich, has been received under round three of the Reducing Burglary Initiative.

Youth Offending Teams (YOTs)

The Norfolk YOT covers the constituency of Norwich, North. The YOT is making a full contribution to reducing delays within the court process for young offenders by producing 80 per cent. of all courts reports within agreed timescales. The YOT is also working in partnership with Youth Court Panels in order to establish a joint approach to tackling youth crime.

To ensure that the needs of victims of youth crime are met through restorative justice measures, the YOT is working in partnership with the Norfolk Victim Support Charitable Trust. A joint working protocol has been agreed and implemented benefiting victims and 70 per cent. of all intervention work with young offenders includes a focus on victim issues. The YOT is also working in partnership with the National Society of Prevention of Cruelty to Children in the delivery of programmes for parents of young offenders to assist them to manage difficult behaviour with confidence, consistency and reliability. Links have also been established by the YOT with the local Drug Action Team in order to commission services for young substance misusers. The YOT is already having a significant impact on youth crime in Norfolk as a whole: 60 per cent. of all young people referred to the YOT have completed court orders without reoffending, while 80 per cent. of all young offenders released from prison have not reoffended.

Norfolk (including the Norwich area) is benefiting from the Youth Justice Board's development fund which has awarded grants of approximately £1.1 million over three years for one bail support scheme and four intervention programmes across the county.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Norwich, North to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;

the asylum backlog has been cut from 103,495 at the end of January 2000 to 66,195 by the end of December 2000;

good progress is being made in reducing the incidence of fire deaths in England and Wales. They have dropped from 605 in 1997 to 534 in 1999.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk).

Animal Cruelty

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were charged with cruelty to animals in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [151015]

Mr. Charles Clarke: Information on the number of persons charged with an offence is not collected centrally.

However, information taken from the Home Office's Court Proceedings Database showing the number of persons prosecuted and convicted of offences relating to animal cruelty during the period 1997–99 is given in the table.

Number of persons prosecuted at magistrates courts and convicted at all courts for offences relating to animal cruelty, England and Wales 1997–99

	1997		1998		1999	
Offence	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*	*Prosecutions*	*Convictions*
Protection of Animals Act, 1911 (as amended)	1,051	867	1,104	887	1,046	825
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 8	8	8	2	2	1	1
Protection of Animals Act, 1934	6	4	4	4	—	—
Docking and Necking of Horses Act, 1949	—	—	—	—	2	—
Pet Animals Act, 1951	4	4	7	6	10	9
Protection of Animals (Amendment) Act, 1954	34	30	22	19	25	21
Animal Health Act, 1981, Secs 40–42, 46 and 49 and Orders made under Secs 8, 9, 37, 38, 39 and 43	65	57	76	62	39	34
Slaughterhouses Act, 1874	—	—	2	2	4	4
Abandonment of Animals Act, 1960, Sec 1	26	21	36	26	17	12
Animals (Cruel Poisons) Act, 1962	1	1	1	—	—	—
Animal Boarding Establishments Act, 1963	2	2	5	5	8	6
Riding Establishments Acts, 1964 and 1970	1	—	1	1	—	—
Slaughter of Poultry Act, 1967	6	3	18	15	8	7
Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1968, Secs 1, 2 and 6	9	8	5	5	15	11
Protection of Badgers Act, 1992 (except Sec 13)	44	25	18	4	30	10
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 9	5	3	—	—	3	—
Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 Sec 11	2	—	3	3	4	3
Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1995	7	3	8	7	—	—
Breeding of Dogs Acts 1973 and 1991	5	4	5	4	5	4
Diseases of Animals Act	89	74	85	65	58	39
Wild Birds Protection Acts	84	63	68	42	157	118
Total	1,449	1,177	1,470	1,159	1,432	1,104

Smoking (Prisons)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will publish the rules which operate within prisons with regard to smoking by *(a)* prisoners and *(b)* prison officers on duty; [151163]

(2) what arrangements are made to prevent prisoners from being exposed to tobacco smoke against their will. [151162]

Mr. Boateng: The policy on smoking in Prison Service premises is set out in "Instruction to Governors 16/1996", issued on 21 March 1996 (a copy of which can be found in the Library). It seeks to ensure that prisoners are not exposed to tobacco smoke against their will.

In particular, smoking is banned in all visits areas and governors are asked to consider bans in other communal areas and make arrangements to prevent smoking in consulting rooms in health care centres. There should also be provision for prisoners who smoke to smoke away from non-smoking prisoners within patient areas. So far as is reasonably practicable, non-smoking prisoners are not expected to share a cell with smokers.

The policy is under review and it is expected to follow that of health authorities which are required to operate a smoking cessation service to support those who want to give up.

New Prison (Peterborough)

Mrs. Brinton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the economic benefits to Peterborough from the siting of a new prison in the city in terms of *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect employment. [151567]

Mr. Boateng: The assessment made in 1997 and reiterated at the public inquiry into the new prison in 1998 was that it would create an estimated 400 direct and 440 indirect jobs during construction and 350 direct and 190 indirect jobs once the prison opens. However, these can only be indicative estimates and precise staffing figures will be dependent on the design and operational policies of the contractor selected to design, build and run the prison.

Police Constables (Benefits)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of serving police constables who are in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit. [151238]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* I have made no such estimate.

Prison Service

Mr. Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made on agreeing Service Level Agreement standards for Prison Service establishments; and if he will make a statement. [151623]

Mr. Boateng: Service Level Agreements (SDAs) have been developed and piloted during this financial year. The purpose of the SDA is to provide three year business plan agreements between the Area Manager and Governor of a prison, and to integrate Prison Service Performance Standards into the business planning process.

SDAs covering all prison establishments are scheduled to be agreed by the end March for 2001–02.

Reconvictions

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the reconviction rates were for *(a)* all prisoners, *(b)* male prisoners and *(c)* young offenders for each year from 1992 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [151762]

Mr. Boateng: Two year reconviction rates for standard list offences following release from prison between 1992 and 1997 are shown in the tables. Figures for subsequent years are not yet available. Changes in the standard list of offences recorded are estimated to have increased the 1994 figure by about 1 per cent., the 1995 figure by about 1.4 per cent. and the 1996 and 1997 figures by about 1.9 per cent.

Table 1—two year reconviction rates for all prisoners

Year of discharge from prison	*Percentage reconvicted*
1992	51
1993	53
1994	56
1995	58
1996	57
1997[1]	57

[1] First quarter

Table 2—two year reconviction rates for male prisoners

Year of discharge from prison	*Percentage reconvicted*
1992	52
1993	54
1994	56
1995	58
1996	58
1997[1]	57

[1] First quarter

Table 3—two year reconviction rates for young offenders (aged 20 or under at time of sentence)

Year of discharge from prison	*Percentage reconvicted*
1992	71
1993	74
1994	75
1995	76
1996	75
1997[1]	74

[1] First quarter

Immigration Officers

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration officers there were for each function in each year since 1992; and if he will make a statement. [151763]

Mrs. Roche: The numbers of immigration officers for each function (Ports and Enforcement) are set out in the table.

	Immigration officers involved in enforcement activities	*Immigration officers involved in activities at ports locations*	*Total immigration officers*
April			
1992	116	1,670	1,786
1993	177	1,625.5	1,802.5
1994	248.5	1,869	2,117.5
1995	272	1,831	2,103
1996	257.5	1,834.5	2,092
1997	240	1,836.4	2,076.4
1998	233	1,758.8	1,991.2
1999	219.7	1,640.5	1,860.2
2000	248.2	1,657.5	1,905.7
2001	425.7	1,971.6	2,397.3

Safe Cells

Mr. Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many safe cells have been installed since 7 July 2000; [151825]

(2) how many people have committed suicide since 7 July 2000; how many of them were *(a)* female, *(b)* male, *(c)* remand prisoners and *(d)* aged under 21 years; and how many suicides took place in safe cells. [151824]

Mr. Boateng: No safer cells have been installed since 7 July 2000, but 1,000 are planned in the three years from April 2001. Rye Hill prison which opened in January this year and Dovegate prison (which will open later this year) will have over 1,000 cells in which elements of the safer cell are incorporated.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced on 5 February a new three-year strategy to reduce prisoner suicide and self-harm in prisons. One strand of the strategy will be physical improvements to reception and induction areas, including the creation of more safer cells, crisis suites and gated cells that enable staff to watch closely at-risk prisoners.

There have been the following numbers of self-inflicted deaths since 7 July 2000: *(a)* female—3; *(b)* male—46; *(c)* remand prisoners—28; and *(d)* aged under 21 years—11. There have been no self-inflicted deaths in safer cells.

DNA Testing

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what requirements he sets for the accurate monitoring of DNA testing. [151681]

Mr. Charles Clarke: The DNA database is a national database which currently holds details of individuals suspected, cautioned and convicted of a recordable offence, together with their DNA profiles.

The Home Office Circular 16/95: National DNA Database sets out the general conditions relating to the establishment and use of the National DNA database.

DNA profiling technologies have developed rapidly over the last 10 years. Significant advances have been made resulting in improved sensitivity and these enable DNA to be extracted from increasingly smaller crime scene stains. The current technique, FSS SGMplus™, analyses 11 areas on the DNA molecule. FSS SGMplus™ has been in use since September 1999 and has a discriminatory power of 1 in a billion. This has a considerable advantage over the SGM technique previously used, which had a discriminatory power of 1 in 50 million.

The reliability of DNA evidence is assured through the internal quality assurance measures adopted by the Forensic Science Service and through their external accreditation by the British Standards Institute and the United Kingdom Accreditation Service to the BS EN ISO 9000 and M10 National Standards. This independent accreditation of the DNA process involves regular audit to ensure the standards are maintained.

Hinduja Brothers

Mr. Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what communications related to the immigration and nationality status of the Hinduja family the Home Office has received from *(a)* Conservative and *(b)* Liberal Democrat Members of either House as well as other (i) elected representatives and (ii) office holders of each party; and if he will make a statement. [149114]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 7 February 2001]:* My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced on 24 January that he had asked former Treasury Solicitor, Sir Anthony Hammond QC, to review the full circumstance surrounding approaches to the Home Office in connection with the possibility of an application for naturalisation by Mr. S. P. Hinduja in 1998. Sir Anthony started his review on Thursday 25 January. After an initial reading of the papers, Sir Anthony decided that, in order to fulfil the terms of reference of his review of the application for naturalisation of S. P. Hinduja, it is appropriate for him to look at the circumstances of the granting of naturalisation in respect of G. P. Hinduja because the circumstances of both applications are closely related. For the same reason, he also decided that it is appropriate for him to look at the circumstances surrounding the inquiries about naturalisation in respect of Prakesh Hinduja. I understand that Sir Anthony hopes to complete his review shortly. The report will be published and copies will be placed in the Vote Office and the Library. It would be inappropriate for me to pre-empt the outcome of this review.

Asylum Seekers

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the granting of exceptional leave to remain for asylum seekers from the Democratic Republic of Congo. [151268]

Mrs. Roche: Each asylum application is considered individually on its merits. In cases where asylum has been refused, exceptional leave to remain may be granted on a discretionary basis in individual cases. Exceptional leave may be granted to a person for a wide number of reasons, but it is most usually granted for compassionate or humanitarian reasons, or to protect from ill treatment a person who does not otherwise qualify for asylum under the terms of the 1951 United Nations Refugee Convention.

Postal Votes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to ensure that electoral registration officers will use only new postal and proxy voting forms which accord with the provisions of the Representation of the People Act 2000. [150726]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 26 February 2001]:* There is no prescribed form for making absent vote applications. My Department has provided a specimen postal vote application form to electoral registration officers but it is for them to determine whether absent vote applications meet the requirements as set out in the Representation of the People Regulations 2001.

The Home Office will, however, be writing to these officers encouraging them to consider making their forms available to all political parties and to be proactive in bringing absent voting arrangements to the attention of voters locally.

SOCIAL SECURITY

War Veterans

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will set out the procedures for granting tribunals to disabled war veterans claiming a war pension. [151595]

Mr. Bayley: Most decisions concerning entitlement to or the assessment of a war pension can be appealed to an independent Pensions Appeal Tribunal. The notification of a decision tells war pensioners if there is a right of appeal and the procedure for doing so.

Regulations laid on 26 February will, additionally, ensure that war pensioners have appeal rights which are similar to those provided for in the Social Security scheme. They provide for war pensioners to be able to appeal, from 9 April 2001, against the majority of decisions that affect their war pension, including for the first time, most decisions in respect of supplementary allowances.

Far East Prisoners of War

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many widows and widowers

will lose benefits due to the receipt of compensation payable to former Japanese prisoners of war and their families. [151294]

Mr. Bayley: No widow or widower of a former Japanese prisoner of war should lose benefit as a result of their or their late partner's receipt of this special payment. The Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Housing Benefit, and Council Tax Benefit Regulations were amended from 1 February 2001 to ensure the payments are disregarded in the calculation of benefit entitlement.

Severe Disablement Allowance

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security how many new Severe Disablement Allowance awards were made each month since March 2000. [151166]

Mr. Bayley: The information is in the table.

Severe Disablement Allowance awards

	Number
2000	
April	1,100
May	800
June	1,300
July	1,200
August	900

Note:
Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample of the benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Pensioners' Incomes

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what estimate he has made of the average nominal increase in pensioners' incomes since 1990 *(a)* in total and *(b)* by source of income. [151640]

Mr. Rooker: The information is not available in the format requested.

Medical Malpractice

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what investigations have been conducted over the past two years into allegations of malpractice by doctors involved with certifying benefit claims. [150530]

Mr. Bayley: Medical Services have identified six cases of alleged malpractice by doctors involved in providing medical reports for benefit claims in the past two years. The Medical Services' Serious Complaints Investigations Team is currently investigating all six cases.

National Insurance Rebates

Mr. Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security what the primary and secondary contracted-out National Insurance rebates will be in the financial year starting in April 2002. [151765]

Mr. Rooker: Reports by the Government Actuary and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on the proposed level of contracted-out National Insurance rebates for the five years from 6 April 2002 have been laid before both Houses today, together with draft Rebate Orders.

New Deal (Jarrow)

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Social Security if he will make a statement on the operation of the New Deal for *(a)* older people, *(b)* lone parents and *(c)* disabled people in the Jarrow constituency. [150465]

Ms Jowell: I have been asked to reply.

The New Deals benefit the labour market because participants leave the programme better equipped, motivated and skilled for the rest of their working lives. For the period ending November 2000, 824 people have joined the New Deal 25+ programme, resulting in 122 jobs. Also, 47 people have started work with the New Deal 50+ employment credit. 540 people have started New Deal for Lone Parents in Jarrow, resulting in 275 jobs. We know that many other people will have left the New Deal for employment without telling the Employment Service—these people are not included in the figures. Figures for New Deal for Disabled People are not yet available at constituency level. The South Tyneside pilot area of the New Deal for Disabled People (NDDP) includes the constituency of Jarrow. All the NDDP pilots are making a valuable contribution to our learning and experience of which forms of extra help and support work best.

PRIME MINISTER

Prime Ministerial Apartments

Mr. Chope: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the public expenditure incurred on refurbishment of the Prime Minister's private apartments at Nos. 10 and 11 Downing street in each of the last 10 years. [151430]

The Prime Minister: Figures are only available since 1993.

For the years 1993–98, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) on 26 January 1998, *Official Report*, column 66W. For 1998–99 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 28 July 2000, *Official Report*, columns 969–70W. For 1999–2000 I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Lewes on 5 June 2000, *Official Report*, columns 49–50W.

The cost of works in the No. 11 flat (expenditure paid or committed) to date this financial year is £44,063 including recoverable VAT. No further work is planned for this financial year.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Prime Minister how much was spent on *(a)* renovation, *(b)* repair, *(c)* improvements and *(d)* additions to the residential flats for his occupation at Nos. 10 or 11 Downing street in (i) 1997–98, (ii) 1998–99 and (iii) 1999–2000; and what his estimate is for 2000–01. [151373]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* It is not possible to disaggregate expenditure in the manner requested as no distinction is made between maintaining, decorating and otherwise improving residential accommodation at Nos. 10 or 11 Downing street as projects frequently cover two or more of these categories of work. For details of expenditure on

refurbishment of the flat at No. 11 Downing street, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) today.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment he has made of the potential savings arising from the Community Legal Service receiving a portion of the damages awarded in civil cases funded by legal aid. [151548]

Mr. Lock: A contingency fund was considered during the passage of the Access to Justice Act 1999, and the Act contains a power to create one. However, the Government have no plans to do so.

It would be virtually impossible to operate a contingency fund in relation to family litigation or cases where victims are seeking injunctions to prevent domestic violence. Costs are often not awarded at the end of these cases, or they are unlikely to be enforced, or there may be no damages out of which costs could be recovered from the funded client. Such a fund cannot operate where funding is provided for some Children Act cases, since funding is granted without a merits test. It would also be impossible to operate Legal Help (formerly Green Form advice) on a contingency fund basis, since cases rarely become formal proceedings where costs or damages would become recoverable.

The Government believe that, as far as possible, litigants should receive the full amount of compensation to which they are entitled. That would not be the case with a contingency fund.

The Government also doubt the practicality of operating a contingency fund where the private funding of litigation through conditional fee agreements and after-the-event insurance is possible. Adverse selection would result in cases with higher prospects of success funded privately on a conditional fee basis, leaving cases with weaker prospects of success to be supported by the contingency fund. That would leave the fund vulnerable to significant financial problems.

Accordingly, and while not ruling out the possibility of operating a contingency fund in any circumstances, the Government have no plans to introduce such a fund in England and Wales.

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what his estimate is of the total financial awards from successful civil cases funded by legal aid in the latest financial year for which figures are available. [151549]

Mr. Lock: Due to changes to the Legal Services Commission's computer systems the latest available figures are for 1997–98. The total amount of moneys awarded or agreed in publicly funded civil cases was £1.37 billion. This information relates principally to one-off payments, and excludes most payments by instalment, whether in matrimonial or non-matrimonial cases.

Jury Service

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were selected for jury service at courts covering the Greater London area during the last 12 months. [150442]

Jane Kennedy: Jurors are selected on a random basis from among those people who are registered on the electoral rolls for England and Wales. The total number of people summoned for jury service at courts covering the Greater London area in the last 12 months was 135,858. The breakdown of how many men and how many women were summoned is not recorded, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Deputy Stipendiary Magistrates (General Election)

Mr. John M. Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what instructions *(a)* she and *(b)* her Department have given to deputy stipendiary magistrates concerning the avoidance of party political activity during the next General Election; and if she will make a statement. [151771]

Jane Kennedy: Neither I nor my officials have given any instructions to Deputy District Judges (Magistrates Courts), as they are now called, specifically in relation to political activity during the next General Election. However, the memorandum on conditions of appointment and terms of service issued to every Deputy District Judge (Magistrates Courts) states plainly that they are expected to refrain from any activity, political or otherwise, which would conflict with their judicial office or be seen to compromise their impartiality. They are advised that in the event of any doubt they should contact my officials in the Judicial Group for advice.

CABINET OFFICE

GM Crops

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the assessment was by MISC6 of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food report on separation for GM field trials; which Ministers were given it; and if she will make MISC6's assessment of the report publicly available. [151538]

Marjorie Mowlam: It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

HEALTH

Flu Vaccine

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the take-up rates for flu vaccine as at *(a)* 1 November and *(b)* 1 December for each health authority. [141403]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is in the table.

These figures are based on returns sent by health authorities to the Department and represent data collected to 30 November 2000. Uptake on 1 November in several health authorities was affected by delays in supplies from one manufacturer. Nevertheless, the data before 30 November do not reflect the work done by HAs and in primary care to promote uptake.

Region/HA	*Percentage 65 and over uptake*
Eastern	
Bedfordshire	58
Cambridgeshire	64
East and North Hertfordshire	60
Norfolk	64
North Essex	62
South Essex	62
Suffolk	58
West Hertfordshire	56
Total	61
Northern and Yorkshire	
Bradford	60
Calderdale and Kirklees	64
County Durham	61
East Riding	64
Gateshead and South Tyneside	63
Leeds	67
Newcastle and North Tyneside	58
North Cumbria	54
North Yorkshire	68
Northumberland	66
Sunderland	64
Tees	62
Wakefield	65
Total	63
South East	
Berkshire	61
Buckinghamshire	59
East Kent	59
East Surrey	55
East Sussex, Brighton/Hove	62
Isle of Wight	64
North and Mid Hants	62
Northamptonshire	68
Oxfordshire	65
Portsmouth and South East Hants	66
Southampton and South West Hants	67
West Kent	67
West Surrey	54
West Sussex	49
Total	61
North West	
Bury and Rochdale	58
East Lancashire	60
Liverpool	60
Manchester	49
Morecambe Bay	62
North Cheshire	62
North West Lancashire	60
Salford and Trafford	53
Sefton	66
South Cheshire	66
South Lancashire	61
St. Helen's and Knowsley	59
Stockport	60
West Pennine	56
Wigan and Bolton	49
Wirral	60
Total	59
London	
Barking and Havering	63
Barnet	67
Bexley and Greenwich	60
Brent and Harrow	48
Bromley	62
Camden and Islington	34
Croydon	53
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	52
East London and City	54
Enfield and Haringey	51
Hillingdon	55
Kensington, Chelsea, Westminster	46
Kingston and Richmond	61
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	50
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	59
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	60
Total	55
South and West	
Avon	67
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	62
Dorset	62
Gloucestershire	63
North and East Devon	64
Somerset	64
South and West Devon	63
Wiltshire	59
Total	63
Trent	
Barnsley	62
Doncaster	65
Leicestershire	54
Lincolnshire	69
North Derbyshire	67
North Nottinghamshire	61
Nottingham	55
Rotherham	68
Sheffield	76
South Derbyshire	67
South Humber	71
Total	64
West Midlands	
Birmingham	61
Coventry	64
Dudley	59
Herefordshire	65
North Staffordshire	66
Sandwell	51
Shropshire	62
Solihull	64
South Staffordshire	66
Walsall	54
Warwickshire	66
Wolverhampton	61
Worcester	67
Total	63
England average	61

NHS Trusts (Borrowing Costs)

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each NHS trust has paid for the cost of borrowing in each year since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [149348]

Mr. Denham: The information has been placed in the Library.

The vast majority of National Health Services trust borrowing is internal to the public sector.

Ambulance Services

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding is being made available to Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust and surrounding trusts to facilitate mergers with neighbouring trusts; [151569]

(2) when he received the South East Region ambulance review; and when he made a decision on it. [151571]

Ms Stuart: No decision has yet been taken about merging ambulance trusts in the south-east.

The ambulance trusts have been reviewing the way in which ambulance services in the south-east are provided to ensure that they are delivered in a way which is consistent with the modernisation of the National Health Service and which ensures they can play a full role in the delivery of emergency and pre-hospital care. Proposals for the future of the service have been produced which will require public consultation. I will be meeting the chairs and chief executives of the ambulance trusts shortly to discuss these proposals.

Dr. Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding will be provided to Oxfordshire Ambulance NHS Trust for paramedic training and the enhancement of skill levels of paramedics. [151570]

Ms Stuart: Funding for paramedic training, both new recruits and refresher training for qualified paramedics, is incorporated in the total budget for providing emergency ambulance services. For 2000–01 the total budget for Oxfordshire Ambulance National Health Service Trust was £10 million.

General Surgery Waiting Lists

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been waiting for general surgery in *(a)* England, *(b)* the Southend, West parliamentary constituency and *(c)* South Essex health authority area for eight weeks or more in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [151254]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is in the tables.

Number of patients on in-patient waiting list for general surgery in England

	Quarter	Total	Less than 3 months	More than 3 months
1999–2000	1	201,533	107,259	94,274
1999–2000	2	202,349	109,929	92,420
1999–2000	3	208,965	112,089	96,876
1999–2000	4	194,010	101,192	92,818
2000–01	1	191,216	98,605	92,611
2000–01	2	187,977	100,376	87,601
2000–01	3	189,203	101,525	87,678

Source:
KH07 quarterly return

Number of patients on in-patient waiting list for general surgery in South Essex health authority

	Quarter	Total	Less than 3 months	More than 3 months
1999–2000	1	2,039	1,115	924
1999–2000	2	2,075	1,102	973
1999–2000	3	2,252	1,270	982
1999–2000	4	2,214	990	1,224
2000–01	1	2,129	1,029	1,100
2000–01	2	2,160	1,153	1,007
2000–01	3	2,391	1,340	1,051

Source:
QF01 quarterly return

Data are not available on the number of people waiting longer than eight weeks. Data are collected in time-bands of three months. The Department does not collect data by parliamentary constituencies, so data has been given on England and South Essex health authority.

Expenditure

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the percentage of gross domestic product that Britain spent on health expenditure was in each year since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [151525]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* Table one shows gross National Health Service expenditure for the United Kingdom as a percentage of gross domestic product from 1979–80 to 2003–04. This shows that, based on latest forecasts, public expenditure on health as a percentage of GDP is set to rise to 6.6 per cent. by 2003–04.

The Department does not produce figures for expenditure on private healthcare. According to Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) data, private healthcare represents about 1 per cent. of GDP. Table two shows total healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP from 1979–99, using information from OECD. The OECD does not produce forecast data, but assuming that private healthcare spend as a proportion of GDP remains stable at around 1 per cent., then this percentage will rise to 7.6 per cent. by 2003–04.

Table one

Year	Gross public expenditure as percentage of GDP
1979–80	4.6
1980–81	5.3
1981–82	5.4
1982–83	5.4
1983–84	5.3
1984–85	5.3
1985–86	5.1
1986–87	5.1
1987–88	5.1
1988–89	5.1
1989–90	5.0
1990–91	5.2
1991–92	5.6
1992–93	5.9
1993–94	5.9
1994–95	5.9
1995–96	5.8
1996–97	5.7
1997–98	5.7
1998–99	5.7
1999–2000	5.9

Table one

Year	Gross public expenditure as percentage of GDP
2000–01	6.1
2001–02	6.2
2002–03	6.4
2003–04	6.6

Notes:
1. Figures are based on UK gross NHS expenditure date and GDP data produced by HMT.
2. Figures for years 1999–2000 to 2003–04 are subject to change.

Table two

Year	Total healthcare expenditure as a percentage of GDP
1979	5.3
1980	5.7
1981	6.0
1982	5.8
1983	6.0
1984	6.0
1985	5.9
1986	5.9
1987	6.0
1988	5.9
1989	5.9
1990	6.0
1991	6.4
1992	6.9
1993	6.9
1994	7.0
1995	7.0
1996	7.0
1997	6.7
1998	6.7
1999	7.0

Notes:
1. Information is produced by calendar year.
2. OECD does not produce forecast information.

Source:
OECD health databank 2000

Patient Referrals

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health since the publication of the NHS Plan in July 2000, how many health trusts have refused to accept referrals from adjacent primary care groups. [151008]

Mr. Denham: Details on referrals that are not accepted by National Health Service Trusts are not collected centrally and are a matter for local commissioners and the National Health Service Trust concerned.

Medical Mistakes

Mr. David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list the adverse events in NHS hospitals involving the use of *(a)* an anaesthetic and *(b)* nitrous oxide in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000; [151604]

(2) if he will list adverse events in NHS hospitals involving *(a)* erroneous intrathecal injections that should have been given intravenously, *(b)* erroneous intravenous injections that should have been given intrathecally and *(c)* other injection errors in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999 and (iii) 2000. [151605]

Ms Stuart *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* The information requested is not currently collected centrally.

An expert group, which Ministers asked the Chief Medical Officer to chair, has examined how the National Health Service could more effectively learn from and prevent adverse events in health care. The group's report, "An Organisation with a Memory" was published last year and is available at: www.doh.gov.uk/orgmemreport.

Ministers agreed all 10 recommendations, including the four key categories of serious recurring adverse events initially identified for action. The NHS Plan includes the establishment of a national reporting system for adverse events as a key initiative intended to help protect patients and improve health care.

Detailed proposals are now being developed to establish a national reporting system, which we aim to establish by the end of 2001.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurses and *(b)* ancillary workers there were in each year from 1979 to 1997; and if he will make a statement. [151526]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 February 2001]:* The data requested are in the tables.

National health service hospital and community health services: Nursing, midwifery, health visiting staff and practice nurses in England as at 30 September each year

Headcount

Year	Total nursing qualified staff	Total HCHS	Qualified nurses	Practice (qualified)	Unqualified	Learners	Unknown
1979	[1]	[1]	1,810	[1]	[1]	[1]	0
1980	[1]	[1]	[1]	1,960	[1]	[1]	0
1981	[1]	[1]	[1]	2,270	[1]	[1]	0
1982	450,180	253,880	251,240	2,640	117,390	78,910	0
1983	455,400	259,360	256,340	3,020	117,060	78,980	0
1984	455,960	266,420	262,910	3,510	113,580	75,960	0
1985	462,450	275,420	271,380	4,030	115,680	71,350	0
1986	463,640	279,230	274,670	4,560	116,110	68,300	0
1987	468,360	284,780	279,730	5,050	118,930	64,650	0
1988	470,950	290,270	283,920	6,350	117,600	63,080	0
1989	476,340	296,940	288,140	8,800	117,110	62,290	0
1990	477,400	298,970	285,360	13,610	115,260	59,080	4,090
1991	489,220	309,780	293,770	16,010	119,740	47,720	11,980
1992	476,820	313,990	297,350	16,640	120,310	35,020	7,500
1993	462,690	310,900	293,380	17,520	122,590	21,360	7,840
1994	447,790	305,780	289,280	16,500	123,070	11,330	7,610

National health service hospital and community health services: Nursing, midwifery, health visiting staff and practice nurses in England as at 30 September each year

Headcount

Year	*Total nursing qualified staff*	*Total HCHS*	*Qualified nurses*	*Practice (qualified)*	*Unqualified*	*Learners*	*Unknown*
1995	434,860	316,890	298,650	18,240	112,350	4,780	840
1996	436,560	319,150	301,250	17,900	113,330	2,910	1,170
1997	438,300	318,860	300,470	18,390	116,430	2,340	670
1998	442,780	323,450	304,560	18,890	116,580	2,140	610
1999	452,540	329,640	310,140	19,500	119,680	1,940	1,280
2000	462,050	335,950	316,750	19,200	123,850	2,040	210

[1] Headcount data not available for these years.

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts. Figures exclude agency staff. A new classification of the non-medical workforce was introduced in 1995. Information based on this classification is not directly comparable with earlier years. Decrease in learners due to transition from traditional learners to Project 2000 students from 1990.

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

NHS hospital and community health services: Staff within the ancillary area of work in England as at 30 September each year

Year	*Headcount*
1979	219,430
1980	220,600
1981	221,450
1982	219,160
1983	215,330
1984	198,970
1985	184,150
1986	167,580
1987	157,320
1988	148,440
1989	141,540
1990	132,650
1991	121,180
1992	110,500
1993	108,440
1994	102,790

Notes:

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

Source:

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census

NHScat

Mr. Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will announce a decision on the creation of NHScat. [151577]

Mr. Denham: The project to create NHScat has been under way since June last year.

NHScat will be available to use by the National Health Service from 1 October 2001.

Norfolk Area Health Authority

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to ensure that targeted moneys from Government to the Norfolk area health authority are not diverted from such targets. [151680]

Mr. Denham: Norfolk health authority's allocation for 2001–02 is £550 million of which £15 million has been designated for policy programmes to support the implementation of the NHS Plan.

This will all be used to support NHS Plan initiatives. Negotiations about exactly how this money will be allocated will form part of the discussions surrounding the Norfolk health economy service and financial framework for 2001–02.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with the Norfolk area health authority on *(a)* the running costs of and *(b)* the purchase of equipment for the new PFI hospital in Norwich. [151682]

Mr. Denham: The Eastern Regional Office of the National Health Service Executive is in discussion with the Norfolk health system regarding the funding of the increased running costs of the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital as part of the 2001–02 service and financial framework negotiations.

In addition a package of funding has already been agreed with the Norfolk health system for new and replacement equipment. This will be funded from a combination of trust block allocation, regional strategic capital, equipment leasing and a proportion of the sales proceeds from the old hospital site.

Primary Care Groups (Norfolk)

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure that primary care groups in Norfolk are not disadvantaged by the development of the new PFI hospital in Norwich. [151764]

Mr. Denham: The decision to proceed with the private initiative scheme was a health economy decision that all relevant health organisations were involved in.

Although primary care groups had not been established when the first business case for the new Norfolk and Norwich hospital was agreed, they subsequently ratified their support for the new hospital by approving the supplementary business case for 144 extra beds, and its financial consequences.

The National Health Service Executive is providing smoothing and transitional support for the higher initial costs of the new hospital. This is in accordance with the undertakings given at the time of approval to ensure other local services would not suffer.

Barnet General Hospital

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what annual interest is paid by the Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS trust to the consortium developing Barnet general hospital's phase 1b project. [151772]

Mr. Denham: The Barnet hospital phase 1b private finance initiative project will not be completed and brought into use until April 2002. There is no payment made to the consortium in respect of phase 1b until the facilities are available for use, and therefore no annual interest is being paid.

NHS Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the annual *(a)* salary and *(b)* support costs are of his Department's Director of International Recruitment for Health Services. [151791]

Mr. Denham: The Director of International Recruitment is on detachment from her post as executive nurse director at Hammersmith Hospitals National Health Service Trust. The trust publishes salary details of its senior staff in its annual report. A budget of £37,000 has been secured this year to fund salary, travel and subsistence, support and conference costs.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the Director of International Recruitment for Health Services for the number of foreign recruited nurses working in the NHS. [151790]

Mr. Denham: The level of international nurse recruitment required will be assessed in the light of the impact on staffing levels of the increased training places since 1997, and the success of the retention and returner initiatives already in place.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure that nurses are not recruited by the NHS from developing countries where there are shortages of trained nursing staff. [151789]

Mr. Denham: The Department issued guidance on the recruitment of nurses from developing countries in the international nurse recruitment guidance published in November 1999. A copy was placed in the Library. The guidance will be reinforced for all healthcare professions in the Code of Practice for International Recruitment which is due to be published shortly.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the representations he has received from foreign Governments about recruitment for the NHS of *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors in their countries. [148276]

Mr. Denham: Over the last year we have received representations from the Spanish Government with regards to the possibility of recruiting both doctors and nurses from Spain to work in the National Health Service.

A Government to Government agreement was signed with Spain in November 2000 to promote closer working between the two countries. As part of this agreement, the first 63 nurses arrived in the north-west from Spain on 19 January 2000 to work in four NHS trusts. Following this successful recruitment, the initiative is being extended to medical staff through a pilot project also being led by North West Region.

I am also aware that the Department has received representations over the last year from:

Latvia
Philippines
Russia
China
Tunisia
Caribbean
South Africa
Zimbabwe.

Representations made by South Africa and Zimbabwe stipulated that both health sectors need the services of nurses and stressed that their recruitment outside of the country could not be supported.

Guidance was issued by the Department on international recruitment stressing how essential it is that all NHS employers ensure that they do not actively recruit from developing countries who are experiencing nursing shortages of their own.

AGRICULTURE, FISHERIES AND FOOD

Common Agricultural Policy

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food what recent representations he has received on his plans to create a new CAP paying agency; and if he will make a statement. [150866]

Ms Quin: We have received no recent representations on the Ministry's plans to create a new CAP paying agency. A summary of the responses to the consultation exercise which we carried out last summer is available on the MAFF website.

Plans for creating the new CAP paying agency are progressing well. We are providing monthly updates to staff affected by the creation of the new agency, and will shortly be inviting key external stakeholders to the first meeting of a CAPPA users' group. This group will provide a forum to help us to ensure that the new agency takes full account of the needs of its customers.

We will be writing to all our customers next months with details of how the restructuring of MAFF's presence in the regions will affect them.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Public Relations (Expenditure)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure was in his Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000, and what the planned expenditure and breakdown of expenditure for 2000–01 is on (i) public opinion research, (ii) television, radio and newspaper advertising and (iii) direct mail. [149267]

Dr. Reid: The total expenditure and the breakdown of expenditure for the Department for the financial years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99 and *(d)* 1999–2000 can be obtained from the Northern Ireland Office 2000 Departmental Report (CM 4621).

The planned expenditure for 2000–01 is as follows:

(i) £340,000

(ii) £1,378,000

(iii) £169,000[1]

[1] Figure relates to the total budget for postage. A provision for direct mail is covered within this figure.

Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what discussions have taken place with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission about current powers; what problems they have encountered; and what action is being taken to address such problems; [150652]

(2) if the review to be undertaken into the powers of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission will *(a)* be independent, *(b)* assess the work of the Commission against the United Nations agreed principles and *(c)* seek views from the public and interested parties; [150654]

(3) what plans have been made to review the powers of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. [150653]

Mr. George Howarth: The Northern Ireland Office is in regular contact with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission on a range of issues, including the extent of its powers under the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Section 69(2) of the Act requires the Commission to submit to the Secretary of State at the end of its first two years of operation recommendations for improving the adequacy and effectiveness of its functions. We have not yet received these recommendations, but expect to do so shortly. We have made clear that we will give full consideration to the Commission's recommendations at that stage. Any subsequent proposals for change will be subject to consultation in the normal way.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what resources have been provided to the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission for the public consultation about the scope of the Bill of Rights. [150645]

Mr. George Howarth: The annual budget of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was initially set at £750,000, three times that of the Commission's predecessor, to reflect its increased powers and functions. The consultation on the scope for a Bill of Rights was envisaged as an integral part of the Commission's functions and resources for the consultation have therefore been provided within the Commission's core budget. However, we made clear from the outset that we would be prepared to consider bids for increased funding, provided they were accompanied by a properly costed business case. The Commission's first bid for additional funds—including for the consultation on the scope for a Bill of Rights—was received during the Christmas break. It is currently under consideration, and we hope to meet the Commission shortly to discuss their bid more fully.

TREASURY

New Deal (Young People)

14. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the New Deal on the employment prospects of young people. [150148]

Mr. Timms: By last November, nearly 270,000 young people had moved from welfare to work through New Deal, already well ahead of the manifesto target of 250,000 in the lifetime of this Parliament. Recent independent evaluation has found that long term youth unemployment is about 40 per cent. lower than it would have been without New Deal.

Working Families Tax Credit

15. **Mr. Hilary Benn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the impact of the Working Families Tax Credit on reducing child poverty. [150149]

Dawn Primarolo: The introduction of the Working Families Tax Credit, along with other changes to the tax and benefit system made during this Parliament, will lift more than a million children out of poverty.

37. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what average weekly payment is received by those in receipt of Working Families Tax Credit. [150173]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates are contained in the Working Families Tax Credit Quarterly Enquiries, copies of which are in the Library.

Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions

16. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the monitoring of the performance of the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions by the Treasury. [150150]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The performance of the DETR is of course the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister. It is regularly monitored against PSA targets and an assessment is published in the Departmental Annual Report.

Children's Tax Credit

17. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in South Swindon will benefit from the children's tax credit. [150151]

Dawn Primarolo: An estimate of the number of families in South Swindon who could benefit from the Children's Tax Credit is not available, but an estimated 475,000 families in the South West area could do so.

21. **Ms Keeble:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage take-up of the Children's Tax Credit. [150156]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Pollok (Mr. Davidson) on 5 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 412W.

31. **Ms Bridget Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the impact of the Children's Tax Credit on family incomes. [150167]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Mr. Bradley) on 14 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 247W.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families will benefit from the Children's Tax Credit in Chorley. [150122]

Dawn Primarolo: An estimate of the number of families in Chorley who will be eligible to claim the Children's Tax Credit (CTC) is unavailable, but an estimate of the number of families in the north-west who will be eligible to claim CTC is 625,000.

Single Parents (Employment Prospects)

18. **Mrs. Ann Cryer:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of the Government's policies on the employment prospects of single parents. [150152]

Dawn Primarolo: Improving the employment prospects of lone parents is a key priority for the Government. The lone parent employment rate has risen from 44 per cent. in 1997 to over 50 per cent. now—the highest rate for 20 years. Many more lone parents say that they would like to work and so the Government has set a new objective: that 70 per cent. of lone parents are in employment by the end of the decade. Policies such as the New Deal for lone parents, the Working Families Tax Credit and the National Childcare Strategy are already helping the Government to achieve this aim.

Public Service Investment

19. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what real terms increases he plans in investment in public services relating to health and education in each of the next three years. [150153]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor announced in last year's Budget real terms growth in UK NHS expenditure of 5.6 per cent, 5.5 per cent. and 5.6 per cent. respectively over the three years to 2003–04.

For UK education expenditure the Chancellor has provided for real terms growth of 4.8 per cent, 5.3 per cent. and 5.4 per cent. for the three years to 2003–04.

Occupational Pension Schemes

20. **Mr. Baldry:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the purchase of annuities for occupational pension schemes. [150155]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government keep all areas of the tax system under review.

Euro

22. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the number of retailers planning to accept the euro in advance of any decision to make it legal tender in the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [150158]

Miss Melanie Johnson: It is entirely a commercial decision for UK businesses to determine whether or not they wish to accept euro, or any foreign currency. The fourth Report on Euro Preparations provides updated information on help available to UK businesses preparing for the introduction of euro cash in the euro area on 1 January 2002.

29. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the timing of British participation in the European single currency. [150165]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Hertford and Stortford (Mr. Wells) on 25 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 702W.

33. **Mr. Corbyn:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact on economic policy formulation of membership of the European single currency. [150169]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Government have said they will only recommend joining a successful single currency if it is in our national economic interest to do so, and if the economic case for the UK joining is clear and unambiguous.

Working Families Tax Credit (Wales)

23. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* Bridgend receive Working Families Tax Credit; and how much has been paid to date from public funds. [150159]

Dawn Primarolo: For the number of families in Wales and Bridgend receiving the Working Families Tax Credit, I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) on 22 January 2001, *Official Report*, column 425W.

Estimates of national expenditure on the WFTC and the Disabled Person's Tax Credit (DPTC) are contained in Table B20 on page 190 of the pre-Budget report, published in November 2000. It is estimated that almost 6 per cent. of total WFTC and DPTC expenditure is paid to recipients in Wales. There are too few cases in the 5 per cent. sample used for analyses of the WFTC to yield a reliable separate estimate for Bridgend.

Disadvantaged Areas

24. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage investment in enterprises in disadvantaged areas. [150160]

30. **Mr. Colman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to encourage investment in enterprises in disadvantaged areas. [150166]

Mr. Timms: The Government have set up the Phoenix Fund, under the Small Business Service, to encourage and stimulate enterprise and business creation in disadvantaged areas. The Government are also taking forward the recommendations of the Social Investment Task Force, for example the proposal for a community investment tax credit. The Government are also supporting the Inner City 100, which celebrates the fastest-growing companies in the most disadvantaged areas of 15 inner cities.

Child Poverty

25. **Mrs. Lawrence:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made towards achieving the target of halving child poverty in 10 years. [150161]

Dawn Primarolo: As a result of tax and benefit measures introduced in this Parliament it is estimated that more than a million children will be lifted out of poverty.

Over 1.1 million families are now receiving the Working Families Tax Credit, nearly 300,000 more than its predecessor, Family Credit, at its peak. Families receiving the WFTC are receiving on average £30 a week more than under Family Credit. A lone parent on Income Support with two children under 11 will be over £25 a week better-off in real terms than in 1997, and a couple nearly £30 a week better-off. In addition, there are now over 300,000 fewer children living in workless households compared to 1997.

Child poverty is a complex problem that requires a multi-dimensional approach. The Government's second annual report on poverty and social exclusions, "Opportunity for All" published in September last year, sets out a further range of child poverty indicators and progress to date. These indicators include the number of children living in low-income households, living in workless households and living in housing below the set standard of adequacy, as well as indicators on education and on health inequalities.

Savings Ratio

26. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the ratio of savings to income over the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [150162]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The November 2000 pre-Budget report gave an assessment of developments in household saving and borrowing in Box A4, page 155.

Taxation

27. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the level of taxation. [150163]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Chancellor receives a large number of representations on tax policy.

VAT (Church Repairs)

28. **Mr. Beith:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has completed his consultation about the relief from VAT for repairs to places of worship. [150164]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the reply I gave on 7 February 2001, *Official Report*, column 662W.

Departmental Performance Targets

32. **Mr. Fallon:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the Treasury in setting performance targets for other Departments. [150168]

Mr. Andrew Smith: Performance management is integral to the management of every Government Department and public sector body. Most Departments will set performance targets at a range of levels within the organisation.

As part of the spending review process the discussion of allocation of resources (inputs) is now accompanied by discussion of the level of service that can be achieved (outcomes). Departments set strategic objectives and targets in the form of public service agreements (PSAs). These are discussed at the Cabinet Committee on Public Services and Public Expenditure (PSX) and with the Treasury.

Interest Rates and Mortgages

34. **Mr. Alan W. Williams:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the effect of the Government's economic policies has been on the level of interest rates and the average cost of mortgages; and if he will make a statement. [150170]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Government policies have delivered economic stability and historically low interest rates. Payments on the average mortgage are over £1,000 a year lower than on average between 1979 and 1997.

World Recession

35. **Sir Peter Tapsell:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is preparing to guard the UK from the effects on the economy of a possible world recession. [150171]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Under the Government's macroeconomic framework, policy-makers are able to react proactively to global developments in a manner that will promote economic stability. The forthcoming Budget, on March 7, will provide an updated assessment of domestic and international developments.

Self-Assessment

36. **Tony Wright:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what savings have been made as a result of the introduction of self-assessment by the Inland Revenue. [150172]

Dawn Primarolo: The introduction of self-assessment was a long-term investment involving significant costs for the Inland Revenue and savings will emerge by 2005. By the year 2000–01, however, cash savings of £145 million have already been deducted from the Revenue baseline.

Renewal Technologies

38. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on fiscal incentives for renewal technologies. [150174]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Government have a range of policies to support renewable energy, including exemption for most renewables from the Climate Change Levy, the proposed Renewables Obligation and £100 million of grants over the next three years to support offshore wind and energy crops.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the additional cost to manufacturing industry of the introduction of the climate change levy, broken down sector by sector. [150121]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on 18 December 2000, *Official Report*, columns 81–82W.

Unemployment

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of his measures designed to reduce youth and long term unemployment. [150154]

Mr. Timms: Through the New Deal for Young People we have helped nearly 270,000 young unemployed people into jobs, further building upon the Government's manifesto commitment to help 250,000 into jobs this Parliament. In addition, over 60,000 long-term unemployed people have been helped to move from welfare and into work through the New Deal for the Long-Term Unemployed.

Recent independent evaluation of the New Deal for Young People has shown that over 200,000 young people left unemployment earlier than they would have done without the programme, with 60,000 entering into employment.

The New Deal helps the young and long-term unemployed to secure jobs as the most effective way of enhancing their earnings, increasing their skills and securing their future economic independence. Furthermore, New Deal is just part of the Government's package of measures aimed at providing employment opportunity for all, by helping people to compete effectively for jobs, increasing work incentives and addressing the specific labour market problems of particular groups of people or local areas.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workers were being paid less than £3.70 per hour in real terms in each of the last 20 years. [141681]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 11 February 2001]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 28 February 2001:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question about the number of workers being paid less than £3.70 per hour in real terms in the past 20 years (141681).

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published estimates of the number of jobs paid at less than specific hourly low pay thresholds, in 10p bands, for all workers in the United Kingdom for 1998, 1999 and 2000. These estimates are based on an improved methodology using data from the New Earnings Survey (NES) and Labour Force Survey (LFS). This methodology provides the best estimates for the number of jobs in the UK paid below low hourly rate thresholds.

The equivalent value of £3.70 in real terms has been calculated, using the all items Retail Price Index, as £3.50 for April 1998 and £3.60 for April 1999 to the nearest 10p pay band. The table below gives the number of jobs for workers aged 22 and over paid at less than £3.50, £3.60 and £3.70 for 1998, 1999 and 2000.

Table 1: Number of jobs in the United Kingdom for workers aged 22 and over paid at less than £3.50, £3.60 and £3.70 per hour

Hourly paid less than	*Number of jobs (thousands)*		
	Spring 1998	*Spring 1999*	*Spring 2000*
£3.50	1,150	430	180
£3.60	1,400	540	250
£3.70	1,640	1,290	850

This improved methodology cannot be used to produce estimates before spring 1998 because it makes use of an LFS variable that is not available for earlier years. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) has changed the distribution of pay rates across the lower pay bands. The NMW was introduced in April 1999 with an adult rate for workers aged 22 and over of £3.60 per hour. The rate was increased to £3.70 per hour in October 2000. The impact of this increase is not reflected in figures for spring 2000 as they relate to an earlier period.

The estimates cannot be used as a measure of non-compliance with the NMW legislation because it is not possible from either the LFS or the NES to identify whether an individual is eligible for NMW rates. For example, it is not possible to identify people such as apprentices, those undergoing accredited training or those with accommodation supplied who are exempt from the NMW or are entitled to lower rates.